# Iranian Ethnicities or Nations in Iran

## Unity or Division Amidst the Challenge of Ethnicity and Nationhood



Kameel Ahmady and colleagues

نشر آوای یوف

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**The Peoples of Iran:**
**Unity or Division Amidst the Challenge of Ethnicity and Nationhood**


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## Preface

This book is the result of an anthropological inquiry into identity, ethno-nationalities, and peace, conducted across thirteen provinces of Iran. The research, which focused primarily on specialists and elites, and to a lesser extent on the general public belonging to Iran's ethno-national groups, seeks first and foremost to address a series of fundamental questions: What perception do these communities have of themselves and of the 'other' against which they construct their identity? Where do they situate themselves within the political and economic structure of Iranian society? And what are their views on integration, political participation, their mother tongue, and the persistent dynamic of the centre-periphery relationship?

My own journey into this research began with my upbringing. Opening my eyes to the world in a Kurdish family and being raised in Kurdistan—a border region a mere stone's throw from Iran's frontiers with Iraq and Turkey—during the critical juncture of the 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, was a formative experience. The attitudes, narratives, and memories of war became an integral part of my life from childhood, shaping and deepening my academic interest in identity and ethnicity. This background has, I hope, afforded me a more distinct

and lucid understanding of the complex realities of ethno-national identity. This personal motivation was further strengthened by my academic fieldwork in Iran and beyond, particularly within the country's rural and deprived communities. This research brought me into direct contact with ethno-national groups living in underdeveloped and marginalised regions, an encounter that illuminated the multifaceted reality of their lives.

A third motive for this study is the pressing need for these communities to understand one another, and for a wider audience to comprehend the deep-seated deficiencies of centre-oriented policies. These policies have long perpetuated an inequitable distribution of wealth and power, leaving the critical issue of the centre-periphery dynamic unresolved. Finally, I was compelled to undertake this research by the profound importance of peace, a fragile yet essential condition in the geography and history of Iran, especially in the volatile climate of our times.

In the contemporary era, the significance of ethnicity and the formation of identities subordinate to the nation-state has only intensified. Territorial divisions, historical inequalities, and competing ideologies have played a crucial role in the ethnicisation of societies worldwide. Many experts once predicted that after the Second World War, forces such as globalisation, urbanisation, and the expansion of mass media would cause ethnic attachments to wane. It was thought that today's educated generation would not be so bound by such affiliations. Yet, the drive for autonomy in former Soviet republics, the persistence of ethno-national movements in the heart of Europe, and dozens of other cases testify to the contrary. These instances demonstrate that the process of ethnic identity formation is a vital force in the modern world, by no means confined to developing nations.

For Iran, a country of immense ethno-national diversity, the significance of this issue is doubly pronounced. Over the past century, nationalist currents have flowed with varying intensity among its peoples, with some groups even coming to view themselves as independent nations.

Prior to the establishment of the modern state, governance in Iran had a supra-ethnic character, founded on tribal and clan-based power. The heads of various ethnic groups were present in the structure of government, sharing in power according to their position within a unified, interdependent system. The state relied on these diverse tribal groups to raise armies, collect taxes, and secure its borders; in turn, these groups shared in and benefited from that power. This equilibrium, though periodically disturbed by power struggles, was the norm.

However, with the advent of modern state formation, this traditional order gradually disintegrated. New relationships emerged, a key manifestation of which was the politicisation of ethnicity and the appearance of groups in the political arena with a distinct ethnic identity.

A review of the history of ethnic groups in contemporary Iran reveals a consistent grievance against discriminatory laws and practices, particularly concerning language, religion, and civil rights. During the Constitutional Revolution, the rights of these groups were largely overlooked. In the Pahlavi era, the publication and distribution of materials in ethnic languages were severely prohibited as part of a general policy of de-ethnicisation. Today, the fundamental cause of this discontent can be traced to a pervasive feeling of political, economic, cultural, and religious inequality, especially when ethnic groups compare their situation to that of Persian-speakers.

Politically, many Kurds, Turks, Arabs, and Baloch believe they lack a fitting position within the country's power structure. Economically, there is a conviction that the nation's resources are concentrated in the central provinces. Culturally, these groups feel they face numerous restrictions, and that national media fails to adequately represent their heritage. In education, their children are compelled to learn in a second language. Religiously, Sunni Muslims, such as most Baloch and a significant portion of Kurds, feel marginalised by the state's official adherence to Shi'ism.

The foregoing represents only a fraction of the demands articulated over the last century. Consistently, these aspirations have been met with a security-oriented perspective, deemed detrimental to national cohesion, and confronted with coercive and violent measures. This has led to violent exchanges, inflicting irreparable damage upon national unity.

This research, acknowledging the importance of ethno-nationalities in the relations of contemporary Iran, seeks to answer the following questions: * How do Iran's ethno-national groups perceive their own identity and the 'others' against which they define themselves? * Where do they situate themselves within the political and economic structure of contemporary Iranian society? * What are their views on the role of ethnicity in integration, political participation, mother tongue, and centre-periphery relations? * Is there an intellectual and practical space for these groups to achieve greater autonomy?

This research employs an interpretivist perspective and a qualitative

methodology, utilising Grounded Theory to explore these questions. The process began with in-depth, semi-structured interviews with elites and members of the public from the Azeri Turk, Kurd, Arab, Baloch, and Persian communities. Using purposive sampling, theoretical saturation was achieved after one hundred interviews, with a further 115 conducted to ensure comprehensive coverage. The data were analysed through open, axial, and selective coding, allowing core concepts and categories to emerge organically from the participants' narratives until a central theoretical framework was established.

A note on gender is warranted. Finding female interviewees, particularly among the elites, proved considerably more challenging. The environments of most universities, local associations, and civil society organisations were predominantly male-dominated. This disparity, beyond the researcher's control, is reflected in the study and appears to be an indicator of the broader gender inequality in Iranian society.

The findings of this research, while illuminating the current demands of each ethno-national group, are intended to assist future decision-makers in peacefully resolving these issues and contributing to national cohesion. It is essential to note that ethnicity and nationality are contested concepts. While respecting the prevalent view among some groups who insist on the term 'nation', this research has been conducted from an anthropological perspective. Throughout this work, the researcher has used 'ethnic group', 'nation', and 'ethno-nation' with a neutral stance, aiming for scientific soundness within the current political geography of Iran. [1]

Finally, a sense of gratitude compels me to acknowledge those who supported this research, which began in 2017. I am thankful to my family for their unwavering support. I extend my gratitude to my assistants and colleagues, Roza Hemmati and Seyyed Mohammad (Jamal) Hosseini, for their help in compiling materials. I thank Sanaz Tabari for reviewing the text. The fieldwork was made possible through the cooperation of many individuals and institutions, and I am immensely thankful to Roza Hemmati, Sanaz Tabari, Dr Hawri Sorkhabi, and Mohsen Maroufi in this regard. I am grateful to Dr Fatemeh Mousavi Mirk

1. See: Tabatabai, S. J. (2019). A Reflection on Iran: The Theory of the Rule of Law in Iran: Part Two: Foundations of the Theory of Constitutionalism (Vol. 2). Minavi Kherad Publications; Hosseini, S. M. (2011). The role of the Azarbaijan region in the Constitutional Revolution. Politics-Journal of the Faculty of Law and Political Science, 41(3), 77-92.

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## Introduction

Many theorists predicted that in the shadow of the emergence of new collective identities and the tumult of the age of globalisation, ethno-national tendencies would gradually weaken and fade into obsolescence. However, the drive for autonomy in the former Soviet republics and British colonies, the continuation of the ethno-national identity movement in the heart of Europe and developed nations, and the emergence of new forms of ethnic nationalism amongst Third World and non-Western societies have, contrary to all these perspectives, attested to the vitality of ethnic tendencies in the contemporary world.

Over the past century, ethnicist tendencies among Iran's ethno-nations have also manifested with varying degrees of intensity. In the early years of Mohammad Reza Shah's reign, the Democrat Party in Azarbaijan succeeded in declaring autonomy for approximately one year, taking control of parts of the region. During the same period in Kurdistan, the Kurdistan Democratic Party managed to establish the Republic of Kurdistan, with its capital in Mahabad, by controlling a number of Kurdish-inhabited cities. Throughout the Pahlavi era, protests also occurred in the Balochestan region, which were suppressed by the central government. In the years following the 1979 Revolution, most Kurdish-

inhabited areas and the Turkmen-Sahra region were embroiled in tensions and conflicts related to ethnic demands. Among Arabs, too, ethnic identity-seeking tendencies have persisted over the last century, with their most recent activities in this domain being the efforts and actions of the Al-Ahwaziya group. All these instances attest to the existence of demands and grievances with an ethnic character, the primary and fundamental root of which can be found in a sense of political, economic, cultural, linguistic, and religious inequality, which has intensified when these groups compare themselves with other ethno-national groups, particularly Persian-speakers.

In the political sphere, a majority of Kurds, Turks, Arabs, Baloch, and others believe they do not hold a suitable position within the country's political structure, and that no officials from their ethno-national groups are appointed to key posts such as ministries, governorships, and ambassadorships. In the economic sphere, there is a conviction that the bulk of the country's resources is concentrated in the central provinces, and that if regions like Azarbaijan possess any facilities today, it is more the result of the efforts of their own people or of industrial plants built before the Islamic Republic regime. In the cultural domain, the ethnic groups studied believe that restrictions are imposed on their regional festivals and conferences, celebrations, and local customs, and that national and local media do not reflect their culture as they should and are not in the service of local cultures. Regarding the mother tongue, despite the Islamic Republic being over forty years old, children from various ethnic groups are still compelled to receive their education in a second language, and throughout their entire schooling, not a single unit is dedicated to official instruction in their native language.

The Baloch and a segment of the Kurdish ethnic groups, who are followers of the Sunni sect, have a different religious affiliation from the country's official religion. They believe that the ideological outlook of officials has led to injustices being committed against them in this regard. The lack of religious freedoms, such as maintaining independence in declaring and holding their festivals and ceremonies, not having a dedicated mosque for Sunnis in Tehran, or the non-appointment of followers of this sect to high-ranking positions such as ministries and governorships, are among the most important demands of these ethnic groups. Despite various promises made to them, these demands have yet to be met.

The aforementioned points are but a fraction of the demands articulated by

ethno-national groups over the past century, particularly in the years following the establishment of the Islamic Republic. These demands have consistently been met with a security-oriented perspective, deemed detrimental to national cohesion and consensus, and have been suppressed antagonistically and coercively. This has ultimately led to violent exchanges between the central government and ethnic groups, which, after a period of weakening and suppression, has imposed an unwelcome silence upon the people of those lands. During these times, no practical steps have been taken towards fulfilling ethnic demands and achieving social justice and equality to prevent the re-emergence of violent actions. This is whilst the endeavour of any conventional government should always be to prevent the emergence of violent behaviour by accepting cultural diversity and attending to the demands of various ethnic groups—many of which are also enshrined within the country's constitution. It should seek to resolve these demands, issues, and problems through peace, dialogue, and interaction, by activating political parties and non-governmental organisations and creating a suitable environment for ethnic elites. The consequence of ignoring cultural differences and pursuing a policy of homogenisation, and taking extremist measures from the central government instead of realising justice and equality, has been that after a time, violent behaviour has re-emerged from another corner, and this cycle has perpetually continued.

Regarding the aims and significance of this research, it can be said that since Iranian society has long been constituted and sustained by a multi-ethnic, multi-national, and multi-identity existence, some scholars believe that any general explanation of multi-ethnic societies will lack sufficient adequacy and competence without due consideration and examination of the ethnic factor. Given the increasing and enduring importance of ethnic communities in the formation and consolidation of social cohesion, the scientific study of ethnic groups must be given more attention than ever before. In this context, many scholars are of the opinion that national solidarity and identity are rooted in ethnic communities and the very old sentiments of ethnicity as a form of primordial nationalism. Ethnic solidarity and the cohesion of identities in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies can foster peace and mend ethno-national divides. The importance of the subject and the main issue here is the nature and rationale of the collective identity of ethno-nations in Iran. The necessity of having a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of ethnic groups and the identities against which they construct

their otherness is clear for civil society, intellectuals, activists in the field of identity and culture, and all those who are committed to peace and reconciliation among the people of this land. Accordingly, this research has endeavoured, by relying on theoretical-conceptual approaches, library research sources, and fieldwork findings, to present a scientific and documented report on the political, social, economic, and cultural order of ethnic groups in Iran. It discusses and examines the issue of identity-seeking among five ethnic groups—Persians (or Persian-speakers), Turks, Kurds, Baloch, and Arabs—and their demands and aspirations, which can be a factor in achieving equality and social justice, and consequently lead to sustainable peace in society and a way out of conflict, war, and turmoil. Undoubtedly, articulating these issues through scientific methods and numerous interviews with elites and the general public, while peacefully demonstrating the current demands of each of the studied ethnic groups, can assist decision-makers in the peaceful resolution of disputes and contribute to national consensus and cohesion.

The structure of this research work, in addition to the preface, introduction, and conclusion, comprises four main chapters and an appendix. The first chapter examines the conceptual and theoretical dimensions of identity, ethnicity, and nationality as the foundational concepts of the research, to provide, through the description and explanation of concepts and theoretical foundations, the basis for an essential understanding of the theoretical dimension of the subject. Relying on theoretical approaches with explanatory capabilities for understanding and analysing the ethnic phenomenon in contemporary Iran, it establishes the theoretical groundwork for presenting the research's conceptual model and analysing the multifaceted aspects of ethno-national phenomena in contemporary Iran. The second chapter, through a review study of the history of ethno-nations in Iran, explains the background, status, and political, social, economic, and cultural role of Iranian ethnic groups in the history of Iran, especially in the contemporary period, and provides a general but comprehensive picture of ethnic groups in the broader context of Iran's geography, history, and culture. At the end of the chapter, the representation of this role and its aspects in Iranian ethnological studies is re-examined. The third chapter, which is the core of the book, contains the analysis and interpretation of the fieldwork findings. The data and information collected from the fieldwork in this chapter, after undergoing research stages of extraction, coding, and meaning-making of the qualitative

data, are presented in various forms of descriptive and statistical analyses within the framework of political, cultural, economic, and social themes. The fourth chapter of the book consists of the conclusion and recommendations, in which, after a general summary of the descriptive and explanatory findings of the work, proposed solutions for resolving ethnic identity issues and overcoming problems resulting from ethnic conflicts are presented. The appendix, which focuses on explaining the political and social events in Iran from 2019 to 2022, is the final chapter of the book.

In the years following the completion of this research and the publication of its first edition (2020), Iranian society, in the arena of international relations and domestic developments, has gone through a turbulent, fluctuating, and eventful period politically, economically, and socially. Within this, from the perspective of collective movements and the atmosphere prevailing in the public sphere of Iran, two very important events, ‹November 2019 protests in Iran› and ‹the uprising following the death of Jina (Mahsa) Amini,› stand as a turning point in the re-examination of Iran's internal relations and are worthy of serious consideration and analysis. Indeed, any research on collective identity in present-day Iran, especially ethnic and ethno-national identity and its aspects, will suffer from a fundamental deficiency without paying attention to these developments. Therefore, in this work, which is a new re-writing of the fieldwork research ‹From Border to Border: A Comprehensive Study on Identity and Ethnicity in Iran,›[1] an effort has been made, on the one hand, while paying attention to the said events (the public protests of 2019 and 2022 in Iran), to analytically re-examine these important political, social, and economic incidents in the form of appendices to the book, from the perspective of the conceptual and theoretical approaches of this research. On the other hand, the findings, analytical propositions, and recommendations of this research are tested and verified after several years in the sphere of these events (the public protests of 2019 and 2022 in Iran).

The unsuccessful attempt to publish the first edition of the research ‹From Border to Border…› inside Iran and the considerations and limitations arising from censorship and obtaining a publishing license on the one hand, and the exigencies of conducting research on sensitive topics of identity, ethnicity, and

1. The book "From Border to Border: A Comprehensive Study on Identity and Ethnicity in Iran" was published in 2021 in two full and abridged versions, as both print and PDF books, by Mehri Publishing in London.

nationality coupled with the constraints of free research—both in narrating events and in their interpretation and analysis—on the other, were among the reasons that necessitated a new re-writing of this research and a more forthright expression of the events and their causes and factors.

Considering critical assessments and a view based on further enhancing the coherence of the book's structure and strengthening its evidentiary and analytical aspects, a structural and content-based rearrangement of the chapters and sections of the research was another editorial consideration observed in this new edition, in order to present a more up-to-date work, grounded in the latest empirical and analytical findings, to enthusiasts of this subject and its audience.

*Chapter One*

# Concepts and Theories of Identity and Ethnicity

## Introduction

The categories of collective identity represent one of the most significant distinguishing features of contemporary modern societies. As a subject of study across various disciplines within the humanities—including political science, sociology, and social psychology—the concepts of ethnic difference, the formation of ethnic groups and ethnic identity, and their relationship with social consensus and national identity have gained increasing prominence in scholarly texts throughout the twentieth century (Bulmer and Solomos, 2003: 14). It is, of course, clear that racial, linguistic, religious, and regional affiliations, along with the forms of collective and group identity influenced by them, have always been a part of human existence. In traditional collective life, however, these affiliations were not a significant factor in the realm of social consensus, their impact being often limited and exclusive. This is because in traditional societies and pre-modern life, the nature of man as a creation of God was considered a fixed attribute. Human identity in those societies was not examined or reflected upon as a problem or a significant topic, and it played a negligible role in the formation of political and social relations.

In today's world, however, identity and its collective forms, particularly ethnicity, have emerged as two 'problematics'. Born from a traditional context, they have been re-inscribed within the structure of the modern world. On the one hand, they have acquired a growing importance within the expansive concept of modernity and its complex, multidimensional relationships, especially the phenomenon of globalisation. On the other, the advent of modernity and the development of nations sought to lead people towards a general homogeneity under the ideology of nationalism through the nation-building process (Jenkins, 2002: 283). These very factors had a profound impact on the emergence of these issues in new forms, with new objectives and mechanisms. In reality, despite their pre-modern roots and affiliations, various forms of collective identity—especially ethnicity—acquired different roles and meanings in modern political, social, and cultural relations. Consequently, they became a subject of focus as a crucial and determining issue in the collective life of many societies, both at the practical level of political and social relations and at the academic and theoretical level from the perspective of various branches of the humanities. Given the modern character of the human and social sciences and their epistemological underpinnings, concepts such as social identity, ethnic identity, national identity, and other forms of collective and group identity do not possess a long history; it is scarcely possible to trace their theoretical foundations back more than two centuries in the humanities.

In this chapter, the fundamental concepts of this research and their associated theories will be scrutinised from various dimensions and perspectives within the human and social sciences. As the title of the research suggests, the two concepts of identity and ethnicity are the key and principal terms of this study. Both concepts are serious and contentious issues among scholars in the various human sciences. For this reason, their lexical and conceptual definitions, along with prominent theoretical approaches concerning them at the micro, meso, and macro levels, will be addressed. The aim is to establish, through a multi-level understanding of these categories and notwithstanding the reader's familiarity with the research's theoretical foundations, the necessary epistemological and theoretical groundwork for presenting and re-examining the pillars of the research within a comprehensive and defined theoretical framework.

## Defining the Concepts

This section defines identity and ethnicity, along with their various forms and manifestations, including religious identity, ethnic identity, national identity, and the intersection of ethnicity with gender, nationality, and globalisation. The analysis will proceed by defining these terms lexically and conceptually, tracing their historical evolution and conceptual genealogy. The relationships between them—their points of convergence and divergence, and their mutual influence—will also be examined. The aim is to clarify the conceptual connection between identity in its general forms and the specific constructs of ethnic identity and ethnicity.

### Identity

The question of the essence and nature of the human being and their relationship with others—questions that revolve around the concept of identity—has been a central theme of human thought throughout intellectual and civilisational history, consistently forming a primary concern for humanity. Although the question of identity has preoccupied the human mind since the dawn of civilisation, it has never grown obsolete; rather, it has manifested in various forms across different eras.

The word 'identity' is rooted in the Latin identitas, which derives from idem, meaning 'the same'. In one sense, this term refers to the quality of uniqueness and individuality—that is, the fundamental differences that distinguish a person from all others by virtue of their 'self'. In another sense, it denotes the quality of sameness through which individuals can be connected, or can affiliate with a group or category based on prominent shared features, such as ethnic characteristics (Byron, 1997, cited in Fakouhi, 2001: 63-64). The term hoviyyat in Arabic, from a linguistic perspective, refers to being, existence, and essence (Farabi, 2014: 10-12).

In tracing the genealogy of the concept of identity, its existential roots can be sought in the depths of human history; that is, the concept has a history as long as humanity itself. The problematisation of identity began when humans started to become self-aware, confronting the question, 'Who am I?'. Man has always sought to discover his own identity, enquiring into his position and place in this world. Consequently, he has always dealt with the issue of identity in his individ-

ual and social life, and this issue has been among the vital concerns of humanity throughout history, to the extent that the root of many conflicts and struggles throughout history can be related to the contest over the 'manifestation of identity' or 'self-expression' (Rahbari, 2009: 15). In other words, the simultaneous thought of finding distinction and sameness between oneself and the other has accompanied humans from early childhood and is traceable from individual to macro-social levels, demonstrating how individuals, based on certain indices, identify both their differences and similarities with others and, accordingly, categorise themselves individually and socially.

Few concepts are as laden with multiple meanings as 'identity'. Traces of this concept can be found in everything from daily conversations to scholarly and academic debates. The existence of numerous synonymous or closely related concepts for identity—such as the subjective 'I', the objective 'Me', 'we', our self-perception, self-image, self-representation, self-awareness, self-concept, ego, superego, and personality—stems from this very fact (Doran and Mohseni, 2003: 81).

In the social sciences, the concept of identity has been a focus of researchers in various disciplines, particularly psychology, sociology, and political science, as one of the most complex concepts. The concept of identity, as it is presented today in scientific and academic literature, originates from a psychological standpoint in terms of its initial position and source. Although its use in theoretical knowledge, especially philosophy, is older, its psychological application has become more widespread (Mirmohammadi, 2004: 89).

Contrary to the view of psychologists, social psychologists and sociologists seek to emphasise the fact that the sense of individual identity is shaped by the dialectic between the individual and society. Although they accept that identity is usually manifested in individuals' attitudes and feelings, its formative context is collective life. The social identity manifested in personality has no meaning apart from the social world of other individuals. Individuals are unique and variable, but personality is constructed entirely socially through the various stages of the socialisation process (Golmohammadi, 2002: 222-223). This itself is rooted in the differing attitudinal and methodological approaches to the study of man and his actions, whereby psychology focuses on the individual and sociology on society.

The multifaceted and prismatic nature of identity has led each of the human

and social sciences, according to their specialised domain, to make one aspect of identity the subject of their inquiry. In disciplines focused on the individual and personal dimensions of human existence, such as psychology, mysticism, and logic, identity is primarily studied as an individual attribute and a distinguishing characteristic of the self from the other, from ontological and psychological perspectives. In sciences that study humans in terms of their supra-individual and social existence, a form of collective identity is examined according to the specific discipline. Political science discusses political forms of identity such as national identity, ethnic identity, and the relationship between power and identity. Sociology and anthropology study collective identities that are both influenced by and influential upon the internal and external relations of different societies—such as gender identity, generational identity, class identity, and religious identity—which are considered fundamental and enduring variables in the construction of human societies.

| Science | Primary Focus of Identity | Core Subject | Main Discussion Point |
|---|---|---|---|
| Logic | Personal Identity | Individual | Nature, essence, and cause |
| Philosophy | Existential Identity | Individual & Collective | In pursuit of 'being'; identity is the centre of the circle of conceptions |
| Mysticism | His Identity | Individual & Collective | Considers true identity to be God's and belonging to God |
| Political Science | National Identity | Collective | State, nation, government, and the relationship with national identity |
| Psychology | Individual Identity | Individual | The self, ego, subconscious, the realm of individuality |
| Sociology | Collective Identity | Collective | Unification with self and others; identity in various collectives and groups |
| Anthropology | Individual Identity | Collective | Identity in various micro-collectives and groups |

*Table 1-1. Identity from the Perspective of Different Sciences*

Based on the existing body of scientific definitions, several fundamental characteristics can be attributed to identity. Firstly, identity is relational in nature. This means that in the concept of identity, whether at the individual or collective level, the perception of others is as relevant as the self-perception of the individual or group. As Jenkins puts it, identity simultaneously establishes two potential relations of similarity and difference between individuals or groups (Jenkins, 2002: 5). The second characteristic is that identity is conscious and social. Identity imparts a form of awareness of the self, the group, society, culture, and history, which an individual acquires through interaction and communication with other individuals or groups (Rajaei, 2003: 14). Dynamism and fluidity are the third features of identity, for not only is identity relational, conscious, and social, but it is also dynamic and fluid. Generally, the evolution and change of identity, both individual and collective, is a function of social position, the quantity and quality of an individual's interactions with social groups, the type of education, and the cognitive resources to which the individual is exposed. Throughout their lives, individuals may expand their network of interactions from the level of family, ethnic groups, friends, and peers to larger, more general, and even global groups (Crespi, 1998; Tönnies, 2002). Furthermore, identity carries emotion and value. The existence of multiple identities, such as ethnic, religious, linguistic, national, gender, and occupational identities, which an individual carries simultaneously, has rendered identity a source of emotional and value-based behaviours that can, in some cases, conflict with rational behaviour (Afrough, 2001: 14-15). The final characteristic is the reflection of identity in creating behavioural coherence and a uniform pattern of collective judgment and action. According to UNESCO's definition, identity is the central core of individual and collective personality that shapes the principal actions, behaviours, and decisions of an individual or a collective (an ethnic group or a nation) (Salimi, 2000: 135).

## Ethnicity

From ancient Greece to the present day, the term 'ethnicity' has undergone a considerable evolution and semantic shift. As Elie Kedourie notes, in one edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, lexicographers defined ethnicity as heathenism or heathenish superstition, a definition that holds no currency in the contemporary era. The word 'ethnic' in Webster's New International Dictionary also carries two meanings: 1) Pertaining to the gentiles or heathen; pagan. Opposed

to Jewish and Christian; 2) Pertaining to race; peculiar to a race or nation. In ethnology, pertaining to the different divisions of mankind as classified according to the same customs and traits. While the first definition now appears obsolete, the second remains in use, referring specifically to 'races', 'racial groups,' and the physical and mental traits of races. In other words, the first definition, 'nations not converted to Christianity,' has lost its currency in favour of the second, 'the races of mankind' (Ahmadi, 2018: 30). The replacement of a religious criterion with a racial one was not the only change in the definition of ethnicity. Since the mid-twentieth century, social scientists have turned their attention to other criteria, including cultural ones, in defining ethnicity or ethnic groups.

As a concept, ethnicity has its roots in the Greek terms ethnos and ethnikos, which were commonly used to refer to pagans outside Hellenic civilisation, and later to non-Jews or non-Christians and second-class individuals. However, its scientific and general use is relatively recent. David Riesman coined the term 'ethnicity' in sociology in 1953, and it came into widespread use in the 1960s and 1970s (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975). Nevertheless, from its very inception, the term was a subject of heated debate within sociology and anthropology. It was introduced to give meaning to a particular type of cultural difference but came to acquire a range of somewhat different meanings. While in the Anglo-American tradition the concept of ethnicity was largely equivalent to minority groups within the larger society of the nation-state, in the European tradition, ethnicity was often used synonymously with the concept of nation, defined on a historical basis and reliant on notions of origin and territory. The common objective of both traditions, however, was to find a substitute for the concept of 'race', which had gained popular currency but had become highly compromised by the experience of Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, in public discourse in Europe and North America, the concept of ethnicity has acquired a 'racial' overtone, meaning that race, in its quasi-biological sense, has been preserved and is still readily used in place of the word ethnicity. On another front, the collapse of colonial empires in the 1950s and 1960s created further confusion regarding racial, cultural, and ethnic issues. New immigrants from former colonial territories, who were markedly different from the people of Europe itself, flocked to the homelands of their former European colonisers. Following the consolidation of public and legal discourse in North America, these groups were defined as 'ethnic groups'. Thus, the older definitions of ethnicity based on origin and territory (such as the Welsh,

Flemish, Walloons, etc.) were retained, while a new definition of ethnicity as an immigrant minority group (such as Pakistani, West Indian, Sri Lankan, etc.) was added.

The collapse of communism and the Soviet-style federations formed along 'ethnic' lines, along with the emergence of policies of 'ethnic cleansing' in the Balkans and the Caucasus, further complicated the problem of defining such terms. With the outbreak of hostilities on the territory of the former Yugoslavia and the extensive and influential media coverage of the 'ethnic conflict' in that country, the term 'ethnic' seemingly became a pejorative synonym for tribal, primitive, barbaric, and backward. Finally, another development led to the term 'ethnic' entering the policy-making sphere: the increasing flow of asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants from Eastern Europe to Western Europe, North America, and Australia. These individuals did not necessarily have significant or noticeable physical, cultural, or religious differences from their hosts but suffered from an uncertain legal status, such as awaiting a decision on their asylum application. In this context, the term 'ethnicity' is once again sometimes applied to non-citizens residing in 'our land', just as it was in ancient Greece and in the land of Judea to denote second-class people.

The history of the semantic and referential evolution of this term reveals the truth that ethnicity encompasses multiple meanings. This flexibility and conceptual ambiguity create a fertile ground for misunderstandings as well as political exploitation. Although the aforementioned concept was confined to academic circles, its entry into the legislative and institutional domain in forms such as 'ethnic minorities' or 'ethnic groups' also revealed its highly destructive effects. Institutionalised and bureaucratic definitions of ethnicity, such as the official definition of a group of individuals as an ethnic minority or ethnic group, are not only a powerful factor in the reification of what are usually dynamic group and individual relations, but are also an instrument of oppression, as they confine individuals within the cage of involuntary affiliations. In such a situation, cultural difference—which is at times inherently changeable, flexible, and ambiguous—becomes codified and regulated, thereby standing in opposition to social change. Thus, it can be concluded that today, the perceptions of the public and legislators regarding other ethnicities are subject to serious errors, which stem from a profoundly unsociological view of cultural difference.

Ethnicity is not a specific thing or the collective property of a particular group.

Social actors, in the course of their social relations and interactions, recognise their cultural distinctions and are thus recognised by their counterparts. Although Barth explained that social contact is a prerequisite for ethnic group difference, mere contact does not lead to the formation of a sociologically meaningful sense of group belonging. As Weber (1968) emphasised, if social interaction is to be effective and, more importantly, if the collective action of people takes on a political dimension, a 'belief in common ethnicity' becomes possible, and the members of the group will form a political community.

Sheila L. Croucher defines an ethnic group as 'a number of people with a common ancestor and culture who share common cultural orientations such as language, culture, kinship patterns, and common physical appearance' (Croucher, 2004). In sociological terms, despite the variations observed among ethnic groups, ethnicity is the product of a politicised culture. Thus, the purpose of studying ethnic group behaviour is not to identify the cultural differences arising from group relations. We are only interested in examining such variations when cultural difference is mobilised to achieve political ends—that is, when social actors, through the process of social action, reinvent narratives of common origin to respond to a changing social environment. In his new dictionary of sociology, George A. Theodorson defines an ethnic group as: 'a group with a common cultural tradition and a sense of identity which sets it apart as a subgroup of a larger society. The members of an ethnic group are distinguished by virtue of their unique cultural characteristics from the other members of their society' (ibid., 31). It appears that the number and type of characteristics considered for defining ethnicity or an ethnic group depend on the researcher's objective in using that definition, and to date, no uniform definition or consensual conceptualisation has been formulated.

Some, considering the initial racial and biological characteristics of the concept of ethnicity, have criticised the inclusion of cultural features as a criterion in its definition. According to these critics, considering the vague criterion of culture in defining a term whose concept is based on inherently biological characteristics is unjustifiable. Ashcroft and his colleagues, in referring to ethnicity and ethnic groups, presuppose a congregation within a larger society which, by having a real or supposed common ancestry, is defined for them by a common awareness of a distinct ethnic identity and a cultural focus and source in one or more symbolic elements. These cultural specifications (a shared historical mem-

ory, origins, or history and historical experiences) will always be in a dynamic combination relative to the specific language, time, and place that the ethnic group experiences (Ashcroft & Griffith, 1998: 84).

In the 1970s, a new generation of social scientists addressed the political aspects of the issue of ethnicity and attempted to provide uniform definitions of ethnic groups and nationality. The creation and use of new terms such as 'ethnic nationalism' and 'ethnic politics' by these researchers added to the existing confusion and ambiguity surrounding the issue of ethnicity. Despite the methodological and theoretical differences in these works, their central theme was equating the concept of ethnicity with the concept of nationality and state-building. The ambiguities related to the definition of 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity' also exist, to some extent, in the definition of 'tribe'. The fundamental problem arises from the fact that, in some cases, the same characteristics considered for ethnic groups have also been attributed to tribes, and therefore, they are referred to as completely distinct and specific groups within a larger society. This issue is most apparent in anthropological and sociological texts, where the two concepts of tribe and ethnic group are conflated, and the differences between them are ignored.

What is important is that in Iranian society, the discussion is not about tribes with their specific characteristics, but about ethnic groups with all the attributes ascribed to them. According to some anthropologists, tribal societies are distinct groups and unique cultural units that live in isolation and are completely autonomous. Raoul Naroll, in his famous work, defines a tribe as follows: a group of people whose shared and acquired way of life constitutes a whole culture rather than a subculture. Social scientists define a tribe, in terms of its socio-cultural structure and its relations with the state, in a manner similar to an ethnic group, thus justifying the synonymity of tribe and ethnic group and giving it legitimacy and, consequently, the potential to become a nation. This is particularly true in tribal and ethnic studies of the Middle East.

Despite the semantic challenges and numerous interpretations in providing a coherent and comprehensive definition of ethnicity and ethnic groups, the following definition is presented as the operational definition for this research: Ethnicity is a concept with cultural and historical origins, founded on a common heritage of language, customs, geography, territory, myths, and collective memory, towards which the members of the group have a conscious awareness,

perception, sense of belonging, and collective commitment.

Excellent. Here is the translation of the next section, adhering to all established guidelines, including the new rule regarding braced content.

## Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is a form of collective identity that refers to the set of characteristics and features distinguishing one ethnic group from another, fostering a sense of mutual belonging and cohesion among its members. Ethnic identity is defined by cultural markers such as language, religion, customs, and historical background, through which individuals connect with all or some of the identity aspects of a group. It is one of the most significant types of identity and a component of an individual's social identity, existing alongside other identities like local, regional, racial, and cultural identities. It holds particular importance in countries with ethnic and cultural diversity. Ethnic identity is one of the formative elements of any society's cultural identity. Cultural identity itself should be understood as a part of social identity based on cultural distinction—a distinction whose foundations must be sought in the traditions, customs, values, beliefs, and historical memory of each ethnic group or nation (Mohseni, 2007).

Ethnic identity is the systematic and continuous articulation of cultural differences between groups that perceive themselves as distinct from one another. This articulation occurs when cultural differences become relevant to social interactions. Therefore, it must be studied at the level of social life, not at the level of symbolic culture.

Ethnic identity is intertwined with its cognate concepts, such as 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity', to the extent that understanding ethnic identity becomes difficult without defining and identifying them. Ethnicity has been a primary source of meaning and recognition throughout human history. From the United States to Africa, ethnicity underlies social differentiation and social recognition. It has also been, and continues to be, the foundation for uprisings for social justice, as well as the irrational logic of ethnic cleansing and, to a large extent, the cultural basis for networked and monopolistic commercial activities in the modern world of business (Castells, 2006: 73).

For an ethnic group to come into being, the group must have a minimum level of interaction with other ethnic groups, and its members must view the ideas of other groups as cultural differences from the perspective of their own tradition.

Without these conditions, ethnicity would not exist.

Eriksen outlines the characteristics of ethnic identity as follows:

| Necessary Condition | Sufficient Condition |
|---|---|
| ↓ | ↓ |
| Cultural Elements | Awareness of Cultural Elements |

Ethnic identity arises from a diverse combination of the components of ethnicity, and in many cases, a single differing component can lead to the creation of a specific type of ethnic identity. Therefore, the components of ethnicity vary among different ethnic groups. Other thinkers have also enumerated characteristics for ethnic identity. For instance, Anthony Smith believes that an ethnic group is 'a named human population with a common ancestral myth, shared memories, common cultural elements, a link with a historic homeland, and a degree of solidarity and common interest and responsibility' (Smith, 1998: 186).

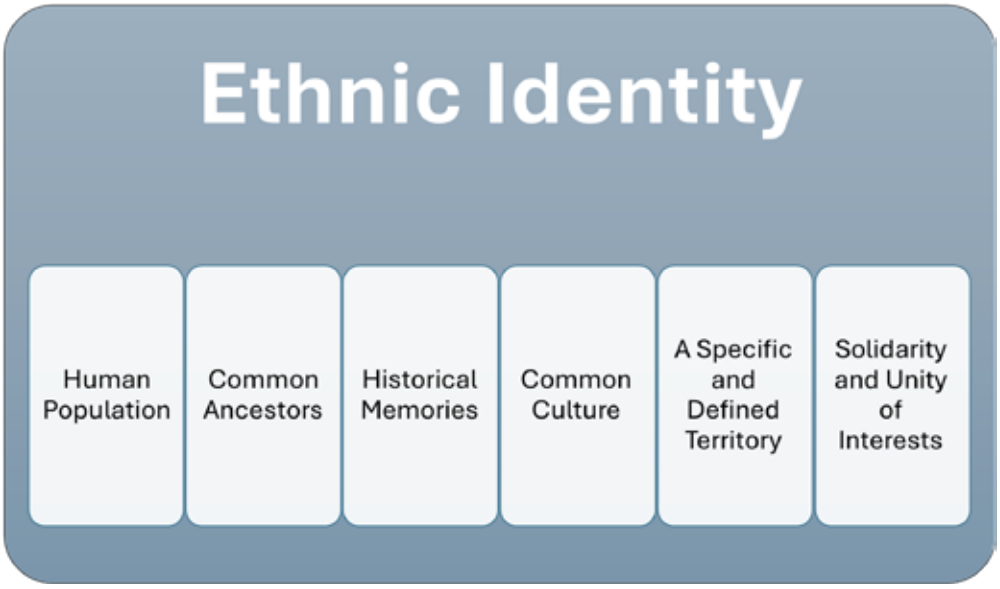



*Diagram 1-1. The Components of Ethnic Identity According to Smith*

In this research, ethnic identity is considered a prominent form of collective identity, representing the identity components of an ethnic group, including both its material and intangible manifestations, as well as the perceptions of its members regarding their own ethnic selfhood. Accordingly, ethnic identity

is a concept with both objective and subjective dimensions. On the one hand, it encompasses a set of material and intangible characteristics derived from the historical existence of ethnic groups. On the other hand, it is indebted to the way individuals redefine their own consolidated ethnic selfhood within the context of this historical existence.

***• Religious-Sectarian Identity and Its Role in the Construction of Ethnic Identity***

Religion is broadly defined as a set of beliefs, feelings, and practices (both individual and collective) organised around the concept of an ultimate reality (or the sacred and transcendent). Religion has at least three fundamental components: 1) 'Religious experience and feeling,' as a specific existential state that a person encounters when faced with the sacred; 2) 'Religious beliefs,' which are related to religious experience and feelings; and 3) 'Religious practice,' which is preceded by religious beliefs and is oriented towards achieving religious experience. There is also disagreement on how to measure religiosity; one of the most widely used scales for measuring religiosity is the five-dimensional scale of Glock and Stark, which includes the dimensions of belief, ritual, experience, knowledge, and consequences, respectively. The belief dimension consists of the beliefs that followers of a religion are expected to hold. The ritual dimension includes specific religious behaviours such as prayer, fasting, supplications, and participation in particular rites. The experiential dimension pertains to the emotions, imaginations, and feelings associated with having a relationship with a divine substance like God or a transcendent reality or authority. The consequential dimension relates to the effects of religious beliefs, practices, experiences, and knowledge on the daily lives of followers (Taleban, 2011: 94-96).

In the conceptualisation of social identity, the major and common element for the formation of a collective identity is considered to be a 'sense of belonging.' Religious identity, as one of the various levels of identity, can be considered the sense of belonging to the religion accepted by the general community. Mircea Eliade considers the definitions of religion to be so numerous and varied that he believes it is impossible even to provide a list of them. If we survey the existing definitions of religion and the criticisms and ambiguities surrounding them, we find that defining religion is very difficult because it is a complex phenomenon with diverse dimensions. In any case, common perceptions of religion have

sometimes emerged a posteriori, based on anthropological, sociological, and similar considerations and information, and these perceptions are highly varied (Thompson, 2002: 30). In this research, rather than examining all these intellectual diversities, a brief overview is provided to show that this social characteristic plays a role in the formation and continuation of collective identity.

Having a common religion and religious teachings, adherence and loyalty to them, and belief in and inclination towards widespread religious rituals and ceremonies are highly effective in the process of shaping national identity. In addition to being a functionally important factor in social relations, religion also fosters public reassurance, vitality, and enthusiasm. Furthermore, in many cases, religion in its sociological sense, with an emphasis on its objective and external dimension, is intertwined with other national themes such as the state, history, and cultural heritage (Hajiyani, 2000: 203). Although religion has lost its importance as a significant factor of solidarity in some parts of the world, it is still considered an important factor of nationality because it alone has a profound influence on the creation of the culture, customs, and traditions of many countries (Alam, 2004: 155). Although the agency of religion has gradually diminished from the beginning of modernity to the present era, various studies indicate that religion still has an active presence in collective identity formation, and cultural and social compatibility or conflict between different identity communities remains one of the prominent functions of religions and sects.

An important point in understanding religious identity is the issue of continuity. Many identities developed during childhood remain largely stable throughout life, but in the case of religious identity, 'change in identity' mainly occurs during adolescence (Duane et al., cited in Safiri et al., 2014: 169). Although many social theorists consider religion itself an important element of a country's culture and its national identity, at the social level, especially when the issue of inter-religious conflict arises, religious identity becomes significant. Religious identity in today's world is very diverse, ranging from universal divine religions to more local and marginal religions and various forms of sectarian religious beliefs.

From the past to the present, religion and sect have been a factor in creating a specific identity for their believers and a distinction from others who did not believe in them; that is, the identity of people was known by their religion and sect. Being Jewish, Christian, or Muslim in the inter-religious dimension, and

being Orthodox, Catholic, Shia, Sunni, etc., in the intra-religious and sectarian dimension, displayed the cultural identity of different people. In this way, religion and sect have had various social functions, such as socialising the members of society, reducing conflict, strengthening common values, integrating society and maintaining social stability, regulating resources, and strengthening social control (Ashrafi, 1998: 9).

Erikson recognised the potential of religion in identity development. He noted that religion is an important aspect of the socio-historical matrix in which identity is formed. Religious beliefs, values, and morals enable young people to understand the world and their place in it. These ideologies give meaning and significance to events and experiences (cited in King, 2003). Religion essentially provides cognitive, ideological, sociological, and spiritual resources for identity (Furrow, King & White, 2004: 17–26, cited in Ghanbari Barzian and Hemmati, 2015: 121). The system of religious meanings explains a wide range of possible forms of an individual's relationship with themselves, others, the universe, God, and whatever humans call reality or truth. No other meaning-giving cultural source has historically been able to compete with religion in responding to this human need for identity formation. Consequently, religion is often at the centre of individual and group identity (Seul, 1999: 556, cited in Ghanbari Barzian and Hemmati, 2015: 121).

Therefore, religion and sect have always been considered among the most influential elements in any society. Despite the varying degrees of influence from one society to another, religion can generally be considered one of the main institutions in the formation of social identity in any society. It can be a determining and powerful factor in the emergence of social phenomena, shape other institutions, influence values, and bring relationships under its sway. Samuel P. Huntington believes: 'In the new world, religion is one of the main forces, and perhaps the only main force, for motivating and mobilising people' (Mirzaei et al., 2014).

Religious identity is a specific type of identity and is not necessarily synonymous with being religious or religiosity. Although these three terms have commonalities, being religious and religiosity refer to the value and importance of membership in a religious group as well as participation in religious events. However, religious identity specifically refers to membership in a religious group, regardless of religious activity or participation (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010).

Religious identity is a collective identity that includes membership in religious groups, acceptance of their belief systems, affirmation of the importance of religious values, commitment to religious groups, and practices related to religion. This definition of religious identity distinguishes it from spiritual identity, which is part of personal identity. A religious context, like other forms of identity formation such as ethnic and cultural identity, can provide a perspective for understanding the world, opportunities for socialising with a wide range of people from different generations, and a set of basic principles for life. These foundations can shape an individual's identity (King & Boyatzis, 2004).

In the current era, religion has created a kind of categorical cleavage that has had the most prominent and far-reaching consequences for the structure of political relations in societies. The existence of a religious government in Iran is another factor that justifies examining the role of religiosity in the relationship between ethnic and national identity. If the ruling religious-political values are aligned with the religious values of an ethnic group, the political or religious ideology prescribes values that make the values of that ethnic group seem more important from the perspective of its members, and the youth of that ethnic group can define their goals and direction more clearly (Driedger, 2006).

The factor of religion and sect has played a significant role in the formation of ethnic groups, especially pre-modern ethnic groups. Primitive and nomadic tribes and peoples generally did not have an organised religion. They essentially worshipped either natural forces, such as the sun, water, and rain, or 'totems,' or they were 'pagan' (polytheistic) or shamanistic. The Abrahamic religions or 'People of the Book' (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have emerged over approximately three to four thousand years. Christianity and Islam consider themselves supra-ethnic and supra-national, with the claim that ethnic and national borders and limitations are insignificant from their perspective, and anyone can become a follower of Christianity or Islam and adopt that religion. However, these religions, in their history, especially after passing through the initial stage of their emergence and expansion and encountering the world of politics, have in practice been forced to accept the cultural and economic-political realities of societies and have acted accordingly. For this reason, in many cases, this or that religion and sect have overtly or covertly become a vehicle for the ethnic sentiments of various peoples and nations. One motivation for this situation is that some of these peoples have even intertwined their own name, their emergence,

or their ownership of a territory they consider their own with their religious myths. In ancient Iran, the language and myths of the Iranians and the names of their cities and fire temples were closely linked to the Zoroastrian religion. It seems that in the pre-modern era, and especially in ancient times, more or less every people had its own specific religion and ritual. The larger the ancient peoples were and the more powerful their state, the more important and influential their religion was. Many of the religions and rituals of the past, especially the rituals of primitive nomadic peoples, have disappeared, but some of them not only did not disappear but have become larger and more widespread and have turned into organised religions.

In general, it can be asserted that small and young peoples and nations, which are more or less ethnically homogeneous, may be able to rely on and emphasize their specific religion, sect, or ritual without this religious priority having major domestic consequences. However, large countries and nations, especially if they are not in a stage of economic progress and cultural and religious interaction, will face serious domestic problems with every step they take towards overt and extremist religious rule. Of course, in many cases, the factor of religion and sect also becomes a pretext for sometimes bloody and long-term provocations. Western countries were also the scene of some religious disputes and even wars a few centuries ago, of which 'The European wars of religion' between 1618 and 1648 are a prime example. But today, they have generally moved out of the circle of serious religious-sectarian conflict and disputes. If we look at the current situation in the countries of the Middle East and some Asian and African countries, we will see that the factor of religion and sect, especially in recent years, has become a serious pretext for bloody confrontations between different groups of people, horrific massacres and destruction, and serious disputes between various countries. At the same time, there are more and more hopeful examples that show that different religions, despite past and even present problems, can live peacefully in a common country and within the framework of a single nation.

Although religions and sects form an ancient and deep part of the structure and cultural identity of societies, the role of these factors in the construction of the ethnic and national identity of different societies, regardless of their level of development and whether they are traditional or modern, depends on another fundamental variable: the degree of overlap between religious identity and ethnic and national identity. In some societies, such as the Jewish and Armenian com-

munities, the degree of overlap between ethnic and religious-sectarian identity is almost completely congruent, which are called 'ethnic religions.' Conversely, some religions like Islam and Christianity are considered supra-national and supra-ethnic. However, even among these religions, at the level of their numerous sects and schools of thought, there are configurations that, in proportion to the position of the follower peoples and nations in the power structure of countries, create a meaningful relationship between forms of religious identity and ethnic-national identity. This is strikingly evident in the political, social, and cultural relations of the nations and peoples of the Middle East, both in the regional dimension and in the domestic dimension of countries, and is a fundamental variable in shaping regional relations.

Assessing the role of religions and sects in the construction of ethnic identity and the degree of influence and susceptibility of these two forms of collective identity ultimately requires a dynamic and multidimensional view of the relationship between ethnic identity and religious-sectarian identity among the groups and peoples studied and their political-social context. The degree of overlap between ethnic and religious-sectarian identity and the importance of this variable in the boundaries of ethnic identity is a fundamental factor in determining the role of religion in ethnic relations, especially when this identity and cultural characteristic encompasses all or a significant part of ethnic demands and an almost complete congruence between religious identity and ethnic identity is established.

The level of importance and influence of religion and sect in the macro-policies and resource allocation of a country with ethnic and religious-sectarian diversity is another effective factor in determining the significance of the variable of religion and sect in the reorganisation of ethnic identity and the direction of their demands. In countries and societies where the macro-policy is influenced by a religious and sectarian orientation different from the religion and sect of some ethnic groups, this factor, despite the non-religious and non-sectarian origin of ethnic demands, will play a divisive role in the macro-relations of society and will make the lines of identity distinction more prominent. On the other hand, a macro-policy following secular and non-religious principles in a diverse ethnic and religious society, if it does not foster integration, can at least not be a ground for collective conflicts and hostilities.

### • *National Identity and its Relationship with Ethnic Identity*

The nation is a central concept in the understanding of national identity. Among its many definitions, the comprehensive one provided by Anthony Smith can be considered foundational. In Smith's view, a nation is a human population with a shared territory, history, myths, memories, public culture, economy, and legal rights and duties (Karimli, 2000: 175).[1] Today, national identity is considered the highest level of collective identity and, due to the prevalence of the nation-state model, it is hierarchically superior to other levels of identity. National identity stems from one's belonging to a national territory and state—in other words, to a specific country—such that there is an awareness of and a sense of loyalty towards its entire existence (Abbasi Ghadi and Khalili, 2011: 50). In another definition, national identity signifies a sense of loyalty to the common elements and symbols within a national community and within defined political borders. According to this definition, the degree of belonging and loyalty of individuals within a national community to each of the national symbols—territory, religion and rites, customs and rituals, history, language and literature, people, and government—determines the intensity of the national identity felt by the members of that national community (Yousefi, 2001: 18). National identity is fundamentally multidimensional. It can never be confined to a single unique element or specific categories of nationalism, nor can it be rapidly and easily instilled among a population through artificial means. Based on this, such a definition of national identity separates it from the concept of the state. The state refers merely to public institutions (distinct from other social institutions) that hold a monopoly on the extraction of resources and the use of coercive force within a specified territory. The nation, however, signifies a cultural and political bond that integrates the political community, where all members of such a society share a common homeland and historical culture. It is worth noting that there is some overlap between these two concepts, as both pertain to a historical territory and, in democratic states, to the sovereignty of the people (Smith, 1991: 14-15). Some thinkers consider national identity to mean a transition from traditional identities, such as religion, ethnic group, and tribe, to more inclusive identities (Rajaei, 2003: 12). Accordingly, national identity is an identity whereby indi-

1. For further reading, see: Hobsbawm, E. (2012). Nations and Nationalism Since 1780. Cambridge University Press, p. 137; Smith, A. (2013). Theories of Nationalism. London; Gellner, E. (2006). Nations and Nationalism. Oxford.

viduals, instead of identifying themselves based on ethno-tribal affiliations, do so based on their belonging to a specific nation with a defined geography and system of governance.

With the spread of nationalism and the onset of political and economic conflicts following the Industrial Revolution over imperialist and colonial rivalries, feelings of belonging to a specific territory and state also increased. The Westphalian system, by stabilising the nation-state system, greatly contributed to the strengthening of national identity. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that national identity—that is, the feeling of belonging to a larger territory with a specific state—is a phenomenon exclusive to the modern era.

National identity and the sense of belonging to it arise from two things: 1) the existence of a recognised territorial unit; and 2) a state or political system that leads this unit. As long as these two elements exist in a society and in some way draw a boundary between the 'self' and the 'other', national identity will also take shape. The French thinker Ernest Renan considered two characteristics necessary for a nation: having a shared cultural heritage and a daily consensus upon it:

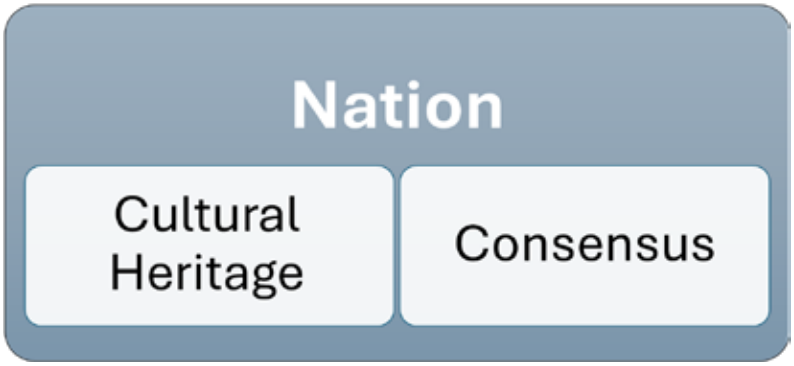



*Diagram 1-3*

However, if no 'rupture' occurs and the only issue is the expansion or contraction of political units, whether in the form of an empire or smaller entities, the feeling of belonging and loyalty to it also remains. Thus, in human history, two types of national identity can be distinguished: one is modern national identities, meaning the feeling of belonging to modern states that emerged from the fifteenth century onwards in Europe and later in other parts of the world; the other is pre-modern national identity, meaning the feeling of belonging and loyalty to ancient political units and territories that have existed since the past, have per-

sisted, and exist today under the same name.

The constituent elements of a nation can be classified into two main groups: the first group includes objective elements, and the second includes subjective elements. Territorial elements belong to the first group, while mythical elements,

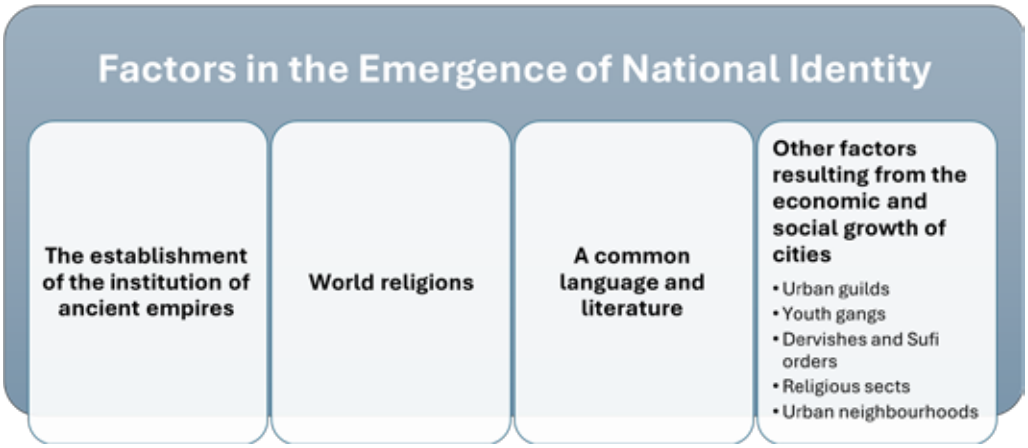



*Diagram 1-2. Two required characteristics for a nation according to Renan*

memories, beliefs, and cultures are considered part of the second. Additionally, two fundamental features and aspects can be ascribed to a nation: one is the ethno-cultural aspect, whereby the nation persists based on the claim of its members having a common ancestry; the second is the civic aspect, which is based on the members of the nation having common obligations and commitments (Alamdari, 2004: 27-30). In this context, Ahmad Ashraf enumerates the following factors for the formation of national identity (Ashraf, 1999: 139-140):

Despite the similarities and differences in the definition of national identity from the perspective of its theorists, the fundamental elements of national identity can be considered as follows:

1. A historical territory, i.e., a homeland.
2. Shared historical myths and memories.
3. A common public culture.
4. Political institutions governing the territory in question, i.e., the state.
5. Common rights and duties for all members.
6. A common economy and territorial mobility for members.

In general, national identity is a nation's perception of its 'whatness' and 'whoness' in relation to other nations, through which it distinguishes itself from others and feels a sense of belonging to its own assets. This general understanding is the essence of most definitions of this concept (Goudarzi, 2008: 27-28).

The entanglement and dialectical relationship between the concepts of national identity and ethnic identity, as two central concepts in the studies of ethnology and nationalism, have led to a vast and challenging body of conceptual and theoretical literature surrounding the relationship between these two concepts, and the explanation and clarification of their various components and forms, in light of different and corresponding viewpoints. Since identity is a phenomenon that takes shape within the context of social fabrics and currents, the primary origin of the formation of different views on ethnic and national identities goes back to the differences in perspectives regarding the historical process of the emergence of ethnic and national identity and the various political and social experiences that the theorists of this field have studied, presenting the results of their research in the form of various conceptual and theoretical definitions.

The most significant conceptual distinction between ethnic and national identity is their historical aspect and origin. According to most researchers, ethnic identity has a historical and relatively ancient nature, with its antiquity tracing back to pre-modern periods, and it is mostly characterised by cultural features. Ethnic identity requires semantic boundaries within which the members of an ethnic group consciously see themselves as different from non-members. This awareness is formed around cultural heritage, values, and perceptions, creating a sense of belonging and loyalty. The source of ethnic values and affiliations is often symbols such as language, religion, customs, rituals, and cultural figures, which are used in the standard model and scale for measuring ethnic identity, the Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), and have high validity and reliability (Umana, 2004: 12). National identity, however, apart from a few exceptional cases known as 'historical nations,' is considered an invented and modern identity whose emergence is a consequence of the formation of modern nation-states. In countries with diverse ethnic, racial, and belief identities, national identity is mainly a contractual and constructed matter with functional objectives aimed at creating a new form of social cohesion and national integration based on a set of individual and social rights and duties. From this perspective, national identity does not have a historical and natural origin and nature, but is an artificial matter that is constructed and elaborated over time through narration, then becomes a collective memory, and is subsequently consolidated. This process expands from a central ethno-centric core and, with the help of imagination and the process of totalisation, is consolidated in the form of a nation, and

then takes the form of a unified and coherent identity. Then, with the help of the mechanism of othering, it distinguishes between the self and the other and, as a new self or collective self, draws boundaries with its surroundings. Thus, the process of the formation and continuation of national identity takes place within a closure. Traditions, history, language, religion, political-economic institutions, and environmental and geographical factors give meaning to national identity, and narratives link this collection together. Therefore, national identity arises from these actions and reactions, and as long as the aforementioned factors are established, national identity will maintain its importance as an analytical subject (Ahmadi, 2004: 26). Of course, within this definitional range, other forms of the relationship between ethnic and national identity exist. In countries with a homogeneous and uniform ethnic composition, national identity has the highest degree of congruence with ethnic identity, the roots of which often go back to the pre-modern era. As Smith, in his dissertation based on Barth's concept of ethnicity, emphasizes that nations are formed through pre-existing ethnicities (ethnic communities or groups) (Edensor, 2002: 8-9).

In terms of the hierarchical classification of identity, ethnic identity is at a lower level than national identity and is one of the modern social identities that is a subset of national identity. National identity is the most inclusive and extensive social identity at the societal level and includes the set of characteristics, attachments, and geographical, historical, cultural, epic, and ethnic bonds that encompass human life. In fact, national identity is a collection of features and characteristics that cause national societies to differ from one another.

### • *Globalisation and Ethnic Identity*

In the early twentieth century, social scientists often regarded racial, ethnic, and linguistic interests and identities as a form of historical regression and anomaly, which would either be surrendered and destroyed in the face of communism or integrated and dissolved within the framework of liberal democratic institutions. Ethnicity was considered a remnant of the early stages of human societal evolution that would sooner or later disappear (Golmohammadi, 2007). It was thought that with the expansion of the capitalist system, the establishment of nation-states, the increase in the level of interactions and information, the growth of urbanisation, the rise in literacy and education levels, and the process of socialisation, ethnic identity-seeking would be relegated to the archives of history.

This claim found stronger theoretical support with the emergence of theories related to globalisation. It was thought that the process of globalisation, especially the globalisation of culture, would lead to the establishment and dominance of one culture across the globe, and that local cultures, the way of life of ethnic subcultures, and even their languages would be forgotten (Tohidfam, 2003). According to this view, which is referred to as 'universalism,' globalisation increases people's cosmopolitan interests, and with the growth of cosmopolitan interests, there is little room left for attention to ethno-nationalism (Scholte, 2003: 201). Another group, however, believes that globalisation will not only not lead to the disappearance of ethnicities but, with the tools it provides them, will facilitate the growth of ethnic self-awareness and lead to the strengthening of ethnic movements. Therefore, to examine the impact of globalisation, the components of ethnic identity must be studied. In this view, which can be called 'particularism,' the process of globalisation does not mean the forgetting of local, ethnic, and regional cultures; rather, globalisation has strengthened the emergence of frameworks for non-national collective identities, the most important of which are ethnic identities. In fact, the global community entered the third millennium while ethnic, racial, and linguistic identities had gained twofold importance, and it can be asserted that almost all countries in the world are grappling with ethnic movements and conflicts (Ahmadi, 2018: 65). Today, there are 8,000 ethnic groups with 6,700 different languages living in the world. However, only 192 states are members of the United Nations (Khoubrouy-Pak, 2001).

Although there is no consensus on the cultural and socio-political consequences of globalisation, adherents of both universalism and particularism agree that globalisation, in Giddens's words, as a process of the compression of time and space (Giddens, 1998: 15), with the new possibilities it has created in the realm of real and virtual communication, has led to an increase in awareness and a rise in the expectations and aspirations of various groups, including ethnicities.

The theories of Manuel Castells are among the most prominent perspectives on globalisation and identity. With a multidimensional view, apart from the contradictory effects of the globalisation process, he also explains the relations of power and the construction of identity. Castells, believing in the contradictory process of globalisation and its impact on identities, states that while globalisation accelerates the formation of a cosmopolitan identity through electronic media, it also leads to the formation of local identities in the form of fundamentalism and

ethnic, religious, and other particularisms (Castells, 2001).

***• Media, the Virtual World, and Ethnic Identity***

Today, the real world and the virtual world are inextricably intertwined, and time no longer has its past locational sense. Cultures have become intensely integrated and have lost their former spatial and temporal purity. It is therefore natural for identity, bound to space-time and a locational and temporal culture, to face a crisis in this new environment (Praprotnik, 2004: 37).

The latest wave of harbingers of the decline of ethnicity emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, concurrent with the spread of the idea and process of globalisation. Many saw globalisation as an integrating and homogenising process that would soon consign difference to history and replace ethnicity with concepts such as global identity, global man, global citizen, cosmopolitan man, and a world without borders. But it soon became clear that the homogenisation of globalisation is also a repressive process. Thus, concepts such as solidarity movements, resistance identity, resistance culture, ethnocentrism, localism, nativism, and the like emerged, indicating the persistence of pre-globalisation interests and affiliations as the defensive ramparts of oppressed peoples at the height of globalisation—a condition in which our world and our lives are shaped by the opposing currents of globalisation and identity (Castells, 2010: 17). Thus, ethnicity and ethnic identity formation, having safely passed through four waves that were thought to herald its end, have today reproduced themselves in the media space and the virtual world of internet communications, as the newest and most pervasive aspect of our globalised world. Information technology has largely eliminated space and distance. In the first century of the coming millennium, we will witness what has been called the 'death or decline of distance.'

In today's world, the mass media play a very important role in the process of the construction of social identities. With the globalisation of media broadcasting in various languages and the loss of the former status of time and place, one can even speak of the globalisation of the identity-making process. Media images provide many opportunities for the identifications necessary for the formation of social identity. On the other hand, the image portrayed of ethnic groups affects the attitudes of others and the formation of their stereotypes about these groups. Therefore, in the study of ethnic relations, attention to how ethnic groups are represented in the media, as a pillar of the politics of identity and representation,

is of great importance.

With the creation of virtual communities with common interests, which some have called communities of choice or 'tribes of taste,' around the nodes of the placeless structure of the internet, the physical boundaries of neighbourhoods and the limitations arising from occupational and commercial situations are gradually disappearing (Sadoughi, 2005: 19). The internet, due to its global and networked characteristics, has transcended borders, and all individuals anywhere in the world can access the virtual space and produce information, which has led to the elimination of distances. The disappearance of spatial distance and the unprecedented increase in people's ability to exchange and interact with each other, which makes it possible to maintain and expand common language and empathy between them, has transformed the process and outcome of the collective identity formation of individuals. It has created virtual groups and communities that are distant but accessible and has completely changed the nature of place and space in the digital world (Montazar-Ghaem, 2002).

Mass media and social communication networks in the virtual world, by creating the possibility of de-spatialisation and providing the opportunity for the presence of the majority of members of groups and communities in the newly emerged context of the virtual world, affect the discourses of collective identity, including ethnic identity, in two general ways. Firstly, the removal of the dimension of space-distance and, more relatively, time, has provided suitable conditions for the dissemination of general and modern global discourses with cosmopolitan claims, which are in a way in opposition to micro and local identity discourses such as ethnic identity and may lead to the weakening and marginalisation of these discourses. This becomes even more important when we add to these equations the media and virtual representation capabilities and power of global and hegemonic discourses. This matter, namely the power of media-virtual representation, apart from the global-local level, also leads to the creation of unequal opportunities and different representation capabilities at other levels, including the relations of identity groups within societies and countries. From this perspective, ethnic cohesion and discursive power are dependent on the media and virtual capabilities attributed to ethnicities. Another effective dimension of the media-virtual world on the collective life of ethnic groups, which plays a prominent role in the formation and strengthening of ethnic identity, is the creation of representation opportunities outside of formal organisational and

governmental contexts, which until recent decades were mainly monopolised by states and were an important and trend-setting tool for them in shaping public opinion and mobilising public sentiments in the struggle against ethnic movements and uprisings. In contrast, the new information and technological age has provided the ground for the exit of this monopoly from the hands of official and governmental institutions and has provided an effective tool for ethnic networks to, by relying on its opportunities, disseminate their discourse and confront rival discourses and find a space to represent their ethnic self from their own perspective. Another function of mass media and social communication networks in the virtual world for ethnic groups and communities that are geographically dispersed is to unify and prepare a sphere of collective interaction beyond the real world for the gathering of identity groups, including ethnic groups, which, with the help of Habermas's term 'public sphere,' can be called the 'virtual public sphere.'Excellent. Here is the translation of the next segment.

- ***Feminism and Ethnic Identity***

In the age of globalisation, alongside ethnic identities, the category of gender identities has also come under scrutiny. In multi-ethnic societies, individuals are generally categorised into ethnic and gender groups. These two identity definitions establish specific relationships with each other that are not easily observed and classified in behaviours and expectations. Social identities, based on their social and cultural characteristics, form the foundation of social actions, which in turn determine individuals' orientation towards others as social objects, as well as their self-recognition and self-expression as subjects in interaction with one another and with others.

Gendered social identity, in turn, and in interaction with individuals' other multiple identities, is effective in their redefinition and differentiation. Gender identity and relations, much like ethnic and class identity and relations, are influential in delineating the public and private spheres in society. Although the boundaries of the private and public spheres are often influenced by gender, gender does not operate independently of other factors. In multi-ethnic countries like Iran, due to a historical patriarchal structure, gender discrimination is an effective factor in all social, cultural, political, and economic domains, and a significant difference is observed between the two sexes in all these aspects. In these conditions, a female gender identity may operate actively but invisibly

from within the private sphere and play a role in shaping certain attitudes, including ethnic attitudes and identity (Ghaneirad et al., 2007).

Carvalho et al., in a paper presented at a seminar of the International Sociological Association, analysed gender as a significant factor in shaping collective experience. They argue that gender, as one of the fundamental dimensions in the production of distinct experiences, leads to the construction and emergence of collective subjects and actions. They propose that collective subjects arise from a plurality of positions, not merely from social class, and show that collective identities depend on a 'cobbled-together' experience (similar to the discussion by instrumentalists on the manipulation of ethnic symbols). Gender is one of the dimensions that, alongside age, ethnicity, and social class, shapes this social experience (Carvalho, 1994).

In some studies on gender and ethnicity, due to the existence of certain specific attitudes among ethnic groups, the inequality of women has been the focus of attention. Such studies, rather than addressing the role of gender in the revival of ethnic identity, explain gender inequality in terms of the cultural status of the ethnic group. Another group of studies examines the effect of ethnicity and gender on attitudes towards gender roles and suitable occupations for women, while another section has studied the two variables of gender and ethnicity as factors in the distribution of income and resources. In these studies, gender has been seen as a factor of inequality alongside other factors, including ethnicity, and has been studied and measured in the same way as these factors. In these analyses, the subordinate position of women has been equated with the subordinate position of an ethnic group. In fact, gender has been classified alongside ethnicity and class, and the co-occurrence of these three factors, rather than their intersection, has been considered. McGuire, in a study, examines the relationship between gender, race, ethnicity, and networks, and clarifies the informal mechanisms leading to inequality. Using network and status construction theories, she examines the processes through which the gender and race/ethnicity of employees affect the status of their network members. Her analysis shows that women and people of colour are members of networks with a lower status compared to the status of men and white people. Consequently, they occupy positions that limit their ability to attract powerful employees. The researcher concludes that structural exclusion, which is a product of macro-social structures and beyond individuals, can explain gender and racial/ethnic differences in the status of net-

work members more than personal exclusion (McGuire, 2000: 500-525).

Race and ethnicity also play an effective role in determining attitudes towards gender roles. Although in the past, race and ethnicity were examined from a biological perspective, they are now considered one of the important social and cultural structures in social studies. Ethnicity, like religion, has a determining role in attitudes towards gender roles, and among the most important reasons for this are being in a minority, having a specific cultural structure, and high homogeneity. These very characteristics have caused a different range of attitudes and expectations of different roles to exist in ethnicities. For example, in some ethnicities, the participation of women in male roles, such as defence and war, is an accepted matter, while in some other ethnicities, there is a complete gender segregation in roles, and women are involved in completely traditional roles. This is while over the past centuries, the changes resulting from the industrialisation of societies have had a great impact on the structure of the economy and society and have caused many changes in the labour market and occupations, and consequently, the division of gender roles. In the feminist approach, gender roles arise from unequal access to resources and opportunities, and empowerment is considered the best way to promote women's participation in social and economic affairs, which leads to greater control by women over limited resources and, consequently, equality in gender roles.

### • *Ethnic Identity in the Contemporary World*

Identity is not an intrinsic and fixed category but a fluid concept. Every identity is the product of a particular discourse, and on this basis, it is a phenomenon that can be understood as a process, given a historical and evolving dimension that has a history as long as human societies and has appeared in various forms in different periods. This phenomenon has also found new forms in today's world, and it seems that its importance is increasing. In the contemporary period, despite the processes of modernisation and the establishment of modern institutions, this diversity of identity not only did not decrease but also became a contentious issue surrounding identity distinctions and differences. Also, from the second half of the twentieth century, processes of globalisation, such as the increasing growth and expansion of media and the de-monopolisation of media control and management, led to the growth of identity awareness and the possibility of its representation. Indeed, along with other social and cultural transformations, it

increased the diversity and plurality of identity, and alongside ancient sources such as ethnicity, race, religion, sect, and nationality, new identity claims based on gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle, quasi-religious groups, and other factors demanded recognition.

Since the end of the Second World War, the world has witnessed a revival of the issue of ethnicities as a problem in politics, an important subject in the field of political mobilisation of people, and a source of domestic and international conflicts. The political importance of the issue of ethnicity is not only relevant in the realm of the colonised territories of the Third World but also in the advanced post-industrial democracies of Western Europe and North America, as well as in many communist nations such as the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Eastern Europe, and the People's Republic of China. The structural conditions that give rise to ethno-regional politics, the immediate causes that accelerate ethnic conflicts, and the forms that ethnicity-based conflicts take, vary significantly among countries and within the three worlds mentioned above. But it is clear that the influence of modernity in all regions of the world has not been able to invalidate the issue of ethnicity as a source of political conflicts; it even seems that its importance has increased as a result of the expansion of modernity (David Mason, 1998: 125-126).

When one truly understands that ethnic heterogeneity is a reality among the nations of the current global society, the persistence of the issue of ethnicity as a powerful factor in the domestic politics of countries should no longer be surprising. Walker Connor, nearly twenty years ago, noted that out of a total of 132 nation-states existing at that time, only twelve (9 percent) were definitely ethnically homogeneous, while in twenty-five cases (18.9 percent) one ethnic group comprised more than 90 percent of the country's population, and another 25 cases had an ethnic group that comprised between 75 and 90 percent of the population. But in 31 states (about 23.5 percent) the largest ethnic group comprised only 50 to 74 percent of the population, and in the remaining 39 cases (29.5 percent) the main ethnic group comprised less than half of the population. In 53 countries (40.2 percent), the population was divided into more than five major groups. According to what Connor calls the 'clear mismatch of political and ethnic borders,' it should not be surprising that ethnicity remains the central core of political organisation and competition at the global level (Connor, 1972: 320). The available evidence on the extent of ethnic violence strongly supports

the multiplicity of ethnic issues that are pursued and followed in the political arena. In studies of African conflicts between 1946 and 1976, Stephen Kende classified 120 conflicts into three types: internal anti-regime, tribal, and border wars (Kende, 1978: 231). He found that 85% of these conflicts were of the two internal types, which were not only more numerous (102 out of 120 conflicts) but also more durable (97.7 percent of the total war-years). In the last ten years of his study (1967-76), the proportion of all internal wars increased, and internal tribal wars with foreign intervention were among the conflicts that rapidly increased in number. All internal tribal wars and most internal anti-regime wars also had an ethnic element (ibid., 128-129).

Although some see the formation of ethnic identities and the increased attachment to sub-cultures below the national identity in the course of globalisation as synonymous with the weakening of territorial bonds and the dominant culture, and describe national integration and cohesion as being at risk, considering it one of the threatening factors to national security, there is, in contrast, the idea that ethnic-linguistic diversity in a society indicates the spirit of tolerance of citizens who live together in peace. In sociological culture, identity is defined as the relatively stable perception of an individual of who and what they are in relation to other individuals and groups, which is formed through social interactions and in the process of socialisation (Johnson, 1977). Throughout human history, this has produced a great diversity of social groups among different human societies, and today we witness ethnic groups, nations, and more diverse micro and macro levels of them in the world.

A set of political and social components in the contemporary world, such as the formation of nation-states, the transformation of nationalism into the dominant paradigm of global politics, the increase in the phenomenon of mass and group migrations, the collapse of ancient supra-ethnic/supra-national political structures like empires, new political demarcations and the formation of newly emerged countries with heterogeneous ethnic populations, and the transition of ethnic identity from a natural and apolitical matter to a determining political variable in the fate of ethnic groups and the increasing self-awareness resulting from it, have caused some predictions based on the decline of ethnicity and ethnic identity in the light of new political discourses and schools of thought and the change in lifestyle and globalised forms of identity in human societies not to occur. In a reverse trend, the dimensions of ethnic issues and ethnic identity in

the current world have witnessed an increasing growth.

• ***Ethnic Identity in the Middle East***

The Middle East can be named the main identity-forming hub throughout history. This region, the birthplace of great religions and the dwelling place of various peoples and nations, has always accommodated a wide and diverse range of collective religious, sectarian, racial, national, ethnic, and linguistic identities. In various eras, it has been, on the one hand, an arena of tension, confrontation, and conflict, and on the other hand, a place of coexistence, tolerance, and interaction among different groups. This distinct historical feature in the contemporary era, following the emergence of new forms of collective identity and the entry of the identity perception of most groups into the self-aware level, has led to the activation of identity fault lines and cleavages and their entry into the field of political and social relations. The conflicts that, in the many decades after the collapse of the ancient political structure of the Middle East in the early twentieth century to the present day, have created a tense and conflict-ridden hub of endless war and conflict, both at the regional level between countries and at the domestic level of countries and societies, have at the forefront of these conflicts and tensions issues inspired by ethnic identity and ethnic demands.

It is difficult to provide a specific identity typology in the Middle East and to categorise them definitively at the sub-national, national, and supra-national levels, and for instance, to consider ethnic identity-seeking as sub-national, Pan-Arabism, Pan-Turkism, and Pan-Iranism as national identity, or Islamism as supra-national identity. This is because, according to this very example, identity-seeking based on Turkish nationalism is the foundation of Turkey's national identity, but in Iran, this ethnic identity orientation may be pursued at the sub-national level. Pan-Arabism has also always been the foundation of the national identity of most Arab countries, but at certain junctures, it has taken the form of a regional and supra-national identity discourse. Regarding the identity-seeking of the Kurdish people, this issue is more complex. No nation-state in the region has arisen from and carries such an identity, and the countries of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria face Kurdish nationalism at the sub-national level. At the same time, the regional dimensions of the issue have also confronted these states with Kurdish nationalism at the supra-national level (Haghpanah, 2011: 91-92).

Ethnological studies in the Middle East face serious challenges. Some Middle

East scholars take the concepts of ethnicity and its related terms as universal and self-evident and apply them to analyse the existing linguistic and religious diversities in the region. Such an attitude, which is in fact a legacy of the behaviourist tradition in social sciences and ahistorical cross-national comparisons, convinces these theorists and researchers that they have no need to provide any historical definition of ethnicity, ethnic group, and ethnic nationalism in their studies. Works related to ethnic studies in the Middle East not only suffer from problems arising from the definition of ethnicity and the contradictory criteria that determine the nature of ethnic groups, but they also ignore the historical characteristics of tribal societies and their relations with the state. The main reason is that in these studies, tribe and ethnic group are usually considered to have the same concepts, and the characteristics of ethnic groups are attributed to tribal societies. Thus, Middle Eastern linguistic and religious groups (which previously had a tribal organisation) are considered distinct ethnic groups that are in constant conflict with the state to become a nation. As Bassam Tibi states, the terms tribe and ethnic group cannot be used as two synonymous words in the context of studies related to the Middle East. Social scientists interested in Middle Eastern issues have used the concept of ethnicity as an analytical tool to depict social divisions in countries lacking a national (homogeneous) society. In response to the question of why researchers speak of ethnic groups instead of tribes, Tibi emphasizes that European historians usually call social groupings in the pre-modern periods of their history ethnic groups, but they call similar groups in non-European history tribes. Thus, tribalism is an Arab or African social phenomenon, not a European one.

The emergence of the modern centralist state or, as Anthony Smith calls it, the scientific state, made the relations between the state and tribes hostile; this was an event that occurred in the Middle East in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, the resistance of ethno-tribal groups to the goals of the state, contrary to what many social scientists say, was not a struggle for independence, but a struggle for survival. Later, this resistance took on an ethnic form under the influence of cross-border factors.

- ***Feminism and Ethnic Identity***

In the age of globalisation, alongside ethnic identities, the category of gender identities has also come under scrutiny. In multi-ethnic societies, individuals are

generally categorised into ethnic and gender groups. These two identity definitions establish specific relationships with each other that are not easily observed and classified in behaviours and expectations. Social identities, based on their social and cultural characteristics, form the foundation of social actions, which in turn determine individuals' orientation towards others as social objects, as well as their self-recognition and self-expression as subjects in interaction with one another and with others.

Gendered social identity, in turn, and in interaction with individuals' other multiple identities, is effective in their redefinition and differentiation. Gender identity and relations, much like ethnic and class identity and relations, are influential in delineating the public and private spheres in society. Although the boundaries of the private and public spheres are often influenced by gender, gender does not operate independently of other factors. In multi-ethnic countries like Iran, due to a historical patriarchal structure, gender discrimination is an effective factor in all social, cultural, political, and economic domains, and a significant difference is observed between the two sexes in all these aspects. In these conditions, a female gender identity may operate actively but invisibly from within the private sphere and play a role in shaping certain attitudes, including ethnic attitudes and identity (Ghaneirad et al., 2007).

Carvalho et al., in a paper presented at a seminar of the International Sociological Association, analysed gender as a significant factor in shaping collective experience. They argue that gender, as one of the fundamental dimensions in the production of distinct experiences, leads to the construction and emergence of collective subjects and actions. They propose that collective subjects arise from a plurality of positions, not merely from social class, and show that collective identities depend on a 'cobbled-together' experience (similar to the discussion by instrumentalists on the manipulation of ethnic symbols). Gender is one of the dimensions that, alongside age, ethnicity, and social class, shapes this social experience (Carvalho, 1994).

In some studies on gender and ethnicity, due to the existence of certain specific attitudes among ethnic groups, the inequality of women has been the focus of attention. Such studies, rather than addressing the role of gender in the revival of ethnic identity, explain gender inequality in terms of the cultural status of the ethnic group. Another group of studies examines the effect of ethnicity and gender on attitudes towards gender roles and suitable occupations for women,

while another section has studied the two variables of gender and ethnicity as factors in the distribution of income and resources. In these studies, gender has been seen as a factor of inequality alongside other factors, including ethnicity, and has been studied and measured in the same way as these factors. In these analyses, the subordinate position of women has been equated with the subordinate position of an ethnic group. In fact, gender has been classified alongside ethnicity and class, and the co-occurrence of these three factors, rather than their intersection, has been considered. McGuire, in a study, examines the relationship between gender, race, ethnicity, and networks, and clarifies the informal mechanisms leading to inequality. Using network and status construction theories, she examines the processes through which the gender and race/ethnicity of employees affect the status of their network members. Her analysis shows that women and people of colour are members of networks with a lower status compared to the status of men and white people. Consequently, they occupy positions that limit their ability to attract powerful employees. The researcher concludes that structural exclusion, which is a product of macro-social structures and beyond individuals, can explain gender and racial/ethnic differences in the status of network members more than personal exclusion (McGuire, 2000: 500-525).

Race and ethnicity also play an effective role in determining attitudes towards gender roles. Although in the past, race and ethnicity were examined from a biological perspective, they are now considered one of the important social and cultural structures in social studies. Ethnicity, like religion, has a determining role in attitudes towards gender roles, and among the most important reasons for this are being in a minority, having a specific cultural structure, and high homogeneity. These very characteristics have caused a different range of attitudes and expectations of different roles to exist in ethnicities. For example, in some ethnicities, the participation of women in male roles, such as defence and war, is an accepted matter, while in some other ethnicities, there is a complete gender segregation in roles, and women are involved in completely traditional roles. This is while over the past centuries, the changes resulting from the industrialisation of societies have had a great impact on the structure of the economy and society and have caused many changes in the labour market and occupations, and consequently, the division of gender roles. In the feminist approach, gender roles arise from unequal access to resources and opportunities, and empowerment is considered the best way to promote women's participation in social and

economic affairs, which leads to greater control by women over limited resources and, consequently, equality in gender roles.

### • *Ethnic Identity in the Contemporary World*

Identity is not an intrinsic and fixed category but a fluid concept. Every identity is the product of a particular discourse, and on this basis, it is a phenomenon that can be understood as a process, given a historical and evolving dimension that has a history as long as human societies and has appeared in various forms in different periods. This phenomenon has also found new forms in today's world, and it seems that its importance is increasing. In the contemporary period, despite the processes of modernisation and the establishment of modern institutions, this diversity of identity not only did not decrease but also became a contentious issue surrounding identity distinctions and differences. Also, from the second half of the twentieth century, processes of globalisation, such as the increasing growth and expansion of media and the de-monopolisation of media control and management, led to the growth of identity awareness and the possibility of its representation. Indeed, along with other social and cultural transformations, it increased the diversity and plurality of identity, and alongside ancient sources such as ethnicity, race, religion, sect, and nationality, new identity claims based on gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle, quasi-religious groups, and other factors demanded recognition.

Since the end of the Second World War, the world has witnessed a revival of the issue of ethnicities as a problem in politics, an important subject in the field of political mobilisation of people, and a source of domestic and international conflicts. The political importance of the issue of ethnicity is not only relevant in the realm of the colonised territories of the Third World but also in the advanced post-industrial democracies of Western Europe and North America, as well as in many communist nations such as the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Eastern Europe, and the People's Republic of China. The structural conditions that give rise to ethno-regional politics, the immediate causes that accelerate ethnic conflicts, and the forms that ethnicity-based conflicts take, vary significantly among countries and within the three worlds mentioned above. But it is clear that the influence of modernity in all regions of the world has not been able to invalidate the issue of ethnicity as a source of political conflicts; it even seems that its importance has increased as a result of the expansion of modernity (David Mason,

1998: 125-126).

When one truly understands that ethnic heterogeneity is a reality among the nations of the current global society, the persistence of the issue of ethnicity as a powerful factor in the domestic politics of countries should no longer be surprising. Walker Connor, nearly twenty years ago, noted that out of a total of 132 nation-states existing at that time, only twelve (9 percent) were definitely ethnically homogeneous, while in twenty-five cases (18.9 percent) one ethnic group comprised more than 90 percent of the country's population, and another 25 cases had an ethnic group that comprised between 75 and 90 percent of the population. But in 31 states (about 23.5 percent) the largest ethnic group comprised only 50 to 74 percent of the population, and in the remaining 39 cases (29.5 percent) the main ethnic group comprised less than half of the population. In 53 countries (40.2 percent), the population was divided into more than five major groups. According to what Connor calls the 'clear mismatch of political and ethnic borders,' it should not be surprising that ethnicity remains the central core of political organisation and competition at the global level (Connor, 1972: 320). The available evidence on the extent of ethnic violence strongly supports the multiplicity of ethnic issues that are pursued and followed in the political arena. In studies of African conflicts between 1946 and 1976, Stephen Kende classified 120 conflicts into three types: internal anti-regime, tribal, and border wars (Kende, 1978: 231). He found that 85% of these conflicts were of the two internal types, which were not only more numerous (102 out of 120 conflicts) but also more durable (97.7 percent of the total war-years). In the last ten years of his study (1967-76), the proportion of all internal wars increased, and internal tribal wars with foreign intervention were among the conflicts that rapidly increased in number. All internal tribal wars and most internal anti-regime wars also had an ethnic element (ibid., 128-129).

Although some see the formation of ethnic identities and the increased attachment to sub-cultures below the national identity in the course of globalisation as synonymous with the weakening of territorial bonds and the dominant culture, and describe national integration and cohesion as being at risk, considering it one of the threatening factors to national security, there is, in contrast, the idea that ethnic-linguistic diversity in a society indicates the spirit of tolerance of citizens who live together in peace. In sociological culture, identity is defined as the relatively stable perception of an individual of who and what they are in relation

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A set of political and social components in the contemporary world, such as the formation of nation-states, the transformation of nationalism into the dominant paradigm of global politics, the increase in the phenomenon of mass and group migrations, the collapse of ancient supra-ethnic/supra-national political structures like empires, new political demarcations and the formation of newly emerged countries with heterogeneous ethnic populations, and the transition of ethnic identity from a natural and apolitical matter to a determining political variable in the fate of ethnic groups and the increasing self-awareness resulting from it, have caused some predictions based on the decline of ethnicity and ethnic identity in the light of new political discourses and schools of thought and the change in lifestyle and globalised forms of identity in human societies not to occur. In a reverse trend, the dimensions of ethnic issues and ethnic identity in the current world have witnessed an increasing growth.

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Ethnological studies in the Middle East face serious challenges. Some Middle East scholars take the concepts of ethnicity and its related terms as universal and self-evident and apply them to analyse the existing linguistic and religious diversities in the region. Such an attitude, which is in fact a legacy of the behaviourist tradition in social sciences and ahistorical cross-national comparisons, convinces these theorists and researchers that they have no need to provide any historical definition of ethnicity, ethnic group, and ethnic nationalism in their studies. Works related to ethnic studies in the Middle East not only suffer from problems arising from the definition of ethnicity and the contradictory criteria that determine the nature of ethnic groups, but they also ignore the historical characteristics of tribal societies and their relations with the state. The main reason is that in these studies, tribe and ethnic group are usually considered to have the same concepts, and the characteristics of ethnic groups are attributed to tribal societies. Thus, Middle Eastern linguistic and religious groups (which previously had a tribal organisation) are considered distinct ethnic groups that are in constant conflict with the state to become a nation. As Bassam Tibi states, the terms tribe and ethnic group cannot be used as two synonymous words in the context of studies related to the Middle East. Social scientists interested in Middle Eastern issues have used the concept of ethnicity as an analytical tool to

depict social divisions in countries lacking a national (homogeneous) society. In response to the question of why researchers speak of ethnic groups instead of tribes, Tibi emphasizes that European historians usually call social groupings in the pre-modern periods of their history ethnic groups, but they call similar groups in non-European history tribes. Thus, tribalism is an Arab or African social phenomenon, not a European one.

The emergence of the modern centralist state or, as Anthony Smith calls it, the scientific state, made the relations between the state and tribes hostile; this was an event that occurred in the Middle East in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, the resistance of ethno-tribal groups to the goals of the state, contrary to what many social scientists say, was not a struggle for independence, but a struggle for survival. Later, this resistance took on an ethnic form under the influence of cross-border factors.

## Theoretical Approaches

This section provides an overview of the most prominent theoretical approaches and perspectives on identity and ethnicity, as the two central concepts of this research. The aim is to familiarise the reader with the most common theoretical narratives concerning the origin, evolutionary process, and discursive indicators of theories of identity and ethnicity from the viewpoint of various schools of thought and thinkers. This will establish the necessary epistemological and theoretical foundations for an principled and systematic understanding and analysis of the research topic.

### Theoretical Readings on Identity

Given that the discussion of identity in the present research is primarily manifested in the form of social identity (national, ethnic, and religious), the focus and attention of the research will be on the theoretical dimensions of social identity. Under this heading, the approaches and perspectives of paradigms, schools of thought, and theorists in the human sciences—including political scientists, sociologists, and social psychologists—regarding social identity will be introduced and examined.

***• Identity from the Perspectives of Tradition, Modernism, and Postmodernism***

The evolution of human epistemological foundations from the age of tradition to the postmodern period has led to the formation of various forms of ontology, anthropology, and sociology, in which the question of human identity, in both its individual and collective forms, is a central theme. This question, following the changing view of man and society in the traditional, modern, and postmodern cognitive systems, has been given different readings. The traditional view of identity was often static, immutable, and essentialist, in which individuals had no agency and which was considered a kind of historical destiny. Generally, in the pre-modern world and the traditional system of knowledge, a set of ascribed characteristics such as race, religion, tribe, lineage, and ethnic group were the factors that constituted and sustained the identity of individuals belonging to different groups. While giving meaning to their lives, these factors also determined their position in the arena of collective life. Thus, in the world of tradition, identity was a predetermined and ascribed matter that was imposed on the fate of individuals hereditarily by society from birth and, by shaping the social status, role, and function of the individual in society, determined their system of beliefs and values. From the perspective of tradition, identity, with its ritualistic, mythological, racial, and ethnic origins, was considered a coherent, static, and fixed entity that possessed an intrinsic quality and an essentialist nature. These characteristics were among the principles and premises that were challenged in the paradigm shift of human knowledge from tradition to modernity, creating a fundamental rupture in the epistemology of various forms of individual and collective identity.

In modern epistemology, identity was extracted from the hard and rigid shell of the traditional view, and its fixed and essentialist nature acquired a fluid and constructed quality, which is transformed under the influence of the changes and developments of collective and group life and the duality of ‘us’ and ‘others’. From this perspective, identity is no longer a purely ascribed and hereditary matter but has an acquired and elective character.

Within the epistemological context of modernism and postmodernism, identity has been subjected to different readings from the perspective of various schools and discourses, each of which has drawn its own picture of identity according to

its cognitive components.

Stuart Hall has identified six fundamental ruptures from the modern theory of identity. The first rupture, in a Marxist break, takes shape from any concept of individual agency and gives importance to the context and structure of action. The second rupture is rooted in Freud's theory that identities are formed based on the processes of the unconscious. The third rupture is in the form of Saussure's structural linguistics. He seeks the fourth and fifth ruptures in the thought of Michel Foucault, discourse analyses, and feminist attitudes. Finally, Hall's identification of the ruptures of identity culminates in post-structuralist and postmodern political theories (Hall, 2004; Tajik, 2004: 135).

The concept of identity is at the heart of postmodern debates. As Stuart Hall clearly shows, one of the fundamental ruptures in the discussion of identity in the last century is founded on the debates of Foucault and the discourse analysis perspective of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. If we follow the history of modern European philosophy from the perspective of Robert C. Solomon, in the discussions of the postmodernists, we witness a fundamental decline of the 'self', and the anthropocentric doctrine of the modern era, along with important doctrines such as the self-founding rationality of the Enlightenment, are called into question (Solomon, 2000: 244). From the perspective of post-structuralists/postmodernists, political identity is the product of social conditions that are themselves subject to change (Ahmadi, 1998: 70).

Discourse analysis does not accept a subject-centred and essentialist view of identity. From this perspective, political identity is constructed in the social context of discourses. Identities are considered the product of conditions of conflict and social othering, and each discourse creates an identity for the individuals who belong to it. The free, autonomous, and self-willed human of the Enlightenment era gradually faded with the various criticisms raised from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, Marx, Saussure, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and others.

| Approach | Time | Space & Place | Sources of Identity | Type of Identity | Subject | Schools of Thought |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Traditional | Past | • Locational identity<br>• Territory-based<br>• Non- | • Customs, religion, structures<br>• Need for recognition | • Fixed and stable essence, subject to power<br>• Pre-determined | • Personal, primordialist<br>• Ahistorical<br>• Atemporal<br>• Fixed essence | • Folk beliefs<br>• Non-scientific<br>• Religious and transcendental |
| Modern | Present | • Emergence of nation-states<br>• Territories with formal borders | • The subject (knowing agent)<br>• Prudent reason<br>• Reformation of religion<br>• Scientific revolutions | • Structured, subject to social, economic, cultural conditions<br>• Collective (national, etc.) and individual identity | • Interaction and meaning-making of the subject with social structures | • Symbolic interactionism<br>• Structuralism<br>• Marxism |
| Postmodern | Future | • Rupture of place, space | • Micro, local actions and cultures<br>• Product of discourse | • Open identities<br>• Contradictory and particularistic<br>• Fragmented and fluid<br>• Diverse and plural<br>• Subject to discourse | • Various representations<br>• Successive and plural interpretations | • Post-structuralism<br>• Critical theory<br>• Post-Freudian psychoanalysis |

*Table 1-2 A General Framework of the Three Approaches (Traditional, Modern, and Postmodern) to Identity (Rashidi, 2015)*

***• Identity from the Three Paradigms: Structural, Action-Oriented, and Integrative***

In a general classification, theories at large, and theories of identity in par-

ticular, can be examined through three paradigms: the structural paradigm, the action-oriented (pragmatic) paradigm, and the integrative, or structure-agency, paradigm.

In the structural paradigm, the unit of analysis is the structure, and its theories grant greater primacy to structure over the individual. According to this view, although the social system is composed of a collection of individual actors, in the final analysis, these actors have no significant agency and are entirely passive, influenced by structural, economic, social, cultural, and historical conditions. In this perspective, the actor is a creation and product of the social system. Accordingly, identity, as a social fact, is also influenced by social structure and conditions, and the individual plays no effective role in the formation of their own identity. Changes in identity are also subject to environmental changes; as long as no change occurs in the environment, identity remains unchanged (Abdollahi, 1996: 131).

Although classical sociologists, and particularly structuralist sociologists, did not produce a coherent theoretical work specifically on the project of identity, one can extract discussions from within their social thought that can indicate their perspective on this category. Émile Durkheim, after dividing societies into simple, primitive and complex, industrial ones, introduces the emergence of the division of labour, the prevalence of specialisation, and the growth of individual identity. Alongside these phenomena, he speaks of the emergence of a type of organic solidarity in contrast to mechanical solidarity. This type of solidarity, in his view, results in a social unity arising from differentiation. Within this emergent unity, he seeks a form of moral consensus—a consensus that would make the individual loyal to society or the state (Alagheband, 1993: 41). Consequently, in such a society, the level of collective identity is elevated.

Weber, in articulating his views and after comparing traditional with modern societies, points to the growth of instrumental rationality and rational actions based on universal criteria, and the elevation of the level of collective identity in modern societies. Weber considers the unique feature of the modern world to be the increasing growth of rationality, especially instrumental rationality, as a consequence of which identities are also elevated, transforming from traditional and affective states to rational identities (Abdollahi, 1996: 123). In fact, based on the growing importance of the factor of rationality in Weber's thought, in the modern era, unlike the traditional era where the basis of individuals' identi-

ty was based on ascribed characteristics and individuals inherited their identity features from their ancestors, individuals independently seek to define their own identity and continually redefine it throughout their lives. Therefore, today, it is no longer traditional and cultural dispositions that construct an individual's identity, and the process of modernity has provided the ground for the individual's liberation from the narrow circle of traditional institutions and factors of identity formation.

Georg Simmel, in sociology, defines the forms of social relations and social geometry. The geometric coefficient he considers consists of numbers and distances; that is, in the relations between the individual and the collective, he pays attention to social mass or volume and the degree of similarity and comparability of social distance. Due to these factors, the individual is absorbed into the collective but bears the mark of a small collective identity on their forehead. At the same time, these factors make the individual's acceptance in other communities difficult. In an industrial society, however, the cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions are differentiated from each other, and the individual, while dealing with various dimensions, is not under the domination of any particular unit or section, and their personality dimensions also become more distinct and extensive. Thus, the individual enjoys greater independence of action and individuality. This enables them to act on the basis of more general formal and rational criteria. Therefore, with the increase in the volume and greater differentiation of social forms, inter-group solidarity becomes greater, and collective identity also becomes more general (ibid., 125).

In contrast to the structuralists, the action-oriented or interactionist perspective posits the determining role of agency or the social actor. According to this theory, it is individuals who shape the structure, and it is they who bring about changes in the structure. In this view, identity is seen as a phenomenon in the process of being created, which will not be fixed in any time or place and is always in the process of formation and change. The fundamental proposition in symbolic interactionism is that people attach symbolic meanings to objects, behaviours, themselves, and others, and they transmit and develop these meanings through interaction. Individuals behave not on the basis of the non-abstract properties of objects but on the basis of the meanings these objects have for them (ibid., 132). They believe that from the beginning of social life, a human being has a fundamental core or a relative initial identity, which, in the course of socialisation

and interaction with others, creates new identities every day. According to the followers of this school, identity is never complete and is always in the process of becoming. The unit of analysis for action-oriented theorists is the individual, and in their theory, the individual is given greater primacy than society (Turner, 1998: 375-382).

One of the first theories that is considered the basis of theories of social identity is the looking-glass self theory of Charles Horton Cooley, which was also developed by Mead. In this theory, the role of society in shaping the identity of individuals, especially adolescents, is explained. Cooley believed that humans use the gestures and signs of others to see themselves. In his view, the images that individuals have of themselves are similar to the reflection in a mirror. Individuals are exposed to the reactions of others to their behaviour. Therefore, humans, by reading the gestures and signs of others, see themselves as an object (Ashrafi, 1998: 16). Cooley believed that the 'self' is a result of being involved in the social process and is the dialectical outcome of the individual self and the social self. The individual self and the social self are conjoined twins that, in the words of Georges Gurvitch, are co-invoked in the existence of every individual. The self is the identity of the human being, and when a child or a type of human society can acquire this identity, it also achieves self-knowledge. The self is formed when the child distinguishes between itself and its belongings in relation to the outside (Tanhaei, 2008).

According to integrative sociologists, society is an arena where micro and macro elements coexist, the tangible manifestation of which is the legitimisation of pluralism and the acceptance of the existence of various collective identities (Tavassoli, 2019: 16). Anthony Giddens, as an integrative sociologist, has made one of the most well-known and comprehensive attempts to integrate agency and structure, and he wants to explain the theory of identity with reference to the theory of structuration. This means that the actor reflexively evaluates their activities within the social structure, and the influence and change of individuals' social conditions are fundamentally a result of their ability to be reflexive about their own behaviour (Zokaei, 2002: 3).

Human beings try to define themselves according to the customs and norms of the society in which they live. Interaction, in this respect, emphasizes the individual's position in society. In other words, they believe in a type of personal identity that arises from society. Anthony Giddens does not consider personal

identity to be something resulting from the continuity of an individual's social actions, which is conferred upon them, but rather as something that is continuously and daily created and is protected and supported in one's reflexive activities (Giddens, 2019: 1). From Giddens's statement, it can be inferred that a person's identity is not necessarily intrinsic to that person. Identity is not a role assigned to a person by society, but a process of meaning-making that is constructed through daily life and its mechanisms. Identity is never fixed, but is evolving and changing, or 'dynamic' (Al-Taie, 2003: 39). The transformations of the modern world, the international division of labour, the end of the Cold War, the expansion of migrations, and other factors led to attention being paid to group identities, and the study of group and social identities has been one of the concerns of the social sciences in recent times. One can especially point to the concern of postmodernists about the decline of contemporary culture.

In Giddens's view, individuals' identity is shaped based on self-awareness and also by social conditions and situations in time and space. He believes that social practices, their reflexive process, the rationality and self-awareness of the individual, and their reflexivity always place the individual's identity in a process of structuration, especially in the modern era where modern institutions are also involved. In his view, everything in social life, from what global systems encompass to what constitutes an individual's intellectual state, is created in a social practice and manner. Therefore, Giddens believes that an individual's identity is formed in the process of structuration, considering the situations, conditions, and social, economic, as well as self-awareness circumstances (Giddens, 2019: 81).

Manuel Castells considers identity to be related to the social context and grounds, the politics of which must be examined in their historical context. In his view, our world and our lives are shaped by the opposing currents of globalisation and identity. The information technology revolution and the restructuring of capitalism have laid the foundation for a new form of society, the network society. He defines identity as the process of meaning-making based on a cultural attribute or a coherent set of cultural attributes that are given priority over other sources of meaning. For a collective actor, there may be several identities, but this multiplicity is a source of tension and contradiction for self-representation and social action. Meaning is the symbolic identification of social actors with the purpose and goal of the action. He attributes distinct characteristics to the current network and information society, which lead to distinct identities

compared to the pre-modern era. With the increase in interconnection under the influence of globalisation and, on the other hand, the emphasis on local identities (resistance), the process of identity selection for individuals undergoes change and transformation and is reconstructed according to the dialectical interaction of the local and the global. Social actors react based on a feeling of reduced legitimacy of their political system and a feeling of unjust political, economic, or social discrimination, and they derive their identity or distinctiveness from communities that, with a defensive or programmatic characteristic, are in the process of presenting a new identity, and this occurs in two forms: particularistic and universalistic (Castells, 2001).

Social identity theory was specifically proposed for the first time by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues, but the roots of this theory go back to Muzafer Sherif's 'realistic conflict theory,' according to which conflict between groups (in case of interaction) usually occurs over scarce resources and their distribution. According to Sherif's definition, group members, based on the common goals they define for themselves, position themselves against out-group members. He believed that in difficult conditions, individuals are attracted to groups that have an ideological prescription for a better world and an enemy that must be destroyed to realise that ideology (Nazari and Pirani, 2017: 80). Tajfel links social identity with group membership and considers it to consist of three emotional, cognitive, and evaluative elements. From this perspective, social identity is the individual's perception of themselves in relation to their knowledge and awareness of membership in a group, along with the evaluative and emotional dimension associated with that membership (Golmohammadi, 2007: 233). According to this view, social identity can be considered a kind of self-knowledge of the individual in relation to others. This process determines who the individual is and what their position is from a psychological and social point of view (Tajik, 2005: 52).

In Tajfel's view, a community is composed of individuals who relate to each other based on their status and power, and the structure of this relationship is important for the formation of identity. He calls the process by which they separate the in-group from the out-group social categorisation and believes that social identity emerges in one of these processes of internalising social categories (Iman and Keydghan, 2003: 82). Tajfel and his colleagues infer that social categorisation causes group favouritism and a positive evaluation of the in-group, and consequently, a kind of bias, for example, in the distribution of benefits to-

wards the group. This theory emphasizes the fact that categorisation is a dynamic and context-dependent process that is determined in comparative relations with a specific context. In categorisation, the between-group difference is always greater than the within-group difference (Javadi Yeganeh and Azizi, 2008: 196). Categorisation creates inter-group social competition. With the continuation of individuals' positive view of their own group compared to the out-group, perceptual biases and discriminatory behavioural patterns, and consequently, conflict emerge (Cottam et al., 2007: 232-233).

Another thinker who has examined the concept of identity within the paradigm of social definition and under the influence of George Herbert Mead's ideas is Richard Jenkins. In his view, social identity is a characteristic or trait of all human beings as social creatures, and in this respect, it is a source of meaning and experience for people, and it can be affirmed that identity is constructed. According to Jenkins, social identity is a game that is 'played face-to-face.' Social identity is our understanding of who we are and who others are, and on the other hand, others' understanding of themselves and other individuals. Therefore, social identity, like meaning, is not intrinsic and is the product of agreement and disagreement, and it can also be questioned (Jenkins, 2002: 7-8).

What gives a human group its identity is the similarity that makes them different from other groups. Similarity and difference are meanings that individuals create. The culture of human societies objectifies the process of difference and similarity. Identity-forming cultural tools lead to the formation of identity categories among human societies. Language, religion, clothing, aesthetic interests, recreation and entertainment, sports, diet, and so on are cultural items that create meaning for the life of each group and cause in-group similarity and out-group difference. Accordingly, a group or even an individual can construct multiple identities for themselves in various situations and consider themselves to belong to them. 'Social life is basically inconceivable without a way of knowing who others are and without some kind of understanding of who we ourselves are.' Jenkins, in developing his theory of social identity, is influenced by the ideas of figures such as Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman, and the anthropologist Fredrik Barth. Jenkins summarises the formation of his theory as follows: 'If identity is a necessary condition for social life, the reverse is also true. Individual identity embodied in a self separate from the social sphere of others is meaningless. Individual identity emphasizes difference and collective identity emphasizes

similarity. But individual identity and the self are completely constructed in society; that is, in the processes of primary and subsequent socialisation and in the ongoing processes of social interaction within which individuals, throughout their lives, define and redefine themselves and others. The origin of this view is American pragmatism, which has benefited from the influential theories of Charles Horton Cooley and Mead. From their work, a conception of the 'self' emerges as an ongoing and simultaneously enacted combination of self-definition (internal) and the definitions of self offered by others (external). In this way, a model is provided for the fundamental pattern that reveals my entire argument; that is, the internal-external dialectic of identification as the process by which all identities, both individual and collective, are composed' (ibid., 35). Individual identity is unique and specific to each person and refers to a set of characteristics that an individual, by attributing them to themselves, distinguishes themselves from others and thereby acquires a sense of continuity and personal independence (Ahmadi, 2007: 86). But collective identity is realised through identification with the members of a group and encompasses that part of social life in which the individual, with the pronoun 'we,' considers themselves to belong and is committed to it (such as 'we Iranians,' 'we Easterners,' etc.). Humans also have different social identities according to the number of roles and memberships in different 'we's (Razazifar, 2000: 102). Therefore, social identity relates to a person's set of affiliations to the social system, such as gender, age, social class, ethnic group, nation, and so on (Gumperz, 1998: 79). Based on these explanations, it can be said that the sources and tools of social identity are interest in a common culture, a common territory, a common language, and a common history, and the sources and tools of individual identity are a coherent self-concept and self-esteem. Of course, we should not forget that identity, whether individual or collective, is a social concept, because individual characteristics such as naming a child are also formed based on a historical and social background. Since we want to discuss identity in relation to social categories and groups, we have also added the suffix 'social' to this concept.

- ***Theoretical Approaches in the Humanities to Identity***

Identity spans from the most private individual manifestations to the most public collective expressions. It is referred to in the sense of an individual's specific and distinguishing characteristics (Olson, 2002), as well as a collective phenom-

enon that does not materialise until thought and behaviour are executed collectively (Khaniki, 2008: 10). Identity has also been defined as the sense of personal distinction, personal continuity, and personal independence (Golmohammadi, 2001: 14); individual and personal difference in relation to others (Brown, 1996: 78); and the nature of a society's thoughts and perceptions of its own life (Sariolghalam, 2004: 42)—all of which are different dimensions of this complex, multifaceted phenomenon.

In this research, identity is used to mean an awareness of one's individual selfhood and social affiliations. Although this awareness is achieved through the process of individuation, it does not remain merely an internal and individual feeling. It acquires an external and collective manifestation by demonstrating the individual's similarities and differences with other individuals and groups, becoming a foundation for social and political communication and action (Jenkins, 2014: 6-20). In this way, the concept of identity takes on a social dimension that has been extensively addressed in the social sciences. From a social perspective, identity is the recognition of the boundary between the self and the alien, which is primarily made possible through comparisons and the separation of in-groups from out-groups (Brown, 1996: 9).

To understand identity, attention to the diverse scientific approaches in this field is highly beneficial, as each of these approaches reveals a part of the truth of this meaning. Psychology, sociology, political science, history, theology, philosophy, and others have each, from their own perspective, attended to this phenomenon and offered various definitions based on it (Ashena et al., 2010: 158). Accordingly, one can draw on different theories within various paradigms.

Erik Erikson first used the term 'individual identity' in 1968. He sought identity formation in the individual during the adolescent years (Erikson, 1994). Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger, however, approach identity from another perspective. They see identity as encompassing all the roles and orientations an individual has internalised during the process of socialisation. With this approach, identity can be considered the result of the dialectic between subjective reality and objective reality, which reacts to specific social structures and leads to the preservation, change, or reconfiguration of these structures (Luckmann et al., 2016). Anthony Giddens seeks subjective reality in self-awareness and objective reality in social action. Accordingly, he considers identity to be the awareness of the self, the group, and society, which is gradually formed in social

actions (Giddens, 2019: 81).

In cultural studies of identity, most thinkers acknowledge that the cultural identities of different societies cannot merge into one another; rather, different societies have cultural commonalities, but each society has its own specific cultural identity (Ruholamini et al., 2000: 110-111). Émile Durkheim believes that societies based on mechanical solidarity tend to have a specific identity, and each individual in a segment, being completely absorbed into it, acquires an identity similar to that of other members of the segment. But in societies based on organic solidarity, we witness a more general collective identity that encompasses specific and smaller identities. This means that the larger the volume of societies, the more the nature of the collective conscience changes. Because societies are spread over a wider area, the collective conscience inevitably transcends and goes beyond local and regional diversities (Durkheim, 1999: 78).

From the perspective of the conflict school, Marx examines collective identity from the dimension of class and class consciousness. He is of the opinion that the collective identity in any era is a result of the ideas of the ruling class of that era. The ideas of the ruling class in any era are the ruling ideas of the entire society; that is, the class that is the dominant material force in society. Class consciousness is the main factor in the formation of collective identity, and a social class also introduces and identifies itself on that basis—an affair that Marx calls class consciousness, meaning the awareness of classes of their identity, desires, and interests. As long as a social class has not achieved class consciousness, it cannot be saved from alienation and attain its collective identity. The class consciousness of the proletariat class is its salvation from false ideology and the discovery of its genuine collective identity. With the identity formation of this class, society also achieves its own identity. Through this identity, an authentic society is one in which the social governance of resources and means of production, the just distribution of wealth, power, and status, etc., are realised. Thus, the prerequisites for the elimination of inequalities and the ideologies that justify inequality—which is the collective identity of capitalism—are removed, and general social relations are substituted, and the highest level of general collective identity (human identity and species-identity) is realised (Abazari and Chavoshian, 2002: 6).

According to the thinkers of the social interaction school, identity, as a phenomenon whose scope ranges from the most private individual manifestations

to the most public sphere of the social sciences, is the result of the dialectic of the self and the other, which is located in a back-and-forth movement within a spectrum of the semantic network of the mind and social and cultural structures. On this basis, it achieves a proportion between the two ends of the spectrum; a proportion that is not fixed and may change at any moment, a change that stems not only from the self (the semantic network) but also from the other (the social structure). The link between culture and identity is also influenced by this same dialectical relationship, to the extent that most experts, due to the prominent role of culture in the relationship between the self and the other, attribute an independent status to culture in identity and also consider identity to be a cultural phenomenon. In this sense, cultural identity gains increasing importance compared to other levels of identity (Ashena et al., 2010: 158).

Symbolic interactionists believe that from the beginning of social life, a human being has a fundamental core or a relative initial identity, which, in the course of socialisation and interaction with others, creates new identities every day. According to the followers of this school, identity is never complete and is always in the process of being created. The unit of analysis for interactionists is the individual, and in their theory, the individual is given greater primacy than society (Turner, 1998: 375-382).

In another type of solidarity of secondary groups, where the membership of individuals is voluntary and realised, the emotional bond between the members of these groups is more extensive, and interactions go beyond limited and specific ethnic and tribal goals. The sense of belonging and attachment of individuals extends beyond ethnic and national borders and limitations and eventually expands to the global community. In situations where social identity is not satisfactory, individuals will try to either leave their current group and join another group that is in a more positive situation, or to improve the situation of their own group (Chalabi, 1996: 226). In fact, the 'self' reacts to the environment, and in one situation, nationality may be of primary importance, but in another situation, ethnicity or race may be the focus. Therefore, the concept of the 'ego' is formed from these social identities and always changes according to the conditions and situations (Tajfel, 1978).

Integrative sociologists consider society to be an arena where micro and macro elements coexist, the tangible manifestation of which is the legitimisation of pluralism and the acceptance of the existence of various collective identities

(Tavassoli, 2019: 16). In fact, in this view, different types and levels of collective identities, whether local, national, or global, are presented in parallel, so that the realisation of a general global collective identity can be considered concomitant with the preservation of differences and specific collective identities. Accordingly, we must always observe, revise, and review our own identity based on time, place, and space and under different conditions. In other words, in the recent era, the context of identity formation is transformed and becomes a reflexive project; in such a way that as tradition loses its influence and daily life is reconstructed according to the dialectical interaction of the local and the global, individuals are forced to negotiate the choice of their way of life from among various options.

Ralf Dahrendorf, who considers the concept of social man as the meeting point of the individual and society, states that social man is the carrier of pre-formed social roles (Dahrendorf, 2002: 35). By proposing the 'extraterritorial man' (the transcendent, free, independent man, beyond geographical, historical, and cultural borders) against the 'territorial man' (the man belonging to a specific territory with a specific history, society, and culture), he wants to make way for the flourishing of the extraterritorial man through the rational understanding of the territorial man via the social man. Dahrendorf believes that the territorial man has at least nine characteristics: 1. occupation; 2. nationality; 3. citizenship; 4. class; 5. geographical characteristic; 6. sexual characteristic; 7. conscious characteristic; 8. unconscious characteristic; 9. individual or personal characteristic. Accordingly, the territorial man, who is limited and confined to specific social, cultural, political, and geographical characteristics, is a man with a particularistic and specific identity, and ultimately, does not go beyond the geographical and political borders of a country, and his identity is limited and confined to the existing social structure. But in contrast, the extraterritorial man, with a spirit of freedom and the characteristic of empty spaces for fantasy, can transcend the ruling structures and actively seek a more general identity, so that the ability to tend towards the most general type of identity (philanthropy) is crystallised in him. According to this view, man moves from the particularistic identity of the territorial man towards the universalistic identity of the extraterritorial man. He sees this process, on the whole, in the direction of the expansion of freedom, justice, and peace.

The discussion of political identity is another debate that is a product of the modern world. The prominent characteristic of political identity in the modern

world is the emphasis on pluralism, individualism, and human self-founding rationality. In such a context, with the acceptance of political pluralism, the individual, based on their natural rights, freely and relying on their individualistic will and mentality, engages in political activity, and no pre-determined matter influences their identity.

Castells considers 'identity' to be the source and organiser of meaning. In his view, the construction of all identities is not the main issue; rather, the main issue is how, from what, by whom, and for what purpose this construction takes place. In his view, identity is always constructed in the context of power relations and has three distinct types: 'legitimising,' 'resistance,' and 'project.' Legitimising identities are created by the dominant institutions of society to expand their dominance and rationalise it. It is logical that such an identity can lead to the formation of a 'civil society.' 'Resistance identities' are created by actors who are in opposition to the dominant institutions of society and do not participate in the institutions of dominance and power relations. Their created identities serve as strongholds of resistance and survival against domination. These identities are considered worthless and invalid by the dominant power, although they may promote programmes or, in the course of history and the change of discourse, be agreed upon by the institution of power. The consequence of these identities is the creation of ethnic communities and class divisions. Castells considers ethno-nationalism and fundamentalism to be a form of this type of identity. In 'project identities,' social actors, using any available cultural materials, create a new identity that redefines their position in society and thus seek to transform the social structure. The consequence of this type of identity is the creation of a subject (Castells, 2006: 22-27).

### • *The Politics of Identity*

One of the turning points in the complex and multidimensional relationship between politics and identity in the modern era is the issue of the 'politics of identity.' 'The politics of identity' is a challenging concept with a very broad definitional scope, which, depending on the research approach and the societies and movements under study, can manifest in various and different definitions. On the one hand, the politics of identity is defined as the purposeful action and effort of marginalised and protesting identity groups against the ruling and official reading, in order to bring about a change in the institution of politics accord-

ing to their own desires and interests. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, in this approach, the politics of identity refers to a wide range of political actions and theorising based on the common experiences of injustice among specific groups. The goal of the formation of the politics of identity is often to guarantee political freedoms for specific individuals and communities who have been marginalised. In this approach, the politics of identity starts from the analysis of oppressive behaviour and its scope often includes political movements (Heyes, 2020). On the other hand, and in a completely opposite reading, 'the politics of identity' is a title for the official positions and performance of political power and the ruling state regarding the issues of collective identity in the society under its rule and management, which is implemented through the hardware and software capabilities of the power apparatus. In this approach, the politics of identity is a field of knowledge in which, in different societies, a specific view (ethnic, cultural, gender) is always imposed as the official, natural, comprehensive, and atemporal reading and view on other views and options, and it prevents the recognition of different views and hinders the change of attitudes and approaches to various social and political issues. Accordingly, the politics of identity can be considered an effort by those in power to model and normalise a specific view of a specific political unit (ethnic group, country, or organisation). This specific view is institutionalised through various institutions, especially the institution of education, such as textbooks and children's television programmes (Amirzadeh and Behestani, 2014: 77-78).

The politics of identity can be divided into two categories: 'bottom-up' and 'top-down.' The first category refers to the process through which people challenge, overthrow, or negotiate the culture, identity, and competitive structure of power and wealth that have been imposed on their social life from above. The second category, on the other hand, mainly refers to the processes by which social, political, and economic entities from above try to shape collective identities based on ethnicity, race, language, and place into relatively fixed and naturalised frameworks in order to understand the activities and the main body of politics (Hill & Wilson, 2003). The first level is more about organising around a specific experience or the perspective of a specific group that has an identity view and seeks recognition and dignity (Hekman, 1999; Fukuyama, 2018; Karimi, 2007). Therefore, the politics of identity at this level is a strategic framework for resistance, a tool for opposing the pressures demanding amalgamation and assimila-

tion, which insists on distinct social and cultural differences (Dunn, 2006: 42). The second level of the politics of identity, on the other hand, includes a type of formal, structural, and public policy that is implemented by governments, parties, and participatory institutions in the political arenas of cities, regions, and states (Hill & Wilson, 2003: 2). In democratic societies, identity politics is usually agreed upon by the government and society, but in non-democratic societies, it is usually the elites who determine its type and manner (Ghahramanpour, 2006: 48).

In this research, the meaning of the politics of identity mainly refers to the 'top-down' type of politics, which is implemented in the form of a set of programmes and policies in the field of collective identity with specific objectives by the central government and the ruling institution.

## Theoretical Readings on Ethnicity

The emergence and manifestation of various forms of issues and demands arising from the subject of ethnicity in the context of the expanding relations and connections of the modern era led to the initial theoretical readings that believed in the dissolution and assimilation of ethnic identity gradually giving way to the necessity of scientific and comprehensive attention and reflection on the diverse forms of emerging ethnic issues and problems. Therefore, ethnic issues, due to the necessities of problem identification and multidimensional explanation from sociological, political, economic, nationalist, value-cultural, identity-seeking, media, and other perspectives, became the subject of numerous theoretical and field studies and research from the perspective of various sciences, schools of thought, and approaches in the human and social sciences. The findings of these studies today present a wide range of theoretical formulations in the literature of ethnology in the form of theories of ethnicity, which are effective explanatory tools for understanding, comprehending, and studying newly emerged ethnic issues. The most important theories of ethnicity will be reviewed below.

### • *Prominent Theoretical Approaches to Ethnicity*

The inquiry into the origin and nature of ethnicity and nationality and the manner of the formation of ethnic and national identity in the theoretical context and intellectual perspective of different schools of thought has led to various answers

to this central question, which are mainly divided into three main approaches: 'primordialism,' 'instrumentalism,' and 'constructivism.' These macro-approaches are a basis for presenting numerous more micro and specific political, economic, social, and cultural theories about ethnicity and its origin and nature.

*Primordialism*

The first approach, which is referred to as primordialism or perennialism, considers national identity to be a natural matter based on deep-rooted elements such as race, language, religion, and other cultural characteristics. This approach was initially presented by Edward Shils and was expanded by Clifford Geertz in the 1950s. Later, researchers like van den Berghe, Masters, and Walker Connor contributed to the emergence of new perspectives in this approach. Primordialism, among experts in ethnicity studies, is mostly associated with the name of Anthony Smith, who argues that nations have ethnic cores and ethnicities are divided into several common elements (Barrington, 2006: 13). Smith, in this regard, imagines a fixed cultural framework that ethnic actors have consolidated and a continuous meaning-making has been possible throughout generations. In this approach, ethnic identity is essentially a type of identification with the group of origin, which is like an attachment to a family. Naturally, the feeling of ethnic belonging arises after an individual is born into an ethnic group. Consequently, ethnic identity is considered a 'primordial' identity that is formed in an individual due to birth among an ethnic group. In this view, the important point is that ethnic identity emphasizes blood ties or kinship. In this approach, the natural and innate nature of ethnic identity is emphasized to such an extent that a person's ethnic identity is basically fixed at birth and is not changeable. Primordialists consider the sense of belonging to an ethnic group to be an emotion rooted in history and the past, because it is only the family ties of the group members that create such a feeling in them. An individual's ethnicity is determined based on the ethnicity of their parents. For this reason, it should be considered an ascribed attribute, like gender or age. Of course, primordialists also have disagreements on this matter. For example, in contrast to those who completely insist on the unchangeability of ethnic identity, some more flexible primordialists do not consider the change of individuals' ethnic identities impossible under certain conditions. For example, an individual in childhood has the linguistic and cultural ability to fully adapt to another ethnic culture and acquire a new ethnic identity.

But the most flexible primordialists still believe that the realistic opportunities for an individual to change their ethnic identity are very few, and according to this belief, the most important factor that distinguishes primordialists from other theorists of ethnicity and nationalism is the ascriptive nature of ethnic identity (Sandra, 2003: 20-21).

Some cultural primordialists find language among all cultural attributes to be a special factor in creating a sense of ethnic belonging. In their view, ethnic identity is fundamentally formed based on language as the main identifier of ethnic origin. An ethnic group cannot be found that lacks a common language, while commonality in other cultural attributes such as religion or customs does not necessarily exist everywhere. On the other hand, the geographical concentration of speakers of the same language is usually greater than the concentration of people of the same religion or race in a territory. Therefore, language plays a special role in the primordial sense of belonging that exists among the members of an ethnic group (Seyed-Emami, 2008).

In historical primordialism, the ancient ties among the members of an ethnic group stem more from a common history and myth of a motherland throughout history than from blood ties or cultural heritage. In principle, this explanation means that the elements defining ethnic identity are not biological but psychological and emotional. David Miller, one of the most famous historical primordialists, considers one of the main dimensions of the existence of an ethnic group or a nation to be an identity that 'embodies historical continuity,' even if some memories of the past are lost in the mists of time. In Smith's conception of ethnic communities and nations, the existence of shared memories, myths, and history is also a condition for the existence of national or ethnic identities (Smith, 1986: 24-25), and in Walker Connor's conception, the most important pillar of the definition of a nation, as well as an ethnic group, is the existence of a 'myth of common ancestors' among them, which has been formed throughout history (Connor, 2000: 246).

In summary of the primordialist view, the powerful sense of belonging to an ethnic group is already formed in the minds of the group members, and the belief in common ancestry, language, culture, religion, and even physical identifiers related to race are the organising principles of an individual's grouping, alongside the historical and social experiences of the group. Therefore, it is completely natural for the members of an ethnic group, based on the innate and predetermined

characteristics of their group, to have a strong sense of belonging to the ethnic group in the form of ethnic nationalism.

*Instrumentalism*

The second theoretical approach to understanding the formation of ethnic and national identity is instrumentalism. According to this approach, ethnic and national identity are seen as tools and are changed by elites. According to the instrumentalist view, ethnicity is a resource used by elites to define group identity, regulate group membership and boundaries, and make claims and extract resources (Brown & Langer, 2010: 413). The classification of this view, based on the degree of agency in objectifying the mechanism of the ethnic structure, considers the role of the elite group to be leading, and the role of the general public is mostly to perform actions based on the meanings that those elites have constructed and elaborated from the actions and relations related to ethnicity. Anthony Smith, in his 1988 article 'The Myth of the Modern Nation and the Myths of Nations,' stated that the myth of nations, especially since the Second World War, has attracted the attention of researchers, particularly in the field of social sciences, and these new myths were presented under the title of instrumentalism, which considered cultural characteristics and differences as a subject for manipulation by elites and interest groups (Smith, 1998: 2). Benedict Anderson, with the publication of his influential book Imagined Communities (1983), and Eric J. Hobsbawm, with his attention to the issue of 'The Invention of Tradition,' are among the proponents of this view.

The instrumentalist approach is seen among a spectrum composed of elitist theorists on the one hand and rational choice theorists on the other. In the view of these experts, ethnicity is considered a social, political, and cultural reservoir from which elements can be drawn and used at the appropriate time to mobilise group sentiments. The extensive طرح of ethnic issues and the highlighting of ethnic identities usually occur when ethnic elites want to use this resource to advance certain political demands. Therefore, ethnicity is essentially a tool for the social and political mobilisation of the members of a specific group to achieve specific political demands.

In the instrumentalist approach, the emphasis is on the goals pursued by ethnic groups or, rather, by their leaders and elites, and the issue of the emergence of ethnic groups or their origin is not the focus of attention. Consequently, ethnic identity is not an attribute that an individual acquires from birth and remains the

same over time. In some situations, due to political and instrumental necessities, ethnicity becomes important, and in other situations, there may be no emphasis on it at all (Seyed-Emami, 2008).

From the instrumentalist perspective, ethnicity is not a politically neutral and fruitless grouping, and it is used in the power struggle and in the efforts of groups to advance their interests. In this view, individual or group interests are always one of the important motivations in arousing ethnic sentiments or identifying with ethnic identity. Ethnic leaders, by highlighting ethnic differences and the deprivations resulting from the domination or competition of the group with other groups, fuel ethnic sentiments and try to achieve their political goals by exploiting the resulting social force. The masses also, by identifying with their own ethnic group, share in the collective power of the group and the interests they hope to gain in the course of the struggle. Of course, in the meantime, the leaders of the group are usually in a better position to define and pursue their interests. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the instrumentalist view, great emphasis is placed on the leadership of ethnic groups and their role in mobilising and organising ethnic identities. Ethnicity has always been a very good vehicle for the political mobilisation of people and the advancement of specific political goals, for the group or the elites or both. For most people, ethnicity, as an in-group that, in any case, has various cultural and linguistic differences with other groups, is easily understandable and recognisable and can be a powerful tool in arousing people to political action (Smith, 2004; Ahmadi, 1999).

The followers of the instrumentalist approach to ethnicity can be divided into two groups:

1. Some consider identification with ethnicity merely a manifestation of more fundamental political or economic conflicts.

2. Others consider ethnicity a non-fundamental type of identity among the members of a group that is aroused by elites with a political or personal agenda. Any use of nationalism by the state falls into the second category.

In any case, the issue of ethnic identity is not fully explained by the instrumentalist approach. For example, instrumentalists fail to explain the existence of widespread ethnic attachments in cases where broad political goals are not seen among ethnic elites or the members of the group themselves. In addition, they do not provide a plausible explanation for why ethnic sentiments and affiliations persist over time. The political goals and agendas of elites or individuals change

over time in response to changing economic and political conditions, but ethnic affiliations usually remain stable over time (Sandra, 2003: 51-52).

Constructivism

The third theoretical approach is constructivism, which is in opposition to primordialism. Since the early 1980s, the constructivist perspective has become the most influential approach in the study of ethnicities. In contrast to primordialism, constructivism emphasizes the processes through which ethnic groups emerge. As Robert Bales argues, the constructivist approach to ethnicity incorporates elements of both primordialist and instrumentalist approaches (Brown & Langer, 2010: 413). The constructivist approach argues that national identity, like the identity of other groups, including those that primordialists count as signs of national identity, is a social construct.

John Comaroff enumerates several paths in constructivism (cultural, political, etc.), but argues that they are all formed based on an idea similar to the idea that social identities are the product of human agency (Barrington, 2006: 13). The constructivist approach agrees on two basic propositions: first, individuals have multiple ethnic identities; second, identity, with what individuals identify differently, depends on some specific variables. Changes in the value of such causal variables may lead to changes in individuals' identification. Therefore, the constructivist approach advocates that individuals have multiple ethnic identities and that ethnic groups are constructed and reconstructed simultaneously with the change of individuals' identities (Bayar, 2009: 1642-1643).

This mode of evaluation, whose intellectual lineage may go back to the pioneering works of Ernest Renan on the origin of the nation and nationalism, includes two basic presuppositions: first, that nations distort their history, and second, that this historical distortion is a necessary prerequisite for nationalist ideology. The nation is certainly not an ancient subjective thing but a modern political construct (Vali et al., 2019: 93). In this view, unlike the primordialists who see ethnicity and its potential to turn into nationalism as a predetermined essence or nature, constructivists consider nationalism or ethnic nationalism to be a constructed matter in the process of meaning exchange among members. The history of nationalism shows that this phenomenon is modern and belongs to recent centuries and, as a social construct that served political and ideological goals, was created by elites and other spokesmen of the 'nation.' In the literature of nationalism, the phenomenon of 'nation-building' has often been addressed.

For example, Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an 'imagined community' that, with the help of some technologies, including the printing industry, has been 'imagined' intersubjectively among people who previously considered themselves to belong to separate ethnic, local, and religious communities. In the process of the construction of the nation, various myths and legends, especially legends about the origin of the nation (ethnic group), are used (Seyed-Emami, 2008). Thus, the meaning-making of ethnic actions and ethno-centric affiliations takes place with the help of imagination, and cultural continuity based on nationalism is consolidated.

Parallel to the growth of the constructivist view in the social sciences, analysts of ethnic issues in recent decades have increasingly used the insights of this view in explaining ethnicity and ethnic movements. In the constructivist view, the nature of ethnic identities is assumed to be fluid and unfixed from the outset. This approach is in some ways similar to the instrumentalist approach, as it acknowledges the role of political and economic factors in the emergence of ethnicity. However, constructivism does not solely emphasize instrumental motives in the construction of ethnicity and considers the relations and interactions among group members as the main factor in the resolution and construction of ethnic identities. Language, religion, customs, and other cultural and even physical identifiers of a group provide a set of resources or reserves for the group members to construct an ethnic or national identity for themselves based on the specific conditions they are in. People, from among the set of identity components available to them, sometimes emphasize their ethnic identities, and this, of course, also depends on specific social situations with political and economic conditions (ibid.).

Social constructivism, unlike primordialism, does not consider ethnicity to be essential but to be constructed in the course of social interaction among individuals, and unlike instrumentalism, it does not place a special emphasis on political and economic goals or motives in the formation of ethnic identity. Despite the fact that there are not unlimited options for identity-making, the very existence of various options from among different identity components for constructing a specific identity cannot be denied. In fact, in the age of globalisation and extensive communication among people with various cultural backgrounds, the range of identity choices for individuals has become very large. The entire history of nation-building in Europe and other parts of the world is a testament to this claim

of how, with the help of the press, a centralized and uniform educational system, and other tools, a single language was promoted as the 'national language' and gradually a national identity was created among very different groups who spoke different dialects and had separate customs. In the course of the collapse of some countries in recent decades, we also witnessed the formation of new nations that had never before imagined themselves as a nation. For example, after the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina—who have a Serbian ethnic origin and speak the Serbian language—made religious difference a factor for constructing a new national identity. This effort intensified especially after the Orthodox Serbs, by drawing a boundary between themselves and the Muslims, considered the latter group to be outcasts and worthy of genocide.

One of the useful takeaways from the constructivist approach is that despite the deep-rooted linguistic and cultural differences among ethnic groups, today the mobilisation of ethnic groups takes place under current political and economic conditions and is influenced by them, and such conditions, even without the incitement of leaders or group activists, may lead to the formation of a new group. But in the end, it must be said, as Abbas Vali (2019: 97) has acknowledged, constructivist approaches to national identity are equally historicist, because the conceptualisation of national identity reduces the discourse to the historical conditions of its formation. This historicism, which determines the nationalist discourse, is inseparable from its empirical epistemology, and both together are the two pillars of constructivist essentialism. This approach cannot distinguish between nationalism as a discourse of origin and nationalism as a discourse of identity.

### • *Classical Theories*

As can be inferred from a review of the history of social thought, the study of ethnicity and ethnic relations does not have a place among classical thinkers. A reflection on classical theories makes it clear that addressing the category of ethnicity among the classics of sociology has been very rare, and if it exists, it has been referred to in a scattered and incoherent manner. Although the four classical sociologists, Marx, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel, did not make ethnic relations the focus of their theoretical reflection, they have presented mostly consistent and uniform views on this matter. It should not be forgotten that these few classical theories were sufficient for contemporary thinkers to

expand and develop the theories of classical sociology, and if it were otherwise, the theories of ethnicity among neo-Marxists and neo-Weberians would be easily refuted.

However, the newness of a term does not necessarily mean its novelty. Issues such as cultural and group differences and some social activities that are formed on the basis of such differences are certainly not new issues. Therefore, classical thinkers have thought about it under titles such as national issues, cultural distinctions, nationality, race, and other titles. From another perspective, the views of classical sociologists are accompanied by a view arising from the issues and characteristics of nineteenth-century European societies. Although there is no specific theoretical focus on the issue of ethnicity in the thought of the classics, there are references to this issue from them. Marx finds it in the development of capitalism and class struggle. Durkheim's explanation can be seen in the idea of the transition from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. Simmel links it to the nature of society and social differentiation, and Weber considers political mobilisation in this regard. In the following, a brief examination of these ideas is presented.

Marx never presented a specific theory about ethnic relations, but with focus and precision in some of his texts, it can be observed that he has to some extent contributed to the possibility of developing a theory of ethnicity. The core of this issue can be found in the book On the Jewish Question. He and Engels, by adapting Hegel's theory of 'historical and non-historical societies,' laid the foundation for a part of the classical theory of ethnicity regarding Irish immigrants in England and the spread of specific ethnic groups throughout the world. Ultimately, three basic principles can be considered the basis of Marx's theory of ethnicity:

1. The economic base has priority over cultural relations and, consequently, ethnic relations.
2. Ethnic issues are an obstacle to the overall progress of the human world.
3. Historical class consciousness has precedence over ethnic identity.

Durkheim, in his theory of ethnicity, has mainly focused on three interconnected issues, which are:

a) The decline or diminishing importance of ethnicity with the emergence of modernity.

b) The nature of group (ethnic) solidarity.

c) The conception of an ethnic group as a form of moral community (Malese-

vic, 2004).

According to Durkheim, in the transition from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity, a kind of anomie arises because the old forms of social morality have begun to decline. Poggi (2000) expresses the content of this argument as follows: anomie is the result of the inability of individuals to determine acceptable sanctions against deviant individual behaviours. Individuals imagine that nothing matters; such a perception leads to the destruction of the previous normative frameworks that could previously constrain individual behaviours, and thus, the cohesion of society becomes subject to meaninglessness (Fenton, 2005: 153). According to Durkheim, parallel to the growth of cities and their reception of migrants from villages and small towns, the natural decline of narrow-range solidarities, including ethnic solidarities, begins. Therefore, it is not surprising that he considered the ethnic and racial origin and source as declining realities of the new social order (ibid., 98).

From Max Weber's point of view, an ethnic group is one of the most troublesome concepts because it is filled with emotions. The fundamental principle of Weber's ethnic theory can be stated as follows: ethnicity as a form of social status. Although ethnicity is explained in terms of kinship relations, since it is an individual identity, it is different from kinship. Mere membership can help form a group, but an ethnic group, once it enters into social action, is transformed into a type of status group. In Weber's view, ethnicity, like all status groups, is amphibious, and social imagination and pride are decisive for its creation. Ethnicity is formed as a result of upbringing, education, and other factors of socialisation (Malšević, 2011: 48).

Ethnicity is manifested in a particular lifestyle and can successfully claim the existence of a kind of 'special social respect' and a 'special status.' Membership in high-status ethnic groups gives individuals a sense of pride and prejudice, which is manifested in the social prestige and honour of belonging to ethnic groups by individuals. A status group is externally manifested through what Weber calls 'ethnic honours.' Ethnic honours are the belief in the superiority of one's own customs and adherence to them. Weber has defined 'a sense of pride' as the models and conventional social demands that ethnic groups raise to determine the behaviour and conduct of their members. In general, although ethnic groups always function as status groups, not all ethnic groups, in all periods and circumstances, and among all members of an ethnic group, are status groups (Weber,

1968: 391).

According to Simmel, ethnic groups that live in physical proximity to each other carry with them signs of collective nervousness, sensitivity, anomie, and feelings of inferiority or superiority, which exist individually in each of the members of these communities. There are three main themes in Simmel's theory of ethnic relations: ethnicity as a form of the process of co-behaviour, the nature of social interaction, and the decline and fading of ethnicity due to social differentiation (Malšević, 2011: 43). The main theory of Simmel's ethnicity is the concept of social differentiation. He begins his work with the assumption that there are different degrees of social differentiation in traditional and modern societies. In principle, this view is based on an evolutionist perspective. While in traditional society, the principle of race and ethnicity is in favour of the formation of similarity and resemblance between individuals, from this perspective, ethnic communities have a strong mechanical connection and a high degree of solidarity. Modern societies display a greater degree of functional differentiation, while the characteristic of modern societies is weak group bonding and scattered individualities. Therefore, the affiliations and dependencies of an ethnic group are considered a phenomenon that declines due to social differentiation and the increasing complexity of society. The feeling and theme of individuality increases in step with the enlargement of the group (ibid., 44-47).

• ***Neo-Marxist Theory***

After the nineteenth century, one of the main goals of Marxist theory was to provide a suitable answer to the question of why ethnicity and race in the contemporary world, contrary to the predictions of classical Marxism, have become much stronger sources for group solidarity compared to class. The answer to this question has been presented in two forms and has led to the development of two completely different trends of neo-Marxism; one of these trends placed its emphasis on the political economy of the inequality of ethnic groups, and the other dealt with the relations between ideology, cultural difference, and class cleavages. These two research traditions also differ in terms of their methods and analytical goals; while the political economy perspective tries to find a scientific explanation for social exclusion and ethnic inequality, the cultural perspective is more interested in examining the strategies and tactics of class and ethnic struggle. Neo-Marxist sociology sees its task as expanding the analyses presented in

classical Marxism in a way that, by critically using the main ideas of the classics, takes steps beyond them, and Marxist theories of ethnic relations overcome classical Marxism. Therefore, by accepting a certain amount of it, they try to overcome the class reductionism of culture in general and ethnic relations in particular, and to remove autonomy as a factor of classical Marxism in predicting the power of ethnic affiliations. They also try to look for other sources for ethnic group hostility in the contemporary world in this apparent inability. But both traditions of Marxist analysis are heavily indebted to the arguments and analyses originally presented by Marx and his immediate followers. The classics, in their studies, gave priority to capitalism and the analysis of the economic factors of social structure and social action.

Neo-Marxism emerged as an attempt to overcome the shortcomings of the classical Marxist approach in explaining ethnicity. Marx's rigid position on the primacy of the economic base over the ethnic superstructure and the historical victory of class over ethnicity was softened with the spread of new concepts and models such as 'internal colonialism,' 'split labour market,' 'the political economy of migrant workers,' or 'the relative and absolute independence of ethnicity from class.' Neo-Marxism has accepted the social realities of the contemporary world and acknowledges that ethnicity, contrary to the initial assumption of Marxists, is a very prominent and formidable phenomenon. Contemporary neo-Marxist research has been very successful when it empirically reveals the patterns of ethnic inequality based on class and their relationship with the discriminatory policies of the state in the capitalist system, and when it points to cases where the functions of the state as a sphere for the reproduction of structured ethnic relations (such as the state of South Africa and its role in the institutionalisation of the apartheid system). However, neo-Marxism still shares the view of classical Marxists that there is no problem in ethnic conflicts or racism that can be imagined separately from the structural features of capitalist society (Solomos, 1986: 107). Although ethnic relations are considered historically specific and thus relatively independent, they are still considered to require an explanation that can only be obtained through historical analysis with a focus on how capitalism and class inequalities emerged and spread. Neo-Marxism, despite refining its theoretical and research tools, is deeply economistic and class-centred and is therefore unable to create a multiple, balanced, and comprehensive theory to explain ethnic relations.

• ***Modernisation Theory***

One of the most controversial theories in the field of social sciences is 'modernisation theory,' influenced by the views of Karl Deutsch. Modernisation, meaning a combination of processes including industrialisation, urbanisation, an increase in communication and transportation networks, and the like, has been discussed by most social scientists. According to modernisation theory, an increase in the elements of modernity leads to a decrease in ethnic conflicts and a weakening of individuals' ethnic tendencies. Therefore, 'when the indicators of modernity in a country have grown, violent transformations have decreased, and man consciously seeks his identity in elements beyond his ethnic group, tribe, and city' (Navah et al., 2007: 89). This theory is based on the fundamental proposition that ethnicity and ethnic identity are pre-modern phenomena and will naturally be assimilated sooner or later in the process of modernisation and development. As from the mid-nineteenth century, social scientists believed that with the progress and industrialisation of societies, economic position and interests would replace ethnicity and other traditional forms of identity as new identities. Ethnicity was considered a composite of loyalties left over from the early stage of social development, which must necessarily give way to economic rationality as the main driving force of human behaviour (Birch, 1978: 325). Recently, writers such as Parsons, Smelser, Lipset, Rokkan, Butler, and Stokes have claimed that the expansion of the scope of the market focus will lead to the disappearance of ethnic affiliations, because ethnic identities are not directly compatible with sales and exchange centres and therefore must lose their social meaning (Laver, 1981: 5-24). The widespread spatial mobility of labour, capital, goods, and services should similarly discourage ethnic groups from geographical concentration and facilitate their absorption into a more general social order (Hechter & Levi, 1979: 266).

The persistence of the ethnic phenomenon and the issues arising from ethnicity in modern societies, both in advanced Western and Third World societies, and the formation of new forms of identity-seeking, demand-making, and tension creation based on ethnic identity, are a serious challenge for modernisation theories regarding ethnicity, because with the expansion of modernisation, ethnicity was not only not assimilated into new forms of identity but also changed along with the developments of the modern world. This shortcoming in explanation

led to the basic principles of modernisation theory regarding ethnicity being seriously criticised and views being presented to correct it. Rogowski and Wasserspring have claimed that, contrary to modernisation theory, increased interaction does not lead to an increase in the 'perceptual problem' of determining people's position by a specific criterion; in fact, modernisation may affect everything except ascriptive criteria. Consequently, among the problems related to perceptual issues that are often concomitant with the process of transition from tradition to modernism, race and ethnicity, as the determining force of people's behaviour, become more important because they are identity-giving mechanisms that contain low-cost information. The increasing complexity of modern societies and the accompanying problems of distinguishing potential allies from potential rivals in the competitions that shape modern societies, renew the tendency towards ethnic solidarity, because distinguishing an ally from a rival based on ethnicity is easier than distinguishing based on criteria such as profession, class, political preferences, or other non-ascriptive criteria, with less clarity (and therefore higher cost) (Rogowski & Wasserspring, 1971: 9-10).

- ***Middle-Range Theory***

Middle-range theory represents the point of intersection between the universal conceptual schemes of grand theory, particularly the theoretical frameworks of Talcott Parsons, and the empirical decisions of actual research. Middle-range theory offers more abstract generalisations concerning real-world issues. In Merton's view, only after an accumulation of middle-range theories can one anticipate the emergence of sociology's Einstein. This strategy led to the production of 'theories of the middle range' (Jalaeipour et al., 2009: 104).

Merton holds that society contains numerous subcultures and subgroups that—contrary to the beliefs of Parsons and other renewalists and holists—have not been able to integrate and adapt within the social system, and thus have each, in a way, remained separate from it. Since the study of these groups is conducted relative to their harmony and compatibility with the means and goals of the social system and the macro-structure of society, they cannot be placed within the domain of the sociology of the individual. However, due to this very deviation from the means and goals of the macro-structure, they also do not fit within the domain of macro-level analysis. Accordingly, Merton, in his sociology, focuses on a domain situated between the micro and macro realms—an attention that

constitutes his point of departure from the traditional structural-functionalist school (Tanhaei, 2012: 773).

Although Merton did not specifically address the topic of ethnicity and ethnic identity within his theoretical framework, his approach paved the way for thinkers who explored the issue of ethnicity at a middle-range or integrative level (integrating micro and macro). Among the thinkers in this field are Giddens and Bourdieu. According to Giddens's theory, the nation-state is a construct of modernity, and he considers its continuity and survival to be dependent on the creation of cohesion and integration through a homogeneous identity. In Giddens's view, ethnicities that remain outside the sphere of national identity constantly threaten the nation-state. This theory can be considered middle-range because, according to it, ethnic groups, as autonomous and active subjects, react against the macro-structure of the nation-state and engage in social action.

Bourdieu is one of the theorists who, in his works, has endeavoured to integrate theory with practice. His book Distinction operationalises his theories in practice using both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', which is also known by various translations such as mental structure and disposition, has received less attention from the academic community in Iran. Using this concept from Bourdieu, the ethnicity and ethno-nationalism of some groups can be analysed (Khandehroo and Rezaei, 2017).

One of the important features of the habitus is that it is embodied and does not consist solely of mental and perceptual attitudes. Bourdieu writes that the habitus is expressed through durable ways of standing, speaking, walking, and consequently, feeling and thinking (Bourdieu, 1990: 70).

The concept of habitus plays a central role in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, this concept represents a set of dispositions and established ways of thinking and acting that individuals gradually develop over time, reflecting their daily experiences and their everyday set of social interactions, which are embedded within the habitus. Thus, the habitus consists of the 'mental or cognitive structures' through which humans encounter the social world. Humans possess a series of internalised schemata through which they perceive, understand, and evaluate the social world. It is through such schemata that individuals create, perceive, and evaluate their practices. However, the habitus is 'a kind of practical readiness, a kind of implicit learning, a kind of sagacity, a kind of social cultivation of the type of taste [that] allows the social agent to grasp the spirit of the

rules, customs, directions, trends, values, and other matters of his own specific field (the scientific, economic, sporting, artistic, political field, etc.), to be accepted within it, to fit in, and to be effective' (Bourdieu, 2001).

In relation to the subject of this research and its connection with these concepts of Bourdieu, one can discuss the 'ethnic habitus.' The concept of ethnic habitus provides a very useful conceptual framework for understanding how individuals' ethnic identities and attitudes are acquired and what nature and forms they take on. In emphasizing the importance of the social context, the ethnic habitus constantly reminds us that we need to understand the emerging ethnic identities and attitudes in individuals as a consequence of active engagement in a specific set of social relations, as well as interaction with specific social environments (such as home and local neighbourhoods). Furthermore, the concept of ethnic habitus encourages us to study the complex ways in which ethnicity has been acquired by individuals and is expressed through the ways they speak, feel, and act. In this sense, the ethnic habitus can be defined as the representation of the totality of social practices and cultural dispositions that are often produced and bestowed by the generative ethnic group to which the individual belongs (Connolly, Kelly, & Smith, 2009: 220-221). Scientific concepts, in addition to being theoretical constructs, must also be capable of being measured. In other words, to apply it to humans and human societies, it is necessary to examine social realities through that concept. Connolly et al. have considered four elements for measuring the ethnic habitus: ethnic preferences, ethnic awareness, ethnic identities, and ethnic prejudices, for which appropriate measures can be constructed (ibid., 222-223).

The ethnic habitus is influenced by social communications and the individual's interaction with the environment in which they live. The more individuals are involved and active in an ethnic environment, the more ethnic attitudes they acquire as an ethnic habitus, whereas less interaction with ethnic environments weakens individuals' ethnic habitus.

- ***Relative Deprivation Theory***

Relative deprivation theory is highly applicable in explaining the causes and reasons for ethnic conflicts and tensions. According to this theory, rebellion and political crises occur when social groups, including ethnic groups, are dissatisfied with what they receive because they believe they have not attained their entitlements. This, on the one hand, causes the situation to acquire an identity

dimension, and on the other hand, ethnic groups, in reaction to the imposed deprivation and in order to achieve greater rights and interests, resort to a range of civil and violent protest behaviours.

The impact of the variable of the feeling of relative deprivation on national and ethnic identity has been noted by many experts. In Erikson's discussions on how identity is formed, the variable of the feeling of deprivation is very prominent and has played a decisive role in the creation and development of the models of Cross (1991) and Phinney (1989). Other experts such as Tajfel, Turner, and Branscombe (1999) have emphasized the role of the feeling of deprivation in highlighting ethnic identity and weakening national identity and the link between national and ethnic identity (Buhrich, 1997: 589).

Robert Gurr, a theorist of the relative deprivation approach, considers the feeling of relative deprivation to be the result of a sense of an intolerable gap between value expectations and value capabilities, which, depending on the intensity of commitment to the expected value, the legitimisation of deprivation, the prohibition of alternative opportunities, and the frequency of deprivation, causes dissatisfaction and anger (Maghsoudi, 2001: 204). One of the manifestations of the feeling of relative deprivation is the feeling of discrimination. Robert Gurr names three types of discrimination: economic discrimination, political discrimination, and cultural discrimination (Ghasemi, 2002: 129). The main assumption of Robert Gurr is that the feeling of relative deprivation is a prerequisite for violent internal conflicts. Other experts have also emphasized that the greater the degree of the feeling of deprivation in an ethnic group, and the more that ethnic group feels that its culture, language, and values have been subjected to discrimination and assimilation, the more the tendency to preserve the ethnic culture and customs is intensified in it, which in an extreme case, is manifested as ethnocentrism (Ghayem, 2001: 212).

### • *Internal Colonialism Theory*

Theorists of internal colonialism, in their theorisation of the subject and in extending the unequal relations between colonisers and colonies to the sphere of domestic relations, are indebted to the term 'colonialism' in its general and classical sense. Colonialism in its classical sense refers to foreign colonialism or expansionism in the territories of Asia, Africa, and America, which began in

the fifteenth century and effectively influenced the global economy and politics (Feagin, 1978: 37). European colonisers, including the Portuguese, Spanish, Belgian, Dutch, English, and French, through the predominance of the use of force and violence, by subjugating the native peoples, restricting their social and political mobility, and culturally demeaning them, and by establishing dominator-dominated relations, engaged in the exploitation of the native peoples and the plunder of the raw materials of the said lands. By conquering local markets, they accelerated the process of the industrial revolution and economic, political, and social development in their own countries (Cashmore, 1996: 178). Internal colonialism theory, by extending these relations to within countries, emphasizes the existence of unequal cultural relations between the dominant culture and the subordinate cultures within societies. These discussions were first raised in the works of Marxists such as Lenin and Gramsci and were later used and expanded by non-Marxists like Robert Blauner and Michael Hechter (Muir, 1997: 201).

In the process of the emergence of the concept of internal colonialism in its later form (from the late 1960s and early 1970s), two major currents have had the most influence in parallel: first, the dire conditions of ethnic and racial minorities in the United States and their lack of complete absorption, integration, and assimilation into the framework of Anglo-Saxon values; second, the continuation of the unfavourable situation of the native people of Africa after the withdrawal of the colonisers from this continent.

Traditional theorising about racial and ethnic relations in the United States has emphasized 'integration and absorption.' A prominent example of this type of perspective is the 'assimilation' theory, which considers the homogenisation and simulation of different ethnic and racial groups in America into the framework of the culture and values of the central group (Anglo-Saxons) as the most important factor in these relations (Feagin, 1978: 27).

The second factor that has had a significant impact on the development of the theory of internal colonialism is the dire situation of the people of the African continent after the withdrawal of the colonisers. In classical colonialism, the backwardness of the African continent was attributed to colonial policies. Therefore, many thinkers, politicians, and freedom fighters saw the solution to the problems in the unconditional withdrawal of the colonisers from the occupied territories. However, after the liberation of the colonies from the clutches of the colonisers, these societies not only did not move towards development and com-

pensation for their backwardness, but many African countries fell into a deeper vortex of problems, hardships, and backwardness (Maghsoudi, 1999).

In understanding the why and the causes of the continuation of the crisis, some researchers, by shifting the focus from external colonialism to internal colonialism, consider the state as a tool in the hands of reactionary, unproductive, corrupt, and dependent elements on the dominant classes, who, by using the structures, institutions, and tools of the state, engage in the accumulation of personal capital, repression, exploitation, seizure, and marginalisation of the masses. In this direction, a large number of African states are a political tool for the consolidation, stabilisation, and exploitation of some ethnic groups against other and occasionally rival groups. In the face of the violence, repression, and exploitative nature of the state, the people also, by returning to their own ethnic and religious identities and by equipping and mobilising resources and also with the help of humanitarian organisations, counter these orientations in various ways, including ethnic conflicts (ibid.).

Michael Hechter, one of the pioneers of internal colonialism theory, in his book Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, believes that the increase in social interactions among ethnic groups in the process of modernisation and development does not necessarily lead to the creation of national unity and the elimination of fragmented ethnic solidarities, but on the contrary, can lead to ethnic conflicts. He seeks the foundation of this conflict in the inequality and uneven distribution of resources among different regions of a national unit that has ethnic and cultural diversity. Thus, he frames the explanation of the durability of ethnic solidarity in modern societies within the framework of the 'reactive ethnicity' model. In this view, solidarity and reactive challenges are formed from a culturally distinct peripheral group against central colonialism (Nielsen, 1985: 134). Hechter has described and explained ethnic identity-seeking and the politicisation of ethnicity in relation to 'internal colonialism' and the 'cultural division of labour' (Hechter, 1975: 14-15). According to him, the uneven wave of modernisation in society causes the resources of power to be distributed unequally among the different groups and communities of society, such that in the general configuration, a minority of individuals have a lot of these resources, and most people have little of them. If cultural differences are intertwined with economic inequalities, a cultural division of labour arises, and consequently, the political absorption and integration of peripheral commu-

nities into the national society is reduced to a minimum. The said stratification structure may be legally guaranteed, and the state, through the implementation of discriminatory policies, i.e., different access to the educational and religious institutions of the system, does not assign valuable social roles to the members of deprived communities. The position of a group in the cultural division of labour affects the life chances of the group's members, and the low quality of life will lead to a feeling of severe deprivation and discrimination based on language, religion, and other cultural forms. The cultural division of labour gives an objective and political colour to cultural distinctions. In Michael Hechter's view, when the inhabitants of a culturally distinct territory resist integration into a centralised state and strive to preserve their identity markers, peripheral nationalism arises, and in its shadow, the identity and cultural markers of ethnic and racial groups take on a political colour (ibid., 2005: 39-60).

Excellent. Here is the translation of the next section, applying all established guidelines.

## A Critical Reflection on Prevailing Views in Iranian Ethnological Studies

The emergence of a modern outlook on humanity and society, and the formation of the nation-state idea as a new configuration of human societies, provided the grounds for rethinking and redefining diverse forms of collective identity. Within this new horizon, humanity's conception of its individual and social selfhood was fundamentally transformed. The components of identity were no longer seen as passive and ineffectual elements of destiny and nature in the course of history. Instead, with the realisation of humanist ideas, man and the individual and collective aspects of his life were placed at the centre of the universe. The fusion of this epistemological metamorphosis with the exigencies of the politico-social life of modern man, at the dawn of the Renaissance, provided a suitable context for the emergence and formation of the nation-state idea, upon which the new political and social man was born. The paradigmatic status of the nation-state idea and the redefinition of all individual and collective interests around national identity led other forms of collective identity to also define and delineate their position, role, and characteristics in relation to national identity as the central and pivotal identity of the modern era.

Ethnic identity was one of the pre-modern forms of collective identity that took

on a new appearance in the arena of modern transformations. The intertwining of the elements of ethnic identity with national identity and the pivotal role of this form of collective identity in the construction of national identities are among the factors that prevented ethnic identity, unlike many pre-modern identities, from undergoing dissolution and eclipse. Instead, it became a dynamic element in the arena of the political and social relations of the new world.

In the modern world, the ethnic group and ethnic identity underwent a transformation of essence, from a neutral social phenomenon and, in a sense, something 'in itself,' to a new form of collective consciousness tied to group interests, or something 'for itself,' which is referred to as 'ethnicity.' This fundamental change and the actualisation of the ethnic aspect of collective and group identity, its challenging nature, and its importance at the global and regional levels, especially in countries with heterogeneous and diverse ethnic compositions, consequently turned the ethnic issue into one of the important and noteworthy topics of the social and political sciences. The epistemological requirements for the scientific study of ethnicity, ethnic identity, and their related issues from anthropological, sociological, political, cultural, and other perspectives, organised a specific and academic field of study around ethnic and ethnicist topics, which is known as ethnic studies or ethnological studies.

Iran, with a history of several thousand years and a vast historical heritage of the movement and coexistence of ethnic groups, is a country that today ranks among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of ethnic and linguistic diversity (Mirheydar, 2015: 132). This social characteristic, in the context of the transformations of Iran's contemporary history and in the sphere of the processes related to the modernisation of society and politics in Iran, has reached collective self-awareness and political actualisation. At various junctures of Iran's contemporary history, it has always been a determining factor in the political, economic, and cultural relations of this land and has shaped a wide and fateful range of the political and social issues of this period. The transition from ethnic group to ethnicity, and from the ethnic phenomenon to ethnic issues, was a transformation that raised the necessity of a scientific view and examination of ethnic issues. Therefore, in the arena of political and social studies in Iran, ethnic discussions and issues found a worthy place, and numerous research and descriptive works were written about the history of ethnic groups, ethnic movements and uprisings, the dimensions and forms of ethnic issues, and the pathology of ethnic topics in

Iran. The collection of these works and the research discourses that govern them are known today as ethnological studies in Iran.

Regarding the necessity of ethnological studies in Iran, it must be acknowledged that the vacuum of scientific knowledge and the lack of a problem-oriented approach to ethnic and ethnicist topics create the ground for the adoption of unprincipled and arbitrary positions. This naturally fuels the complexity of ethnic discussions, the crisis of issues, and the inefficiency of the institution of science in accurately and fundamentally understanding ethnic issues and prescribing appropriate solutions for them. Another important and influential aspect of ethnic studies is their tangible consequences for the lived world of ethnic groups. Ethnological studies are not merely a cognitive and pathological stance towards ethnic realities, whose sphere of influence is limited to the realm of intellectualism and purely theoretical discussions. Rather, the prescriptive function and application of the findings of these researches cause them, directly and explicitly or indirectly and implicitly, to become the basis for political action and identity and ethnic policymaking. Therefore, any cognitive position and theoretical orientation regarding ethnicity and ethnic issues in the arena of ethnic relations will have tangible and effective consequences. Some findings and theoretical and cognitive positions regarding the nature of ethnicity and ethnic issues in the contemporary history of Iran have been remarkably influential in shaping public opinion and the political mentality of the country's officials regarding these topics. With this in mind, the following section will critically examine the prevailing and prominent views and theories in Iranian ethnological studies, in order to, while becoming familiar with their theoretical and discursive components, identify their epistemological shortcomings and their theoretical and practical consequences in the arena of ethnic relations.

Nationalism and ethnicity in Iran are two intertwined categories, such that any descriptive-analytical and theoretical position regarding one of them and its pillars and components is inevitably the adoption of a position regarding the other, and the understanding of one depends on the understanding of the other. Therefore, reflection on Iranian nationalism is a prerequisite and epistemological infrastructure for understanding ethnicity and, more importantly, the main factor in the prevailing and dominant readings of ethnicity in the field of Iranian ethnic studies. The approaches concerning the studies of Iranian nationalism have generally, influenced by the paradigms of primordialism, historical sociology,

modernism, ethno-symbolism, instrumentalism, and postmodernism, organised their theories about the nature of the nation in Iran. Among these, the three main trends of modernism, primordialism, and historical sociology play a central role and are among the theories that take a positive and affirmative position regarding the national identity and nationhood of Iran. In contrast, the critical trends of postmodernism have challenged the beliefs of national identity and Iranian nationality. Signs of conscious or unconscious adherence to these three trends can be observed in the works of sociologists, Iranologists, and Iranian and non-Iranian thinkers who have commented on the issue of the nation in Iran (Shirazi, 2017: 31). In contrast to these affirmative trends, some more recent critical and negative approaches have also been presented, which often follow the critical paradigms of postmodernism and instrumentalism. In the following, the most prominent of these views and opinions are examined from the perspective of the dominant paradigm and with reflection on their reading of the role and position of ethnic groups in the construct of national identity.

## Anthony Smith and the Pre-modern Foundations of Iranian National Identity

Anthony D. Smith is one of the leading thinkers and researchers in the studies of nation, ethnicity, and nationalism and one of the founders of the interdisciplinary field of nationalism studies and the historical sociological approach to the category of nationality. Smith, while rejecting the primordialist and modernist views on the nation, believes that the nation is a historical reality and the main sources of nations and national narratives must be sought in more distant times (Smith, 2004: 135). According to his definition, 'national identity is the continuous redefinition and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that constitute the heritage of the distinction of nations' (Smith, 2004: 30), and nationalism is an ideological movement for achieving and maintaining independence, unity, and identity for peoples who believe in the formation of a potential and actual nation (Smith, 2004: 20).

Smith is one of the experts who has considered Iran among the pre-nationalist countries and believes that the nation in this land has a pre-modern and ancient historical foundation and cannot be considered a product of capitalist relations and the modern period. He symbolically chose an image of Persepolis for the cover of his famous book, The Ethnic Origins of Nations (Smith, 2009). One

of the distinguishing points of Smith's view is his emphasis on the concept of ethnicity in relation to pre-nationalist countries like Iran, Greece, and Rome, believing that the reliance on the element of ethnicity indicates the historical nature of the nation in these countries (Smith, 2012: 96).

Smith has constructed his view on the history of the nation in Iran based on the views and opinions of Iranologists. He has specifically used the works of Iranologists such as Frye and McNeill, and it is not the result of direct and deep personal knowledge and investigation into the historical works and sources of Iran. His views on this matter are scattered in his three books on 'The Antiquity of Nations' (Smith, 2004), 'The Ethnic Origins of Nations' (Smith, 2009), and 'National Identity' (Smith, 1991). He considers Iran a country in which the emergence of a kind of Iranian ethnic solidarity has left a precedent in its ancient and Islamic past. From this perspective, Smith considers the Sassanian period to be the pinnacle of the ancient era. However, he considers the awareness of Iranian ethnic solidarity in the Sassanian period to be superficial and limited to the aristocratic classes (courtiers, bureaucrats, and clergy). Contrary to many anti-Islamic nationalist interpretations, Smith is of the opinion that the special sense of Iranian ethnicity remained under the name of Islam, and Islam even led to an Iranian renaissance. He further speaks of the revival of Iranian ethnic identity in the Safavid era.

In sum, he is of the opinion that the manifestation of the sense of Iranian ethnicity in the Islamic period was not, in any case, so deep as to lead to every Iranian villager's familiarity with Ferdowsi or to cause him to consider the law of the government as his own. But it was to the extent that it spread Iranian identity in many areas in the familiar bond of being from the same province, kinship, and being Muslim (Shirazi, 2017: 39-41).

Smith and many other Western experts in the field of national and ethnic studies, since they often rely on Iranological sources and the dominant Iranian historiographical narratives in their research on Iran, inevitably present their theorising about ethnicity and nationality in Iran based on the propositions and assumptions presented in these works. Therefore, most of these works pay no attention to the historical reality of the ethnic diversity of Iranian society and the position and role of these ethnic groups in the nature and essence of the macro-historical identity of this land, and naturally ignore it in their narrative. Smith's view is one of the ideal examples of such reflections, which, despite its strong foundations and

precise theorising, faces a fundamental void of direct and unmediated reflection with primary sources and sources and in-depth historical evidence.

## A Deficient Reading of Hobsbawm's Theory of Historic Nations

In the field of Iranology and national studies in Iran, few propositions can be found that have been cited as much as the brief statement by Eric Hobsbawm about Iran's status as a historic nation, and which have been reflected in numerous works. This view refers to a brief phrase from Hobsbawm, who in his book Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality (Eric Hobsbawm, 2021), while listing the nations he calls 'historic nations,' also names Iran. However, this phrase, long before the work itself was translated into Persian (30 years after its writing) (Hobsbawm, 1992), found its way into the field of Iranian nationalism studies through the works and numerous references of Iranian researchers. As Ahmad Ashraf, referring to this statement by Hobsbawm, writes: 'Although Hobsbawm is a renowned critic of romantic nationalism and national prejudices and believes that the national identity of many of today's nations and ethnic groups has no historical basis and that it has not been long since a national title was created for them, he is of the opinion that apart from the countries of China, Korea, Vietnam, Iran, and Egypt, which had a relatively permanent and old political existence, and if they were located in Europe they would be known as 'historic nations,' many other nations whose age at the time of independence did not exceed a few decades were either the product of the conquests of Western empires or represented 'religious-cultural' regions and did not have an existence that could be called a nation by modern criteria of nationality' (Ashraf, 2016: 31).

The criticism levelled at various citations of this point is the selective and decontextualised reference to Hobsbawm's view, such that the nuances and premises of his argument are not accurately considered and understood. Ahmad Ashraf's unreferenced translation of Hobsbawm's statement is a good example that clearly reveals some of the contradictions between the original statement and its famous quotation in the field of Iranian studies and the Persian language. In Ashraf's 'paraphrase' of Hobsbawm, three errors can be observed that have completely changed the meaning of the text and conveyed a meaning different from what Hobsbawm intended, which we will address in order. But it is better to first quote Hobsbawm's original writing: 'Moreover, apart from the relatively

permanent political entities, such as China, Korea, Vietnam, and perhaps Iran and Egypt, which if they were in Europe would be recognised as 'historic nations,' the territorial units for which the so-called national movements demanded independence were largely in practice the creation of imperial conquest and often their age did not even reach a few decades, or otherwise they were more representative of religious-cultural regions than anything that could be called a 'nation' in Europe' (Eric Hobsbawm, 2021: 164). First: Hobsbawm, in making an exception for Iran and Egypt, shows some doubt and hesitation with the word 'perhaps.' Whereas in Ashraf's quotation of it, no such caution is seen, and all five political entities are made exceptions with equal certainty. Second: Hobsbawm speaks of 'territorial units for which the so-called national movements demanded independence [and] were largely in practice the creation of imperial conquest and often their age did not even reach a few decades,' whereas Ashraf speaks of 'other nations whose age at the time of independence did not exceed a few decades, were either the product of the conquests of Western empires…'. Third: a precise understanding of Hobsbawm's statement requires examining the text in the context in which he presented it. These sentences are mentioned in the first pages of the fifth chapter of the book, titled 'The Apogee of Nationalism, 1918-1950,' and the author tries to examine the state of nationalism in the period from the end of the First World War to a few years after the Second World War. The chapter, as far as our discussion is concerned, begins with the situation in Europe on the eve of the Treaty of Versailles. The collapse of the multi-national Ottoman, German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires in Europe, alongside the principle of self-determination by the American President, Woodrow Wilson, provided the ground for redrawing the map of Europe based on the principle of nationality. Hobsbawm then discusses the challenges surrounding this redrawing, including the discrepancy between national and linguistic affiliations in some regions and the necessity of expelling or committing genocide against minorities in the Wilsonian understanding of a nation, a linguistically and ethnically homogeneous unit. He then discusses the spread of nationalist discourse and demands arising from Wilsonian principles outside the European geography and the challenges arising from it, which is very important for our discussion, and the sentences that are the subject of this text's investigation only find a correct meaning in relation to it… In fact, what Hobsbawm has said, contrary to what is understood from Ashraf's rephrasing, is by no means that Korea, China, Vietnam, Iran, and

Egypt, unlike other nations that are new and lack a historical tradition, are nation-states with a long and exceptional historical basis at the global level; but it only refers to the point that if these political entities had the fortune of being European (which they did not), unlike other colonised and semi-colonised units, the claims of their 'so-called national movements' for independence and the right to self-determination, like the multitude of newly emerged ethnic groups and nations that achieved independence in Europe with the help of the Treaty of Versailles, would have been recognised. It should also be noted that Hobsbawm is speaking about the acceptance of these claims in 1918, not explaining his own belief. Because as he clarifies, a territorial unit can achieve its independence in the form of a territorial state and be officially recognised as a nation; while Hobsbawm does not accept its nationhood. Therefore, this proposition does not in principle represent the author's belief about Iran (Omranian, 2022).

The above argument about the historical nature of the nation in Iran, with reference to Hobsbawm's view, is clear evidence of a superficial and rhetorical encounter with many scientific and historical propositions about Iran, even at the highest academic and research levels, which mainly have a polemical use and function in the encounter and confrontation of identity discourses, not a problem-oriented and pathological aspect in order to solve crises and devise peace-oriented solutions to identity issues.

## Ahmad Ashraf and the Historical Approach to Iranian Identity

Ahmad Ashraf is one of the most prominent researchers and experts on Iranian identity, and the issues of national and historical identity of Iran form the main axis of his works and views. Ashraf is a sociologist who has approached the subject of Iranian identity with a historical perspective, and the historical sociological approach to Iranian identity is the distinguishing feature of his works. Ahmad Ashraf's view on Iranian identity is clearly reflected in several of his works, including the sub-entries on 'Iranian Identity' in the Encyclopaedia Iranica,[1] and the book 'Iranian Identity from Ancient Times to the End of the Pahlavi Era.'

Ahmad Ashraf, in an essay titled 'Iranian Identity in Three Narratives' (Ashraf,

1. See: Ashraf, Ahmad (2006), "Perspectives on Iranian identity," Encyclopaedia Iranica, Vol. XIII, Fasc. 5, pp. 501-504; Ashraf, Ahmad (2006), "Medieval Islamic period," Encyclopaedia Iranica, Vol. XIII, Fasc. 5, pp. 507-522; Ashraf, Ahmad (2006), "In the 19th and 20th centuries," Encyclopaedia Iranica, Vol. XIII, Fasc. 5, pp. 522-530.

2016: 25-47), introduces and critiques three prominent narratives of Iranian identity: the nationalist, the modern, and the historical-discursive. While labelling the romantic nationalist approach as extremist and the modern and postmodern approaches as reductionist—calling the former a harbinger of national prejudice and the latter of anti-national prejudice—he considers the historical-discursive narrative as the solution to avoid this extremism and reductionism, and writes about it: 'The historical narrative, while avoiding the extremism and reductionism of these two narratives, has chosen a middle way for the examination and analysis of 'Iranian identity'.' In fact, this is an approach of which Ashraf himself is considered the most well-known figure. One of the most prominent theoretical achievements of Ashraf in explaining Iranian identity is the analytical and ontological distinction he makes between 'Iranian identity' and 'Iranian national identity.' As he himself introduces it: 'This narrative, while considering national identity as a category belonging to the modern era and not accepting its retrospective application, considers Iranian cultural identity as a historical category that has been reconstructed in various forms from the pre-Islamic era to the present day. In this way, the historical concept of Iranian identity, which was reconstructed in the Sassanian era, underwent transformations with ups and downs in the Islamic era, was reborn in the Safavid era, and was constructed and elaborated in the form of Iranian national identity in the modern era.' Ahmad Ashraf, based on these assumptions, considers the talk of a national identity several thousand years old as an exaggeration and, at the same time, calls the talk of the newness and imitativeness of Iranian identity a colonialist trick (Ashraf, 1998: 530). Another noteworthy point in his works is his attention to the historical dimension of concepts and words. Ashraf, in his essays, always warns against the semantic and conceptual extension of present-day Iran to its historical instances and emphasizes that we must pay attention to the specific understanding of the ancients of these words. He names Ehsan Yarshater, Fereydoun Adamiyat, Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, Shahrokh Meskoob, Gherardo Gnoli, Ann Lambton, Alessandro Bausani, and others as thinkers who believe in a historical-discursive approach to Iranian identity (Ashraf, 2016: 39-40). The categorisation of all these views under one approach and interpretation, among which there are sometimes contradictory opinions, is a kind of simplification and unverified assertion.

Ashraf, in the article 'The Crisis of National and Ethnic Identity in Iran' (Ashraf,

2004: 133-170), describes the relationship between national and ethnic identity in contemporary Iran as a crisis, as is evident from the title of the article. He says about this: 'Right at the time when Iranian identity, as a kind of primordial nationalism, evolved into the concept of Iranian national identity in its modern sense, the seed of the identity crisis among the Iranian ethnic groups was sown and over time became a chronic disease. The identity crisis in this era appeared with two different dimensions. One issue was the emergence of ethnic identity with a tendency towards national autonomy… The second was the emergence of various concepts of national identity based on different understandings of the nation-state, civil society, ethnic groups, and the relationship between nationality and religion' (Ashraf, 2004: 158-159).

Ashraf, in his view, in order to pathologise this crisis situation, addresses the emergence of ethnic and linguistic identities in the contemporary period and, while recalling some stories and clichéd points about Iranian pride and love of Iran among the majority of ethnic groups, considers the afflicted situation more as a kind of incitement caused by an external factor. In fact, Ashraf, in this discussion, first, without directing any criticism towards the formulation of Iranian national identity and its role and share in the emergence of the crisis, with complete reductionism, considers ethnic identity as its cause, even without providing the slightest argument about it and addressing its origin, causes, reasons, and conditions.

Ashraf, as a historical sociologist, does not pay much attention in his works to the micro and meso view of the phenomenon of historical identity, which is one of the necessities of this research approach. Essentially, both at the level of analysing the historical trend and in explaining the contemporary identity situation, ethnic groups are completely ignored in the text of his theories.

Another criticism of Ahmad Ashraf's views is that, contrary to his explicit opinion, in several passages of his writings, when talking about pre-modern identity, he uses the concept of national identity. In addition, in the discussions related to the discourse of national identity, he believes that, due to the nature of such discussions, they are the cognitive domain of intellectuals and a specific and limited group of educated people and the middle class. But in various places in his works, when talking about national identity, he speaks of society and considers it a comprehensive social matter.

## Javad Tabatabai and the Primordialist Idea of Iranshahr

Javad Tabatabai, known as the philosopher of Iranshahr, is a researcher whose views and ideas have held a dominant position in the discourse of Iranian national identity for over three decades. Indebted to the Hegelian idea-centric approach to history, and assuming that philosophical thought is the foundation and essence of any political society as well as the basis for any critical analysis of society, he prioritises reading history from a philosophical perspective (Tabatabai, 1996: 8). By adopting a primordialist approach to the category of Iranian national identity, Tabatabai has developed and expanded an idea known as the 'Idea of Iranshahr,' the basis of which is 'the continuity of the land of Iran from a historical and intellectual-historical perspective' (Tabatabai, 2014: 9). In his view, the political thought of Iranshahr is a valuable intellectual and philosophical heritage that, like an invisible thread, has connected the ancient and Islamic periods of Iran's history up to the preliminaries of the Constitutional Movement, thereby enabling the continuity of Iran on its foundation (Tabatabai, 2013: 82-84). Therefore, it should be at the centre of rethinking, re-reading, and attention.

In his re-reading of Iranian history, Tabatabai identifies the dominance of the Arabs, the ascendancy of the Turks, and the invasion of the Mongols as three factors of intellectual and civilisational decline and decay in Iran. At the same time, however, he insists that these dominations and the ruptures they brought about did not prevent the cultural continuity of Iran (Tabatabai, 2013: 12). Unlike many of his intellectual and theoretical predecessors, especially nationalist historians and historiographers who tried to provide a reading of political, territorial, and governmental continuity of Iran through selective narratives and various historical interpretations and justifications, he, while acknowledging the deep voids and ruptures in the process of Iran's political history, presented a new narrative based on the continuity of intellectual and cultural heritage. In speaking of the evolution of thought in Iranian history, Tabatabai always refers to national consciousness. As he notes in reference to the historiography of the golden age of Iranian culture, 'historiography acquired a rationalist character and became the site for the formation of national consciousness.' He states that his goal is to write a kind of philosophical national history of Iran that is the history of the manifestation of the national consciousness of Iranians (Tabatabai, 2004: 353-354). Like many nationalist thinkers, he emphasizes the central role of the

Persian language in the intellectual continuity of Iran and the wisdom of Iranshahr and considers it the national language (Tabatabai, 2013: 84).

The wise, powerful, and charismatic king, who is considered the central pillar of the Iranshahr tent, is another cornerstone of Tabatabai's national thought. In delineating its position, he writes: 'The land of Iran, or Greater Iran, was a country with various ethnic groups, in which, from a historical and political perspective and based on the principles of Iranshahr, the person of the king was God on earth and the cause of unity in the diversity of those ethnic groups. Thus, the king, if not the sole institution, was certainly the most stable institution of this political system.' Tabatabai believes that the foundation of the land of Iran was based on a ritual and cultural order, and even in some periods, the country's political system was established on that basis and made the legitimisation of the institution of kingship possible (Tabatabai, 2003: 115). Accordingly, Tabatabai believes that the general structure of the rule of the land of Iran was a monarchy (shahanshahi), and the king in the political thought of Iranshahr was more the 'embodiment of order' than the 'organiser of order' (Tabatabai, 2003: 139). Tabatabai describes the monarchy and its unifying role as follows: 'The Iranian monarchy was a method of ruling over a vast territory with peoples of various languages, customs, and traditions, who gradually, while preserving their diversity and plurality, formed a single nation… The king in the thought of Iranshahr was a symbol of unity in the diversity of all the 'nation's' ethnic groups, and he, with his 'just' rule, transformed the stable balance of those ethnic groups into the stability of the 'nation'.' In describing the monarchical system, Tabatabai notes that the absolute power of the monarchy should not be confused with a system that writers like Karl Wittfogel have called 'oriental despotism.' Because in his view, the power of the monarchical system, although absolute, was not autocratic in the technical sense of the term, as the theory of monarchy later became (Tabatabai, 2004: 139-150). Tabatabai keeps the discussion of the monarchical system at an abstract level by including guarantees from Hegel's discourse on the history of the state in Iran. In speaking of the kings of ancient Iran, whom he considers the creators of the utopias of their age, with the argument that the domain of his discussions is intellectual-philosophical, he pays no attention to the history of these kings and the existing historical reports about them and the nature of their kingship.

Tabatabai, while acknowledging the multifaceted and prismatic reality of the

social, linguistic, and religious fabric of Iran throughout history, explains national integration under the idea of 'unity in diversity' as follows: 'The land of Iran or Greater Iran was a country with various ethnic groups in which, according to the principles of Iranshahr thought, the ‘person’ of the king, God on earth, was the cause of unity in the diversity of those ethnic groups. Alongside this institution, other unifying factors such as Iranian culture… were able to guarantee the historical, ritual, and intellectual continuity of Iranians over long centuries. Iranian culture, at the core of which was the thought of Iranshahr and which in the Islamic period was mixed with Persian poetry and literature, was considered the second pillar of the survival of the land of Iran alongside the institution of kingship' (Tabatabai, 2003: 115-116).

What gives Tabatabai’s views and theories a different hue is mostly influenced by his philosophical approach and the conceptualisations he has made about the intellectual phenomena of Iranian history. Otherwise, from the perspective of the interpretation he offers of territorial and historical identity, he is also among the primordialist researchers who, with a cultural and idea-centred interpretation, seek to legitimise a nationalism based on monarchy and the Persian language. Tabatabai even views ethnic categories with a condescending and reductionist look, calling them, including language, culture, art, music, clothing, etc., a local phenomenon that lacks any capacity for growth and development. As he writes in a sharp critique of the government’s plan for mother tongue education in Azarbaijan: 'From the perspective of the history of language, Iran, unlike many other countries, has a distinct history. The Persian language, as the ‘national’ language of all the people of Greater Iran, has a long history. This language is the most important document of the continuity of the history and the history of the culture of Iran. Iran is the only important country whose people, by preserving the Persian language, unlike many other countries that became Arab, remained Iranian. This counter-historical situation of Iran has important consequences that the curriculum planners of the Ministry of Science, Culture, and Education cannot ignore and ‘issue’ a curriculum for the country’s education and higher education system. New Persian, the language that has been the only national language of the country for fourteen centuries—like Middle Persian and also other ancient languages of Iran—has been the only scientific and standard language of Greater Iran from the beginning of the Islamic period, and it remains so until further notice. This language is also the foundation of the nationality and

identity of all Iranians, meaning that if the Persian language did not exist, Iran, like countries such as India, present-day Pakistan, Africa, etc., whose common languages have not been able to create a standard national language, would have had to speak one of the other standard languages—of which Arabic was at the forefront in the Islamic period. The reason why Iran, in this same Islamic period, despite the many other languages that its people spoke at different times, found only one national language is none other than that only this language was the language of science and culture, as well as the standard language, and it could be such a language. This matter, contrary to the propaganda of the supporters of the current Pan-… ideologies, has nothing to do with domination and colonialism, but has a history that their ideologies prevent them from knowing. The Persian language, like all other national languages, in addition to being the language of culture and science, is also the language of political power. From the beginning of the Islamic period, the Dari Persian language was the language of the court, the place of power… There is no doubt that Sultan Mahmud was more 'Turk' than many of the current 'Turks', but he knew this much politics and had the sagacity to know that his 'mother tongue' was not sufficient for governance' (Tabatabai, 2016: 5-15).

A critical reflection on the components of Tabatabai's primordialist theory reveals clear lines of ahistoricism in his seemingly solid and complex intellectual construct. Tabatabai's philosophical project, rather than being an intellectual effort to transfer historical understanding from the level of descriptive narrative to the realm of philosophical and historical-intellectual reflections, is an endeavour to extract the garment of the primordialist idea of the Iranian nation from the constraints and limitations of the realities of Iranian history, which in various aspects contradict and negate it. For he confronts history in a completely selective manner in order to impose his views and interpretations on it. Tabatabai's improper and irregular encounter with the history of Iran has in recent years been severely criticised by the community of researchers and historians, who have taken a strong stance against its improper and ahistorical consequences.

Another form of the ahistorical nature of the pillars of Tabatabai's thought relates to the imaginary and idealistic interpretations of historical elements and institutions, whose historical nature and function are fundamentally different from and sometimes contrary to Tabatabai's idealistic intellectual project. His views on the institution of monarchy in Iranian history, excerpts of which were men-

tioned in the above materials, are a telling example of such images, which have little congruence with its historical instances in the Islamic and even ancient periods of Iranian history. It is as if Tabatabai is not trying to philosophically interpret the material of Iranian history, but is endeavouring to create a utopia that has no relation to the true nature of the history of this land and in a way promotes a deterministic and fatalistic view of history.

Apart from the scientific and academic criticisms of Tabatabai's views in the realm of thought and research, its unscientific and, in a sense, political and social consumption in the social arena and political disputes is another important point that has drawn sharp criticism towards him. The elevation of the institution of monarchy as the 'central pillar of the tent of Iranian history' is one of the propositions that, in the political debates of recent decades in Iran, has been a pretext for monarchists to, by citing it, seek to justify and necessitate the revival of the institution of monarchy as the inevitable historical destiny of Iran. This is while the public opinion of Iranian society and the majority of intellectual and political elites are strongly opposed to such a view and even consider it the main cause of the backwardness of Iranian history.

Apart from Tabatabai's dominant image as an intellectual who has philosophical reflections on the history of Iran, his media image is another face that has received much more attention and consequently criticism and condemnation in recent decades than the academic Tabatabai. For in his re-reading and evaluation of the position and importance of other researchers and experts in the human and social sciences of Iran, he has often adopted an insulting approach accompanied by the negation of any value and importance of the intellectual heritage and works of others, which has led to his professional ethics and scientific position being severely criticised.

His often journalistic comments on some serious issues of society, especially the discussions of collective identity, with a generalising view and generalising literature, are another criticised aspect of Tabatabai's views, in which ignorance of the subject and a generalising approach mixed with affection and aversion are often evident. His views on ethnic languages in Iran, including Kurdish and Azeri Turkish, are an example of this criticisable legacy of Tabatabai. In speaking of them, he is not bound by any scientific and theoretical principles and framework and speaks about them with a quasi-ideological and completely emotional view—words that the scientific achievements and theories of linguistics contra-

dict and consider an obsolete view and thought.

This is why in Tabatabai's intellectual system, which deliberately takes a selective approach to historical institutions and elements, the undeniable reality of the ethnic composition and diversity of Iranian history and the necessity of rethinking it as a prerequisite for overcoming the current rigid situation and untying the knots of macro-territorial identity are marginalised with generalising and unscientific and unsubstantiated interpretations that are deeply reductionist. It is interesting that materials of history such as the institution of monarchy are magnified and sanitised, which in the history of Iran, especially the contemporary period, have been considered the source of many major and minor crises, including exclusionary and problematic identity policies.

In sum, Tabatabai's intellectual construct of the national and historical identity of Iran, apart from its noisy controversies in the arena of political and journalistic debates, mainly suffers from a fundamental flaw in delineating its historical foundations—a void that Tabatabai skilfully tries to conceal to some extent under the guise of philosophical and intellectual-historical terms and expressions and to save his theoretical system from the critique of the lack or inadequacy of historical evidence and documents with generalisations based on idea-centred interpretations. But Tabatabai's thought, despite all the sharp criticisms and exaggerated praises that exist for it in the sphere of Iranian historical studies, is an intellectual and theoretical legacy that will continue for many decades as an influential intellectual apparatus in the context of historical, nationalist, and ethnological studies of Iran.

## Hamid Ahmadi and the Denial of Ethno-nationalism in Iran

Hamid Ahmadi is one of the most well-known and active academic figures in the field of national and ethnic identity studies within Iran, whose views and opinions on nationality and ethnicity in Iran have always been the subject of serious controversy. His ideas on nationality and ethnicity have been published in a collection of books and articles in Persian and English, [1]the most well-known of which are: *Ethnicity and Ethno-nationalism in Iran: Myth and Reality, Foundations of Iranian National Identity, and Iran: Identity, Nationality, and Ethnicity*

1. e.g., Islam and Nationalism in Contemporary Iranian Society and Politics, in Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs

(co-authored with a group of writers).

The starting point of Ahmadi's thought on ethnic issues in Iran is to posit a substantive distinction between the phenomenon of ethnicity in the West and the ethnic group and ethnicity in Iran. As is clear from the title of his doctoral thesis in the book Ethnicity and Ethno-nationalism in Iran: Myth and Reality, with the phrase 'the myth and reality of ethno-nationalism,' he has given precedence to the attribute 'myth' in speaking of ethno-nationalism. Ahmadi introduces ethnicity and ethno-nationalism in contemporary Iran as resulting from the self-interest of local and non-local elites, the interventions of foreign countries, including colonialists and neighbours, and the reaction of ethnic groups to the authoritarianism of the national state. In his view, ethnicity and ethno-nationalism are new concepts that have no precedent in the history of Iran. In the Qajar period and before, a large part of the country was composed of tribes and clans that were often in conflict with each other and sometimes, due to the exigencies of the time, formed confederations. They never united under a larger concept like ethnicity. The primordialisation of ethnicity is a myth that has been created in contemporary history, and historically, no instances can be found for it (Ahmadi, 2003: 238-239).

Ahmadi strongly criticises the universalism of the concepts of ethnic literature and the ahistorical view of it and considers himself indebted to the historical view or, to be more precise, the historical sociological approach to the phenomenon of historical, national, and ethnic identity in Iran (Ahmadi, 2003: 17-18). Therefore, with decisiveness and sometimes with a harsh and hostile literature, he criticises and rejects the modernist and postmodernist approaches to nationality and ethnicity in Iran and considers their positions either imitative and resulting from an incorrect understanding of the nature of these issues in Iran or the product of anti-Iranian and colonial programmes.

Hamid Ahmadi considers the formation of Iranian identity in history to be the result of the fusion of four important elements: territory, history, political heritage, and a common cultural heritage, from the combination of which a 'hard core' has been created that historical crises and ups and downs have not been able to break (Ahmadi, 2009: Chapter 11). With full awareness of the difference between 'Iranian identity' and 'Iranian national identity,' he believes that both have existed in various periods of Iranian history and that Iranian identity and national solidarity in ancient periods cannot be denied. He explicitly writes: 'The

phenomenon of the nation in Iran emerged in the process of political and social events and developments before Islam and continued its life in the Islamic era' (Ahmadi, 2009: 110, 112, 143). Therefore, contrary to the view of modernists and postmodernists, in his view, the nation in Iran is an ancient and pre-modern phenomenon. On this basis, he also extends the phenomenon of nationalism to the pre-modern era and believes: 'Just as the nation in past Iran was a type of nation, the nationalism of that era was also a type of nationalism. Both were pre-modern' (Ahmadi, 2009: 323).

Hamid Ahmadi, whose views on national and ethnic identity are more of an extremist belief than a research and academic view and position, his views are, in the first instance, criticisable from the perspective of the history of concepts and phenomena, because by using the concepts of nation and especially nationalism for the pre-modern and ancient era, he has clearly committed an anachronistic fallacy. In an essentialist argument about national identity, he considers various pluralities in the sub-category of social identity, including classes, religious and political groups, ethnic groups, and tribes, as components of societies, not components of the nation. Therefore, he considers it permissible to speak of a mosaic identity at the societal level and impermissible at the national level. Thus, he considers national identity and its pillars not the result of the common accumulation of the general historical characteristics of strata, groups, ethnic groups, sects, etc., but a jewel higher than these local and peripheral elements, without explaining in this regard when, where, and how the elements and components of national identity came into being.

Another clear contradiction in Ahmadi's view is the denial of the ethnic group in the history of Iran and at the same time the use of this title in referring to the Kurd, Azeri, Baloch, etc. To escape this contradiction, he resorts to coining the title of pre-modern ethnic groups, which, according to his definition, their internal conflicts have prevented them from manifesting as an ethnic group in its modern sense (Ahmadi, 2009: 119). The analysis of this very argument clearly illustrates the contradiction and lack of coherence in the components of his view, because while he denies that level of social solidarity and intra-group cohesion that would provide the ground for ethnic integration and the manifestation of ethnicity, he simultaneously speaks of a hard and unbreakable national identity and a historical national community, and that with nationalist manifestations. This argument is undoubtedly not just a cognitive and scientific weakness or

an ambiguity in expression and presentation of the subject, but it primarily reveals the deep contradictions of the idea of the ancient national identity and the extremist primordialist view of Hamid Ahmadi, who, between the dualism of historical realities and truths and his own ideological necessities, is inevitably caught in the self-made trap of some contradictory arguments and propositions.

In fact, one of the most criticised fundamental assumptions of the primordialist and historical discourse of national and Iranian identity is the discussions related to the pre-modern Iranian national identity or, in other words, the ancient historical Iranian identity. What is specifically a source of criticism and a point of contention is the ideological readings of the history of Iran. There is not much doubt that the history of Iran, with all its ruptures and continuities, has been the ground for a set of historical experiences, cultural and biological elements, and common perceptions and beliefs for most ethnic groups that have lived in this territorial expanse. But whether these common chapters can be called an ancient national identity with a thousand-year history is a contentious and criticisable issue that is open to debate. The first criticism directed at the foundations of this argument relates to the adequacy of the assumptions on which this view is based. Because what results from the evidence and documents referred to by this intellectual spectrum, at best, tells of Iran as a cultural geography that has been the ecosystem of different cultures, religions and sects, ethnic groups and races, which, despite considerable commonalities, have deep and irreconcilable points of divergence.

## Vaziri and the Theory of Iran as an Imagined Nation

Mostafa Vaziri, author of the book Iran as an Imagined Nation, is among the first individuals who, some thirty years ago, by proposing the theory of 'Iran as an imagined nation,' levelled one of the most serious critiques against the primordialist approach and the promoters of the idea of the historic Iranian nation. Vaziri, who is counted among the critical postmodern researchers, begins his work by critiquing the nationalist, racist, and Aryanist doctrines of Western linguists, Orientalists, and Iranologists of the 19th and 20th centuries. He considers the emergence of these positions among Iranian intellectuals and statesmen to be influenced by their suggestions (Shirazi, 2016: 88-89). He regards the national history of Iran, and consequently its national identity, as a new fabrication that has no relation to the true nature and facts of Iranian history but is rather the

product of a collection of ideas and thoughts derived from Orientalism, the idea of the Aryan race, and linguistic classifications (such as the Indo-European languages or the Iranian languages).

Regarding Iran and its national and territorial identity, Vaziri is of the opinion that the word 'Iran', until the Safavid period and more precisely until the modern era, was a title that, if used at all, had a purely territorial meaning. Therefore, it neither referred to a government and a country nor did it denote the inhabitants of this land… The conclusion is that applying the name 'nation' to the inhabitants of this land and calling them Aryan or Iranian is a product of the imagination of Orientalists and their imitators in Iran (Vaziri, 1993: 1-3). He goes even further and considers the use of the word 'Iran' in its territorial sense in the Islamic era not very common, writing: 'It is only in the literature of the Ilkhanate era and subsequent to it that Iran becomes the primary name for this land' (Vaziri, 1993: 92). Regarding the reason why 'Iran' cannot have a semantic denotation other than territory, Vaziri points to the heterogeneous, diverse, and even incongruous composition of the inhabitants of this land and cites it as clear evidence of the impossibility of applying the single name 'Iranian'. In his belief, even a common ethnic sense could not emerge among the ethnic groups living in this land, so how is it possible to speak of a common national sense or a feeling of belonging to a common homeland? (Vaziri, 1993: 65-79). He frames his argument with these questions: 'No one has explained who an Iranian is. Where is the common ground between a Kurd and a Gilaki whose linguistic and historical relationship is completely different?' In his view, neither the Kurds nor the Gilakis have ever used the term 'Iranian' in their tradition (Vaziri, 1993: 5). Vaziri extends his arguments regarding the rejection of the possibility of a national territorial identity in the Persian language and the impossibility of a national cohesive factor and a common language (Vaziri, 1993: 214), thereby challenging one of the fundamental pillars of the national identity discourse. He then continues to expand his theory by critiquing other cultural, political, and even artistic pillars and manifestations argued by believers in national identity, such as architecture, art, poetry, the ruling dynasties of Iran, etc., and considers their 'national' character to be the product of an imaginary interpretation.

Vaziri, by presenting and analysing numerous and critical arguments in his rather voluminous work, ultimately reaches the conclusion that gathering diverse and disparate cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious-sectarian commu-

nities under one nation and race is impossible, and he calls this act 'imaginary.' He applies the adjective 'imaginary' to all views and opinions that believe in an Iranian nation.

Among Vaziri's criticisable positions is the reduction of Iran to a purely geographical concept and the failure to consider any cultural, political, and collective identity for it, which is inconsistent with a vast body of historical documents and findings. However, his initiative in confronting primordialist identity views, which were once taken for granted and any critique or confrontation with them was met with the most severe unscientific reactions, is significant. Although Vaziri and his critical and scholarly work were met with deliberate rejection, and the hegemonic discourses of Iranian studies and Iranology, especially the Pan-Iranists, gave it little room to be expressed as far as was possible, it ultimately opened a path that, in its continuation and with the emergence of new academic figures, made it possible to present new narratives based on modern and post-modern approaches to identity in Iran.

## Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, Dislocated Nationalism, and Anachronistic History in Iran

Dislocated nationalism is the title of a theory by Reza Zia-Ebrahimi in a research work titled The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation, which he has written in order to critically examine the dominant aspect of Iranian nationalism. The author, in the preface of the book, presents his argument as follows: 'The longing for the glory and honour of pre-Islamic Iran is seen in many Iranians; the virtual space of Iranians is full of ancient decorative motifs; certain strata of Iranians see the Islamic history of Iran as a long period of decline, and for them, the entry of Islam into Iran takes on a racial colour and is called the Arab invasion, and they proudly trumpet the belonging of Iranians to the Aryan race.' He then states that 'this book deals with these ideas, but not as rational, ahistorical elements of the collective spirit of Iranians, but as historical categories that need critical examination. I consider these ideas to be the components of a nationalist ideology which I call 'dislocated nationalism'.' He explains that 'I do not use the term dislocation in the sense it has in diaspora studies, i.e., the geographical displacement that, for example, migrants or refugees experience. Dislocation in the present work refers to an act that takes place in the imagination' (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 12). He then explains the concept of 'dislocation'

as follows: 'Dislocation in the present work refers to an act that takes place in the imagination, an act that dislodges the Iranian nation from its experiential reality as a society with a Muslim majority in the 'East.' 'Aryan' Iran, as if by accident, becomes separated from other Aryans (i.e., Europeans). Only the formulation of a separation and opposition between Iranian and Arab can make possible the dislocated nationalist reading of Iranian history and the separation of Iran from Islam that is inherent in it. I believe that dislocation was an intellectual strategy to soothe the pain of encountering the seemingly more advanced Europeans. Dislocation is a discursive reaction to the challenge of European modernity and the need to digest the new feeling of lack. I call dislocated nationalism 'discursive' because its cure for the pain of observing (European) modernity is in the form of a discourse, especially in the form of a historicised narrative of the greatness and status of Iran's past among the nations of the world. In other words, dislocated nationalism does not offer a prescription for reform; it is more or less summarised in the imaginary act of dislocation; and if it implies any reform, it is content with the demand for Iran's return to its pre-Islamic past, which it considers its period of racial purity' (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 12-13).

This researcher, regarding nationalism in contemporary Iran and the necessity of addressing this specific current of nationalism, writes: 'I do not claim that dislocated nationalism is the only form of nationalism in Iran. On the contrary, this book claims that a single nation, that is, with a single territory and a single population, can have several nationalisms. Other forms of nationalism also exist in Iran, and I will address some of them in their proper place. Among these are the nationalism of the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), the nationalism of Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh (1882-1967) and the oil nationalisation movement, and the nationalism of the Islamic Republic (which requires further scrutiny in history and the social sciences). Nationalisms do not appear one after another but coexist alongside each other. However, I believe that none of these Iranian nationalisms has achieved as much ideological development as dislocated nationalism. This nationalism was clearly expressed in ideological texts, and the Pahlavi government promoted its principles with all its might. It is also the dominant nationalist ideology in Iran today. Dislocated nationalism is a living ideology today and has become the most common form of opposition to the Islamic Republic since the 1980s. Even some statesmen of the Islamic Republic do not seem immune to its spell and often use its signs to prove their patriotism. The

fact that a residue of dislocated nationalism is found in both political spectrums only speaks of the dominance of this ideology in contemporary Iran' (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 10-11).

Zia-Ebrahimi outlines the pillars and components of this nostalgic and imaginative nationalist current as follows: 'The ideas of a superior Aryan race, the praise of the ancient era, the condemnation of Islam and the Islamic period, the veneration of ancient symbols, 2500 years of monarchical rule, etc., I consider to be the components of the ideology of 'dislocated nationalism,' which has several central beliefs. First, that Iran has always existed and its uninterrupted antiquity goes back 2500 years (and this figure is often exaggerated to 5000 years, and even more). Second, the essence of Iranianness and the greatness of Iran must be sought in the golden age before Islam. Third, it is claimed that Islam, which was imposed by the Arabs by the sword, is responsible for the problems and decline of Iran. And fourth, Iranians are of the Aryan race and therefore have a kinship relationship with Europeans and are racially pure, separate from the Arabs. I will argue that dislocated nationalism is a recognisable intellectual body with a complex ideological apparatus based on doctrinal texts and established dogmas that have been created by familiar ideologues' (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 9).

The present work, regarding the origin of the main principles of dislocated nationalism, claims that the elevation of Iran's pre-Islamic past to the status of the embodiment of the Iranian essence, the central role of the Iranian/Aryan versus Arab/Semitic opposition, and the racialisation of Iranian history can be traced not in local traditions or narratives but in nineteenth-century European Orientalism and racial studies. Of course, it is not that these beliefs were imported from Europe wholesale. A complex process of selection and indigenisation occurred, and Iranian thinkers, according to their ideological needs, produced hybrid examples of European ideas. What has been overlooked so far are the dimensions of this indigenisation/hybridisation (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 10).

One of the very important and fundamental discussions that has been addressed in this research is the role of 'dislocated nationalism' in the emergence of modern Iranian historiography and the role of historiography in preparing the historical foundations of this ideology and their interactive relationship with each other. In fact, Zia-Ebrahimi correctly proves that modern Iranian historiography is not only the source from which these ideas and opinions are fed and from which they derive their desired data, but beyond that, historiography itself has an indelible

and determining role in shaping identity discourses and the studies of national identity and Iranian nationalism. Regarding the relationship between historiography and the ideology of dislocation, he says: 'This ideology has a historical infrastructure, and in fact, the dominant type of Iranian historiography has been created by the followers of this ideology. Dislocated nationalism is a new ideology with no precedent until the late nineteenth century. This ideology emerged in the late Qajar era between the 1860s and 1890s and was then integrated into the official ideology of the Pahlavi state (1925-1979). Thus, for several decades later, it was an integral part of history education in schools and played a major role in Iranians' understanding of history, nation, and race. Therefore, it took deep root, and its impact on Iranian identity and Iranians' self-understanding will be indelible in the near future' (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 9).

The critique that Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, under the title of dislocated nationalism, directs at the race-centred and archaeophilic nationalist discourse, emphasizes the central signifier of this discourse. By relying on the pillars of his critique, one can essentially consider this nationalist current to be an anachronistic discourse that, with a nostalgic view, depicts an ideal world that not only has little relation to the locational evidence of Iranian history but also sets aside the most fundamental aspect of history and historical narrative, namely the temporal and chronological dimension. This discourse, as Zia-Ebrahimi correctly points out, is the result of the rearrangement of some Orientalist narratives about the history of Iran. The severe poverty of historical foundations, the deep chronological and locational ruptures of the narrative chains, and the undocumented, story-like, nostalgic, and emotional aspect of some of the assumptions and narrative propositions are other cognitive features of this nationalist current. With these descriptions and despite all the major and minor criticisms directed at its body, this narrative still holds high importance in the sphere of national and historical identity discussions in Iran, because the dominant narrative of the nation in contemporary Iranian history has belonged to this discourse, and until the 1979 Revolution, except in very short and intermittent periods, other discourses basically had no opportunity to be expressed, while this discourse was the official ideology of the Pahlavi state for nearly six decades and used all the institutional capabilities of the fields of culture, education, press, national media, etc., to justify and promote its identity components.

Therefore, apart from the impacts of this research in the specialised field of

national and ethnic studies in Iran, its importance and value in the public sphere should not be overlooked. In today's world, the 'discourse of dislocated nationalism,' with the help of mass media and social networks, is one of the strongest currents that, due to its nostalgic slogans and extensive media advertising, has a strong presence in the Iranian public sphere and, under the shadow of ideological suggestions and the incitement of ancient Iranian glory and honour, has been effective in mobilising public opinion. Therefore, raising awareness in the public sphere and enlightening public opinion enables people to better understand idealistic ideologies and to be able to obtain an accurate and pathological understanding of them.

Ziaeddin Sadr-ol-Ashrafi, Ali Al-Taie, Afshin Matin-Asgari, Mehrzad Boroujerdi, Meysam Badamchi, Zakaria Ghaderi, and others are among the other writers and researchers in the field of national and ethnic studies in Iran who, by adopting critical positions and modern and postmodern approaches, have sought to seriously and explicitly critique the primordialist and historical perceptions that believe in the historical identity of the Iranian nation and other components of the pillars of the Iran-centric discourse, and through their analytical and critical works, have confronted its foundations and assumptions with serious cognitive and historical challenges.

In a general and comprehensive assessment of the dominant approaches and theories in the field of nationalism and ethnic studies in Iran before the emergence of mostly postmodern critical approaches, it can be said that the majority of the prevailing theories and views in this field until two decades ago, disregarding the diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious, and even racial nature of Iran, acted in parallel with the prevailing and academic Iranian historiography in neglecting and ignoring ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. They generally presented ethnic issues as a foreign conspiracy in the path of the growth and elevation of Iranian nationality. Thus, by eliminating the original issue and marginalising it, they avoided any kind of fundamental and root-cause analysis and pathology. This encounter ultimately provides the ground for a security-oriented reading and approach to it and consequently exacerbates the crisis situation. In other words, many of these denialist and exclusionary views and opinions, by crossing the boundaries of the theoretical and research world and entering the public spheres and collective ethnic spaces, on the one hand, will lead to ethnic conflicts and the reproduction and dissemination of violence resulting from ethnic

disputes, and on the other hand, in many cases, will directly or indirectly become the overt and covert models of ethnic policymaking and, in the sphere of power, will cause the deepening of inequality, discrimination, and ethnic conflict.

You are most welcome. It is a pleasure to work on such a well-structured and thoughtful text. Here is the translation of the next section, crafted with the professional and authentic academic voice you requested.

## Perpetual Peace

Over the past two centuries, various schools of thought and theories have emerged concerning the definition of peace and the manner of approaching it. At its most precise level, peace is equated with security in power relations or the absence of overt violence. From the perspective of critical thought, however, and based on epistemological discussions, peace is seen as the possibility for widespread social justice. The prevailing understanding of peace during the Cold War era was the absence of direct military conflict between the major powers (Bertrand, 2001: 58).

Perpetual peace refers to a state in which a peaceful condition has been permanently established in a region. Perpetual peace, centred on justice, is synonymous with a just peace. Therefore, to achieve it, one must, through diplomacy, find and insist upon the implementation of just methods for resolving crises. The concept of perpetual peace was first introduced in the eighteenth century in an anonymously published essay titled Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe (Project for Perpetual Peace in Europe). However, the concept did not receive significant attention until the late eighteenth century. The phrase 'perpetual peace' became widely known in Europe following the publication of Immanuel Kant's essay, Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch.

'Perpetual peace' is a term that the German philosopher Immanuel Kant introduced nearly three centuries ago in a book of the same name, positing non-intervention in other countries and the prohibition of the use of force as preconditions for its realisation. The term was subsequently repeated many times and used—or misused—as one of the prominent slogans for resolving international disputes and conflicts. According to this theory, perpetual peace must be accompanied by justice; a peace without justice cannot be lasting and is not a remedy for resolving current crises. Today, the world is in greater need than ever of achieving a just peace—in other words, a peace founded on justice. A just peace, as a struc-

tured idea championed by elites, is capable of becoming a discourse, entering the social arena, and transforming into an international practice or function. Perpetual peace centred on justice is synonymous with a just peace, and therefore, to achieve it, one must, through diplomacy, find and insist upon the implementation of just methods for resolving crises.

In his concise yet highly significant essay, Perpetual Peace, Kant seeks to present an enduring plan for the union of nations to establish and safeguard peace on a global scale, thereby guiding the international community towards a world republic. Kant fundamentally considers war the greatest evil that can befall humanity. Thus, in this work, he has endeavoured to propose a plan that leads to the elimination of this great evil. In his preliminary articles, Kant seeks the suspension of wars and conflicts as much as possible. However, since the mere suspension of war does not in itself guarantee the preservation of peace, he proceeds to articulate the main pillars of peace, the realisation of which would lead to its institutionalisation.

According to Kant, the establishment of perpetual peace has six preconditions (BaratAlipour, 2015: 41-42):

1. No treaty of peace shall be held valid in which there is tacitly reserved matter for a future war.
2. No independent states, large or small, shall come under the dominion of another state by inheritance, exchange, purchase, or donation.
3. Standing armies shall in time be totally abolished. In other words, militaristic and arms-race rivalries are prohibited.
4. National debts shall not be contracted with a view to the external friction of states.
5. No state shall by force interfere with the constitution or government of another state.
6. No state shall, during war, permit such acts of hostility which would make mutual confidence in the subsequent peace impossible, such as breaking treaties and incitement to treason.

The primary condition for observing these six points is that, in general, the minimal intention of states must be based on a moral obligation. It is worth noting that among these preconditions, there is no economic theory or plan that would lead to an economic order and, ultimately, to economic security and justice. This may be due to the general flaw of Kant's perpetual peace plan as a

superstructural, rather than an infrastructural, project.

Subsequently, Kant (2001) adds three fundamental pillars to these preconditions for the realisation of perpetual peace. These pillars are:

1. The civil constitution of every state should be republican.
2. The law of nations shall be founded on a federalism of free states.
3. The law of world citizenship shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality (ibid., p. 42).

From Kant's perspective, a 'republican government' is a type of government in which law is the axis of human life. This type of government guarantees perpetual global peace. The establishment of a republican government based on a constitution indicates that individuals, by the dictate of their practical reason, have accepted a social contract. This system is the embodiment of the general will of all. A republic is founded on three principles:

1. The principle of freedom for all members of society as human beings.
2. The dependence of all upon a single common legislation as subjects.
3. The principle of legal equality for every individual as a citizen.

Therefore, the observance of both human rights and the rights of citizenship based on political belonging to the state are considered foundations of the republican system (Mirmohammadi, 2011: 123).

Perpetual peace cannot be realised without the establishment of a republican system in which the three powers—executive, legislative, and judicial—are independent. However, the creation of such a system is itself conditional upon rationality, justice-centeredness, intellectual maturity, ethical conduct, and power-wielding based on law. As Kant puts it, perpetual peace is like a child that is born in a moment, but it takes years for this child to reach maturity through care and education.

The hierarchy that Kant presents in articulating the necessary pillars for achieving perpetual peace indicates that he seeks peace first 'at home' and then 'beyond the borders.' Kant considers the remaining of states in a state of nature, lawlessness, and conflict of interests to lead to war. He sees the solution in the creation of and accession to a global federation (ibid., 124).

In general, in this research, perpetual peace refers to a dynamic and continuous state that, by relying on legal, political, and cultural mechanisms such as equality, justice, democratic values, tolerance, dialogue, and forbearance, leads to the creation of an environment free from violence, hostility, conflict, and

strife among the various strata and groups of society with their diverse tastes, interests, and benefits. Of course, perpetual peace does not mean the achievement of a condition devoid of challenges, contradictions, and conflicts, because this abstract view will not find much purchase in the contentious public sphere, whether at the domestic level of societies or at the external level among different societies and nations. Rather, the goal is to devise mechanisms through which it is possible to resolve contradictions and conflicts in a civil manner and free from violence.

*Chapter Two*

# The Role and Position of Ethnic Groups in the History of Iran

## Introduction

Throughout its various historical periods, the land of Iran has been the homeland of numerous and diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and social groups. It has been described with titles such as the 'land of many ethnic groups,' the 'kingdom of many nations,' a 'multi-ethnic society' (Maghsoudi, 2003: 45), a nation with a 'mosaic structure' (Abrahamian, 2005: 25), and a 'rainbow land' (Khosravani Majd, 2021), all of which attest to the diversity and plurality of the social order of the inhabitants of this territorial expanse. Consequently, the element of the ethnic group in the history of Iran is not merely a specific characteristic but a fundamental trait whose historical role and function can be examined and re-read from the perspectives of cultural and art history, social history, the history of the formation and evolution of collective identity, politics and power, and religious-sectarian relations.

This chapter, while examining the role and position of ethnic groups in the history of Iran, endeavours to provide the historical cognitive foundations of the main subject of the research. Therefore, topics such as the analysis of the relationship between ethnic groups and the historical identity of Iran, the historical

genealogy, geographical distribution, and cultural and economic characteristics of ethnic groups in Iran, the emergence of the ethnic issue and ethnic movements and uprisings in contemporary Iran, and a critical re-reading of the prevailing views in Iranian ethnological studies are addressed in this chapter.

The use of the term 'ethnic group' for Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Baloch, and Persians in this study is accompanied by certain considerations, a few points of which need to be mentioned. Ethnic studies, apart from the requirements of academic standards in the definitions and application of scientific terms and concepts, are among those social sciences whose findings and content receive feedback in the public sphere, especially among ethnic communities. One of the most debated and contentious issues in Iranian ethnic studies is the application of the concept of 'ethnic group' to Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Baloch, Turkmen, and others. This is because some researchers and a wide range of individuals belonging to these identity groups believe that their macro-collective unit is a 'nation' and not an 'ethnic group'. Therefore, the use of the term 'ethnic group' is considered by them to be a form of reductionism which, with due consideration of historical background, cultural and linguistic systems, group experiences, and racial and territorial indices, seeks to confine and annex their collective identity within Iranian identity and the Iranian nation, which will ultimately lead to the weakening of their national rights and their true status. Hence, the view of the 'ethnic group/nation' dichotomy from the aforementioned perspective is often met with strong and critical positions and reactions. The said research, while acknowledging the requirements of scientific standards and the considerations of the public opinion of ethnic groups regarding the use of the concepts of ethnic group and nation, believes that Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Baloch, Turkmen, etc., in terms of identity indices such as language, culture, historical background, shared memories, etc., potentially possess the components of a nation, and the only absent element of nationality in the nature of their identity is a formal territory, state, and national sovereignty. Therefore, in this research, the non-application of the title of nation to Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Baloch, and Turkmen is due to the lack of the political-sovereign element that constitutes a nation, namely, a state and national sovereignty.

Another important point relates to the literature of ethnology and ethnic studies about Iran, within which the use of the title 'ethnic group' for Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Baloch, Turkmen, etc., has a relatively established position.

Naturally, any conceptual initiative and innovation in this area first requires a set of theoretical and conceptual measures to prevent referential and conceptual confusion and ambiguity in these cases. In addition, contrary to the pejorative angle and view of the ethnic group, the concept of an ethnic group, in terms of its semantic denotation, is a historical and more authentic concept compared to a nation, because a nation in some of its forms, apart from a territorial unit with formal borders and the system ruling over it, lacks the other components of national identity. In this research, the index of official territorial geography and the system possessing the exercise of sovereignty over it is the line of distinction between the concepts of 'ethnic group' and 'nation', and on this basis, Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Baloch, and Turkmen in Iran are considered ethnic groups, while most of them potentially have the capacity for national identity, and some of them at the global level have national units (nation-states) and are considered nations.

## Ethnic Groups and the Historical Identity of Iran

The study of collective identity is one of the most challenging topics in the field of human and social research, where defining and delimiting the scope of this concept and its derivatives, even in the most abstract and neutral states, faces serious challenges and considerations. This matter, in general, is rooted in two very important and fundamental factors: the first factor relates to the fluid and dynamic nature of collective identity and its plural and diverse instances in human societies, a characteristic that causes the presentation of a clear and comprehensive definition and picture to ultimately face criticism and challenges. The second factor is the often-contentious impact of the findings of identity studies on the thoughts and minds of the audiences belonging to the collective groups being studied. Therefore, any research in this field requires the observance of a set of scientific and methodological principles coupled with considerations of the public sphere. When the analysis of macro-collective identity and its relationship with ethnic identities in nearly three thousand years of the eventful history of the land of Iran is the subject of study, especially in the current era where we are witnessing the increasing growth of disputes of collective and group identities at various levels, including the ethno-national identity struggles, the importance

and sensitivity of the subject is doubly increased. Therefore, in this section, while refraining from theoretical debates about identity and ethnicity in the history of Iran, an effort is made to present a concise and comprehensive descriptive-historical reading of the subject. The main objective is focused on presenting a dynamic and transparent picture of the course of the formation and evolution of the historical identity of Iran and the role and position of ethnic identity in this process.

## The Ancient Era: Formation of the First Veil of Iranian Identity

The history of the land of Iran, from the ancient era to the contemporary period, is the eventful history of the collective life of numerous ethnic groups, who have played a pivotal role in the formation and evolution of the historical identity of Iran in various periods. According to most historical narratives, the turning point in the formation of identity in the ancient history of Iran is marked by the arrival of Aryan migrant peoples from the region of Siberia and the steppes north of the Caucasus to the Iranian plateau. These nomadic migrants, due to the unfavourable conditions of their own ecosystem, in search of a more suitable climate for the continuation of their collective life, left their original homeland and, through vast and long waves of migration, gradually made their way to regions of the Iranian plateau, the Indian subcontinent, and parts of present-day Europe.

Like many other vast and extensive historical migrations, the entry of Aryan peoples into the inhabited and habitable regions of the Iranian plateau—which was itself the dwelling place of older peoples and the cradle of more ancient civilisations such as the Mitanni, Lullubi, Gutian, and Kassite peoples and the Elamite civilisation—initially took place in the form of scattered and small groups and was mainly accompanied by the absorption and assimilation of the guest peoples into the host environment. However, with the increase in the rate of migration, which was sometimes accompanied by invasion, bloodshed, and ultimately, the subjugation of the native inhabitants of these regions, parts of the Iranian plateau became the dwelling place of newly arrived peoples (Bayani, 2012: 25-27), who named it 'Airyanem Vaejah' (Rezaei Baghbidi, 2009: 9), meaning the land of the Aryans, and established their collective life in this expanse.

The settlement of Aryan peoples in regions of the Iranian plateau, part of which

includes the geography of present-day Iran, and the beginning of the biological and cultural life of these newly arrived peoples in their new homeland, is the origin of the dominant historical narrative of the history of ancient Iran (705 BCE – 651 CE), whose political turning points are the formation of the Median kingdom, the Achaemenid Empire, the Seleucid and Parthian dynasties, and the Sasanian Empire.

The most important Aryan peoples residing on the Iranian plateau were the Medes and the Persians, who had a high degree of cultural and linguistic affinity and played an effective historical role in laying the foundations of governance and the cultural-social order of Iran in the ancient era. Among the Aryan peoples, the Medes, after creating an internal union among their separate tribes and groups, who were mainly settled in the western and northwestern regions of Iran, in the Zagros mountains, pioneered the establishment of the first Aryan monarchy around 705 BCE, which they ruled until 550 BCE. The formation of the Median kingdom is one of the turning points in the history of Iran, which heralded the rise of the Aryans towards dynastic power, a movement that continued thereafter and shaped the political and cultural life on the Iranian plateau and in other regions and territories under their rule (Yarshater, 2010: 225).

Cyrus the Achaemenid, after taking over the leadership of the Persians, who were settled in the southwestern regions of Iran, ended the Median kingdom in 550 BCE and established the Achaemenid Empire. After numerous conquests during the reign of Cyrus and other kings of this dynasty, especially Darius the Great and Xerxes, this led to the establishment of the largest empire of the ancient world up to that time, whose territorial expanse at its peak of power stretched from the Balkans and Eastern Europe in the west to the Indus Valley in the east (Taagepera, 1979). The great Achaemenid Empire ended in 330 BCE with the invasion of Alexander the Great and the defeat of Darius III, the last Achaemenid king. With the dominance of Alexander and his successors over Iran, until about 250 BCE, a Seleucid rule with a Hellenistic culture prevailed in Iran (Yarshater, 2010: 212-224). The rise to power of the Parthians, from the Aryan peoples residing in the northeastern regions of Iran, is another chapter in the emergence of dynastic power of the Aryan peoples in the ancient era, which led to the establishment of the Parthian Empire and the dissolution of Seleucid rule. The Parthians ruled for about 471 years (247 BCE to 224 CE) and at their peak of power, ruled over a vast part of West and Central Asia (Dąbrowa, 2016).

The last royal dynasty of ancient Iran was the Sasanian Empire, which came to power in 224 CE after defeating the Parthians and, until their dissolution in 651 CE following the Islamic conquests, established a relatively coherent and unified empire for 427 years, which ruled over a vast geography of West Asia and was one of the great powers of its time alongside the Roman-Byzantine Empire.

The Sasanians, who had risen from the Aryan peoples of the land of Pars, beyond establishing political and military dominance, founded a political and cultural-civilisational order whose most prominent features were the institutionalisation of the political structure and governmental powers and the construction of their desired cultural system with the official recognition of the Mazdean religion and the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) language (Christensen, 1988: 69).

The nearly fourteen centuries of the ancient history of the land of Iran (from 705 BCE to 651 CE), apart from the period of Seleucid dominance, was the arena of the rule and the rotation of the reins of power among the dynasties attributed to the Aryan peoples, who, in various forms of rule from local kingships to empires, ruled not only over Iran but often also over some of the near and distant countries. Regarding the dominant culture and civilisation of this era, several stable indices can be mentioned, such as the rituals and beliefs of Mazdeism and Zoroastrianism (Yamauchi, 2011), the Proto-Iranian languages derived from the Indo-Iranian branch, architectural works, and some principles of governance and administration of relatively vast territories. In the literature of the ancient history of Iran, the Aryans are referred to as the Aryan people and Aryan peoples, which, considering the coordinates of their collective life and their original homeland, their nomadic way of life, their relatively large population, and their settlement in regions with a vast and scattered geography, the application of the title ‘people’ to them is mainly acceptable in its very basic definitions, meaning human groups with a common way of life and linguistic origin.

The various Aryan peoples and branches residing on the Iranian plateau, alongside older peoples such as the Gutians, Lullubis, Mitannis, and Kassites, were the inhabitants of the land of Iran in the first period of the ancient era. This ethnic composition was always subject to change and transformation due to two important factors: first, the geography of Iran, which throughout history has been a crossroads between the East and West and the northern and southern regions, and has always, in various forms of mass migration, invasion, refuge, etc., been receptive to newly arrived peoples and human groups. Second,

governments have always been an effective factor in the change, composition, and displacement of ethnic and group populations through the expansion of their own sphere of power. Therefore, in the ancient periods of Iranian history, alongside the relative political and cultural dominance of the Aryan peoples, the life of other peoples and human groups also continued, and along with the Zoroastrian and Mazdean religion, mythological beliefs and religions and sects such as Judaism, Mithraism, Buddhism, Christianity, Manichaeism, Mazdakism, and Zurvanism also had followers (Ghadani, 2002: 92-104). From a linguistic point of view, simultaneously with the Proto-Iranian languages belonging to the Indo-European linguistic branch, languages such as Scythian, Elamite, Greek, Aramaic, Parthian Pahlavi, Avestan, Babylonian, etc., were also common.

In the ancient era of Iran, apart from the period of the prevalence of Hellenistic civilisation resulting from the hundred-year dominance of the Seleucids, which was accompanied by the dominance and dissemination of Hellenistic and Greek cultural, linguistic, and architectural elements, in other periods, forms of Aryan culture and language were often dominant. In amalgamation with the geography of the land of Iran and the common historical experiences of these peoples under the rule of mostly dynasties attributed to Aryan families, they gradually acquired distinct and unique components that are defined and formulated in the prevailing historiography under the title of the ancient identity of Iran.[1] Of course, it should not be forgotten that the culture and language of ancient Iran, known as Aryan, should not create an ahistorical perception implying the existence of a widespread and common territorial culture and language, the achievement of which was fundamentally impossible in such a historical context. Rather, the denotation of this matter is more about some general lines of linguistic and cultural commonalities, which were also mainly not continuous, because the change of governments, which was accompanied by the internal power play between the ruling families and peoples, caused the new power groups to take the most action to eliminate the cultural and civilisational achievements of the previous rulers. This is evident in the change of the Parthian rule to the Sasanian, as the Sasanians made the utmost effort to destroy the legacy of the Parthians in

1. For more information, see: Pirnia, H. (2012). History of Ancient Iran (3 vols.). Tehran: Negah Publishing; Diakonoff, M. (2001). History of Ancient Iran (R. Arbab, Trans.). Elmi va Farhangi Publications, 2nd ed.; Christensen, A. (1988). The State and Court of the Sasanian Empire (M. Minovi, Trans.). Asatir Publishing.

the land of Iran (Mahmoudabadi, 2000: 187-204).

According to many Iranologists and historical researchers of ancient Iran, the clearest and most coherent arrangement of Iranian identity in the ancient era appeared in the period of the Sasanian Empire. The Sasanians, after consolidating the foundations of political and military power, by stabilising the borders of their territory under the title of Iranshahr, took steps towards establishing a cultural and civilisational order based on the official religion of Zoroastrianism, the Pahlavi script, and a relatively defined political geography. As Ahmad Ashraf says: 'The concept of 'Iranian identity' in its true sense emerges in the third century AD in the Sasanian era' (Ashraf, 2004: 15).

Regardless of the debates and different interpretations about presenting clear and decisive formulations of Iranian identity in the ancient era and the criticism of imposing some impossible identity propositions on the coordinates of the collective life of that period, the ancient era can be considered the era of the formation of identity foundations and the emergence of the first form of Iranian identity and the identity of ethnic groups in Iran. Considering the historical documents and interpretations about the ancient periods of Iranian history, in sum, it can be concluded that the relationship between ethnic identity and historical identity in the ancient periods of Iranian history is a multifaceted, fluid relationship and, due to the limitation of sources and documents concerning social history, is somewhat ambiguous and non-transparent. Unlike some one-dimensional and ideological interpretations, it is neither the result of a gradual, evolutionary, and continuous accumulation with the participation of all ethnic and group elements nor the outcome of a collective self-conscious action. Rather, it is the result of the contradictions, conflicts, wars, migrations, assimilations, eliminations and absorptions, compromises and peaces, and the amalgamation and intermingling of all the material and spiritual elements influenced by the collective life of all the human groups residing in this land. Therefore, the history of ancient Iran is the material for the interpretation of numerous and sometimes contradictory readings and narratives that are presented about the course of the formation of Iranian identity and the role and position of ethnic groups in it. These contentious narratives, which are presented in the form of a wide range of views from believing in an ancient and primordial national and territorial identity to its complete and total rejection and denial, are among the challenging categories that play a pivotal role in some of the contemporary discursive disputes and

debates about national and ethnic identity in Iran.

## The Emergence of Iranian-Islamic Identity and the Fusion of Identity Horizons

The collapse of the Sasanian Empire at the hands of the Muslims and the entry of Iran into the newly established geography of the Islamic Caliphate in the year 31 AH (651 CE) marked the end of the ancient era and the beginning of a new period titled 'Iran in the Islamic Period.' This new era, which began as a result of the conquests of the Arab Muslims and their dominance over the land of Iran, was not just a change at the level of rulers and the system of governance, but it marked a new era in all individual and social dimensions and the material and spiritual spheres of the lives of the people of this land. The newly emerged religion of Islam, by presenting an extensive, complete, and universal programme for all worldly and otherworldly affairs with the claim of the salvation of mankind, took steps towards establishing a comprehensive community under the title of the 'Islamic Ummah' (Quran, Surah Al-Imran, Verse 110). Despite the precedence and dominance of the Arab Muslims, it also included people belonging to other diverse lands, races, cultures, and languages, who had come under the geography of the Islamic Caliphate either as a result of military conquests and Islamic raids based on military force or through invitation and methods of peace and compromise.

Thus, the dominance of the religion of Islam and the system of the Islamic Caliphate, with the transformation it brought about in the pillars of governance, religion and public beliefs, social and class relations, language and cultural indices, and the manifestations and material effects of collective life, posed a serious challenge to the pillars of Iranian culture and civilisation, weakened the interconnected foundations of Iranian identity, and disrupted its integrity (Kabiri, 2010: 77). This is because with the dominance of Islam and the Islamic Caliphate, the most important components of the historical identity of Iran at that time, consisting of territorial integrity, the Zoroastrian religion, and the Persian language, faced dissolution and eclipse. The borders of the land of Iran collapsed with its integration into the geography of the Islamic world, and Iran became a part of the territory of the Islamic Caliphate, which was administered under the command of governors appointed by the caliphate apparatus. The Zoroastrian religion, as one of the pillars of the identity of ancient Iran, began to decline

with the dominance of the religion of Islam, and its followers gradually, for reasons such as the influence of Islamic teachings with the claim of eliminating discrimination, piety-centeredness, and being trans-racial (Arnold, 1979: 299 & 152), and acceptance resulting from surrender in war, or to escape the severe consequences of not accepting the religion of Islam, such as paying the jizya and the social pressures of being non-Muslim, gradually accepted the religion of Islam (Moftekhari and Zamani, 2011: 53). Although Islam considered the Zoroastrian religion to be among the People of the Book, the process of its decline and marginalisation accelerated to such an extent that in the first centuries of the Hijra, the followers of the Zoroastrian religion became a small and limited minority. The Persian language, which was considered another of the foundations of the ancient identity of Iran, faced a serious challenge in the face of the Arabic language, which was the language of revelation, the Quran, and worship in Islam.

The intermingling of Islam with the identity of the people of Iran and the nature of its territorial history was the beginning of an unbreakable current that has continued to the present era. Islam in the last 14 centuries has brought about profound changes in the political, economic, and social structures of Iran and after its establishment, it has left its deep mark and sign on the history and historical identity of this land (Kabiri, 2010: 78) and has given direction to the collective identity of Iranians and their way of looking at the world and their behaviour and social and political structure. In such a way that a significant part of the identity-forming elements of Iranians has been nourished by Islam. Islam influenced Iranian identity from several dimensions and provided the grounds for the transformation of its foundations. The first aspect was the change in the belief and cultural foundation, which generally led to the dissolution of a large part of the ancient culture of Iran. The second dimension relates to the geographical changes and the integration of Iran into a whole called the territory of the Islamic Caliphate. Another very important dimension was the supremacy of the Arab element in Islamic societies. The Arabs, mostly in the newly conquered lands, with reliance on military-political power and also claims related to the affinity of Islam with the Arab origin and the Arabic language, acquired a kind of sense of superiority and pride. On the other hand, the opening of the doors of the land of Iran to the Arabs led to migrations by some Arab tribes to near and far points of Iran from Kufa to Khorasan, parallel to the conquests with security-military and

welfare purposes based on the goal of achieving more favourable living facilities and receiving iqta' (Lambton, 1983: 115), as well as seeking refuge and escaping the internal conflicts of Arab society. Although according to historical evidence, these migrations were not so numerous in terms of quantity as to bring about significant changes in the demographic composition, alongside the changes influenced by the spread of the religion of Islam and the Arabic language, a new and powerful ethnic element was introduced into the political-social relations of Iran, which, despite its gradual absorption and assimilation into Iranian society, left its effects on the face of the social life of Iran (Dehghanpour and Bayat, 2012) and transformed the Arabs, who had a history of existence in the land of Iran since the ancient era, into a stronger social element. Another consequence of these new conditions was the opening of the borders of the land of Iran to migrants from different regions, which until this time, due to the strict protection of the frontiers and borders, was either not possible or was difficult to achieve. An opportunity whose outcomes in later periods led to more profound changes in the demographic arrangement of the inhabitants of the land of Iran and its identity evolution.

Thus, the entry of Islam into Iran, by providing the grounds for the migration of Arabs and ending the class system of the Sasanian era, provided the possibility for a kind of social mobility in Iran. The Arab migrants in Iran, in a cultural exchange, gradually accepted some features of Iranian culture (Ibn Hawqal, 1987: 113). Of course, the process of acculturation was not one-sided, and the people of the conquered lands also benefited from some of the cultural elements of the Muslim Arabs, including the Arabic language and especially the element of religion, of which the Arab migrants were in any case the carriers. The intensity of influence on some new Muslims was so great that they not only completely abandoned the religion of their fathers, but some of them became so hostile to their past that they spoke ill of it, even changed their names and lineage, and some of them traced their lineage back to the Arabs, including Ishaq ibn Ibrahim (Mas'udi, 1986: 101). Another consequence of the migration of Arabs to Iran was the spread of the nomadic and pastoral way of life, which in the settled societies based on agricultural livelihood of most parts of Iran had been somewhat marginalised and, with the arrival of the Arabs who considered it a source of pride, it became widespread again; although the Arab migrants later tended towards a settled life.

Thus, the history of Iran in the first two centuries of the Hijra has been subject to different and sometimes contradictory interpretations by historians and Iranologists; some have referred to it with titles such as the era of collapse, interregnum, and silence,[1] and some others consider it the era of liberation from the limited and closed political-social and cultural system of the Sasanians, which led to the revival and flourishing of Iran and its high and prominent participation in the establishment and strengthening of Islamic culture and civilisation.[2] But what is noteworthy from the perspective of ethnic relations and the historical identity of Iran is the powerful entry of the Arab element into the relations of the collective life of Iran with a nomadic way of life and the Arabic language, which thereafter became the religious and belief language of the entire Iranian society, and moreover, Iran was not the territory of a single government for many centuries, but was alternately the arena of the simultaneous rule of multiple governments, which, according to Ahmad Ashraf, for about 9 centuries, that is, from the entry of Islam until the rise of the Safavids, was deprived of political and ethnic unity (Ashraf, 1994: 535).

In the period from the second to the fifth century of the Hijra, Iran witnessed the emergence of local Iranian governments such as the Tahirids, Samanids, Saffarids, and Iranian movements including the uprisings of Abu Muslim Khorasani, Behafarid, Sunbadh the Magian, Ustad Sis, Babak, and others under the title of Shu'ubiyya (Momtahen, 2017), which had as their goals the preservation and reconstruction of the historical identity of Iran, the revival of the Dari language, and religious reform. A cursory look at these uprisings and the role of Iranians in overthrowing the Umayyad Caliphate, with the claim of returning the Islamic government to the family of the Prophet, shows the establishment of a composite Iranian-Islamic identity among Iranians for opposition to the Arab monarchy (Ashraf, 2016: 31-80; & Goudarzi, 2008: 36). This period, which in Iranian historiography is referred to with titles such as the 'Iranian Renaissance' and the 'Golden Age,' was possessed of considerable literary and cultural achievements that played an effective role in the establishment and consolidation of the new

1. Zarrinkoub, A. (n.d.). Two Centuries of Silence. Amirkabir Publications; Ansari, M. (n.d.). From Bedouinism to Empire; Shafa, S. (n.d.). After 1400 Years (2 vols.).

2. See: Browne, E. G. (n.d.). A Literary History of Persia. Morvarid Publishing; Frye, R. N. (n.d.). The Golden Age of Persia (M. Rajabnia, Trans.). Soroush Publishing.

foundations of Iranian culture. [1]

## The Historical Identity of Iran in the Era of Turkic Rule

The period of rule by local Iranian dynasties, which Minorsky referred to as the 'Iranian Intermezzo' (Rashtiani, 2016: 125), was a relatively short era that ended with the ascendancy of Turkic dynasties and governments over the geography of Iran, ushering in a new age. The rise to power of the Turkic dynasties of the Ghaznavids, Seljuks, and Khwarazmshahs (977-1219 CE) in Iran and many other lands and countries, from Central Asia to Anatolia—which at times led to the establishment of large and powerful empires—was rooted in the extensive migration of Turkic tribes from the eastern borders to the Iranian plateau and other new territories, and their political and social role-playing in the form of tribal confederations in these new domains. For instance, the Seljuks, in the Battle of Manzikert (1071 CE), by defeating the Byzantine Empire, extended the scope of their power and their ethnic borders to Anatolia and the Levant (Emami Khoei, 2005).

The rule of the Sunni Turkic dynasties, who shrewdly benefited from the legitimacy conferred by the Caliphate system, not only marked a new era in the arena of power and politics but also in the social and cultural spheres, which are of great importance in re-examining identity transformations. Firstly, the Turks and their cultural and social attributes, including their nomadic way of life and the Turkic language, became influential elements in the land of Iran. The dominance of the Turkic dynasties in this period, despite its reliance on military-coercive superiority, gradually moved towards compromise and coexistence with other tribes and native peoples. This characteristic was also prominently manifested in the governance model of the Turkic dynasties in Iran, such that under their rule, Iran witnessed brilliant periods of cultural and linguistic flourishing. The history of literature and culture of Iran in this era is replete with literary, scientific, and philosophical figures, poets, and sages who are considered the luminaries of the history of Iran and the Persian language throughout the centuries. Alongside the dynamism and growth of the Dari Persian language in this era, in addition to the mutual influence of the language of the new migrants with the inhabitants

1. On this, see: Heravi, J. (2001). History of the Samanids (The Golden Age of Iran after Islam). Tehran: Amirkabir, 1st ed.; Minovi, M. (2021). The Iranian Renaissance. Shafiee Publications; Frye, R. N. (n.d.). The Golden Age of Persia (M. Rajabnia, Trans.). Soroush Publishing.

of different regions, one of the notable linguistic changes was the dominance of the Turkic language in the military sphere. Military affairs were in the hands of the Turkic men of the sword, and thus their vocabulary and terminology became prevalent as the language of the military sphere in successive governments in Iran (Ghazi Ozgunli, 2017: 38). Entrusting the administrative affairs of the country to eminent viziers and bureaucrats such as Khwaja Nizam al-Mulk also led to Iran witnessing one of the glorious periods of bureaucracy and a coherent administrative organisation. [1]

The presence of the Turks in the demographic and ethnic fabric of Iran marked another identity transformation in the course of the evolution of Iran's historical identity, the consequences of which were institutionalised in the racial composition and linguistic distribution of Iran. The following two couplets from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh vividly depict this historical situation:

From Iranians, Turks, and Arabs, A new race shall emerge in between. Neither peasant, nor Turk, nor Arab shall it be, Words shall be like a game. (Ferdowsi, 1960: 319)

## The Mongol Conquests and the Ruin of the Foundations of Historical Identity

The era of Turkic rule finally ended in the early second half of the 7th century AH (1219-1256 CE) after the overthrow of the Khwarazmshahs by Genghis Khan and his sons. Following the devastating Mongol invasions between 616–654 AH (1219 to 1256 CE), one of the harshest and most difficult periods of political and social life began in most regions of Iran and many other neighbouring lands. It was a period in which the lives, property, and livelihoods of the people were destroyed, and most of the cultural and civilisational infrastructures were demolished. The great calamity that befell the people of the invaded regions during the Mongol onslaught is the dominant narrative of the historical sources and documents of that era. As Ata-Malik Juvayni, the historian of the Mongol court, writes: '…especially the lands of Islam from the border of Turkestan to the farthest reaches of Syria, wherever there was a king or a local ruler or the chief

1. For more information, see: Javadi, A. (2022). Turks of Iran and Iran of Turks. Rowzaneh Publishing; Frye, R. N., et al. (2015). The Cambridge History of Iran: From the Advent of Islam to the Coming of the Seljuks (From the collapse of the Sasanian state to the coming of the Seljuks), Vol. 4 (H. Anousheh, Trans.). Amirkabir Publications.

of a city who opposed him, he, along with his family and retinue, kinsmen and strangers, was annihilated to such an extent that wherever there were a hundred thousand people, without exaggeration, not a hundred remained, and the proof of this claim is the description of the conditions of the cities…' (Ata-Malik Juvayni, 2003: 17). With the invasion of the Mongols and their relentless dominance over all parts of Iran, a period of interregnum began, comprising the collapse of all pillars of individual and collective life and the material and spiritual affairs of the entire society, which confronted the existence and collective identity with a fundamental crisis.

These invasions, in the first instance, led to a demographic crisis resulting from the slaughter, captivity, transfer, flight, and voluntary and forced migration of the inhabitants of the cities and regions under attack. Some historical reports tell of the complete destruction and depopulation of some cities and major cultural centres. Historical sources speak of massacres of several thousand people up to the genocide of millions of the inhabitants of Iranian cities, especially in Khorasan (Abbasi and Yarmohammadi, 2012: 121 & Eqbal Ashtiani, 2009: 53, 65, 82, 138, 157). The massive displacement of the population resulting from the arrival of the Mongol tribes and the forced migration of the native inhabitants, who on the one hand headed for the Indian subcontinent and China, and on the other hand took the path of Asia Minor, the Caucasus, Syria, and even Egypt (Abbasi and Yarmohammadi, 2012: 124), was another tangible consequence of this invasion. Research based on historical documents vividly depicts this situation. For example, the Mongol invasion brought about fundamental changes in the demographic composition of Khorasan, and the foundation of a significant part of the subsequent demographic composition of this region was laid in this period (Abbasi and Yarmohammadi, 2012: 134).

What remained after the devastation of the Mongols was a destroyed economic infrastructure, the eclipse of science, the stagnation of civil life, the decline of rational thought, the spread of fatalism, an increasing tendency towards Sufism and world-renunciation, and a lack of security (Boyle, 2019: 174-180). In short, it was a disintegrated society, the depiction of whose identity is a very difficult task. The prominent feature of the historical identity of the people of this era was, firstly, the quantitative demographic changes resulting from the slaughter, captivity, and forced migration of the native inhabitants and the settlement of the Mongol tribes, which led to anthropological and biological changes in

many regions. Secondly, the arrival of the nomadic Mongols led to the spread of a pastoral way of life and a nomadic existence (Petrushevsky, 2001: 455-454). Alongside the effects of groups that settled in green and strategically important communication cities for military and other purposes (Abbasi and Yarmohammadi, 2012: 131) and the ruling class that established the Ilkhanate dynasty, their language and some of their cultural indices gradually became widespread and left a tangible impact on the general culture and language of the people of Iran, including the vocabulary of the Persian language. The words that found their way into the historiographical books of the Mongol era, poems and literary works, and the titles and honorifics of the Ilkhanate period are clear examples of these linguistic impacts (Ansari-Ahmadsaraei, 2019: 10 and Bagheri Mishni, 1999: 40-42). Other dimensions of the identity changes of this situation were the migration of groups and communities from different regions of Iran to neighbouring countries from India to Syria, which led to amalgamation, coexistence, and identity assimilation with the host societies. As a result, they transferred their culture, language, and racial characteristics and provided the ground for their dissemination. For example, the extent of the presence of Khorasanis in other regions of Iran and even outside of Iran during the Mongol period was such that in some cities and regions like Baghdad, Asia Minor, and India, titles such as 'Khorasani' or 'Khorasanis' became common for individual and group identification (Abbasi and Yarmohammadi, 2012: 134). The fall of the Baghdad Caliphate at the hands of Hulagu Khan, which was considered the centre and axis of the Dar al-Islam, in fact meant that Islamic governments no longer needed to be granted political legitimacy by the caliphs. In this way, the Mongols not only did not recognise Islam as the official religion of their realm for several decades but also initially made efforts to spread Christianity in Iran. These were all signs of a fundamental transformation in the foundations of the legitimacy of the political system from the Seljuk period to the Ilkhanate period (Ashraf, 2016: 127). In fact, the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate at the hands of the Mongols and the dismantling of the Caliphate's mechanism for legitimising the rulers of Islamic lands, although it provided a fundamental transformation in the political and cultural relations of Islamic countries and political societies, including Iran, and was considered a new possibility for the process of territorial identity formation, this new opportunity, in the shadow of the consequences of the Mongol invasions and the destruction of the agents and structures of identity

formation, faced fundamental difficulties.

The transformation of the geographical concept of Iran can be considered one of the important identity phenomena in the historiography and historical geographical works of the Ilkhanate period. In the Ilkhanate period, the geographical conception of the land of Iran, for the first time after the Arab invasion, transformed into the concept that had been constructed in the Sasanian period. The main cause of this transformation was, firstly, the gathering of the various provinces of Iran in the territory of the Ilkhanids, and secondly, the decline of the Sunni fanaticism of the Ghaznavid and Seljuk Turks, who did not tolerate Iranian identity. For this reason, in historical and geographical texts before the Ilkhanids, in most cases, the provinces and territories of Islam were mentioned, while in the Ilkhanate period and after, the provinces and territories of the land of Iran were mentioned (Ashraf, 2016: 135).

## The Rule of Petty Kings and the Fragmentation of Territorial Identity

The arrival of migrants and invaders from the eastern borders and its identity consequences was not a process that ended with the establishment of the Ilkhanate Mongol rule. Rather, in later periods, it remained a fundamental factor in the political transformations and social relations of Iranian history and played a determining role in the changes of Iran's historical identity. The end of the Ilkhanate Empire in 1349 CE led to an interregnum which, in the absence of a powerful rival and successor, resulted in the disintegration of their sphere of power. Nearly twenty local and small rivals entered the scene to exercise power, who are known in the history of Iran as the 'rule of petty kings' (Muluk al-Tawa'if).

The rivals involved in this conflict were divided into three categories: the most prominent were the amirs of the various branches of the Genghisid dynasty who sought to restore centralised Mongol rule. The second group were the representatives of local dynasties or high-ranking families who had served the Ilkhanids as commanders or high-ranking state officials, as well as the leaders of powerful tribal confederations. Finally, there were other groups for whom what was important was religious adherence to Shi'i or extremist movements, not dynastic or aristocratic considerations. The power struggles between these groups continued for half a century, and the issue of the unity of the kingdom had no existence for them, and no cooperation or solidarity was seen in this regard.

The structure of most of these governments was based on limited regional and tribal relations and alliances and represented the interests of these groups, and it provided an opportunity for some local powers to conduct their governmental and bureaucratic affairs based on their regional traditions, language, and culture. Iranian society in this period also suffered severe damages and losses resulting from the constant war of the local powers. This situation continued until the emergence of another power from Central Asia named Timur a.k.a. Tamerlane and his entry into Iran, until most of these claimants submitted to his power. Iran, once again after a series of military campaigns and destructive attacks and widespread massacres, was annexed to the territory of a Turco-Mongol government (The Cambridge History of Iran: The Timurid and Safavid Periods, 2000: 11-12), which ruled in Iran from 1370 to 1507 CE. In continuation of the previous Turco-Mongol governments, they had an impact on the cultural-civilisational structure and the social system and livelihood of the native peoples, to the extent that some experts speak of a kind of Turco-Persian culture and tradition to name this historical amalgamation (Canfield, 2002).




*Diagram 2-1 Iran during the era of petty kings after the Ilkhanids*

In general, the establishment of the great states of the Seljuks, the Ilkhanate Mongols, the Timurids, and the Aq Qoyunlu Turkmens indicates the political dominance of those tribes over the land of Iran and not the establishment of a comprehensive government and the unity of the land of Iran. Nevertheless, in the view of Ahmad Ashraf, during this period of political and national interregnum, a few things remained. One is the Iranian peoples, who are recognised as 'Ajam in contrast to the Arabs and Tajik in contrast to the Turks, and a specific identity is determined for the Iranians. Another is the land of Iran, which continues in its geographical sense as the middle of the world. A third is the myths of the creation of man and the emergence of the Iranian peoples, which are mixed with Islamic legends and remain stable and help the continuity of Iranian identity. And above all and most brilliantly, the flourishing of the Dari language, which becomes the carrier and guardian of Iranian culture and identity (Ashraf, 2014: 536).

## The Safavids, Forgers of a New Iranian Identity

With the decline of the Timurids, Iran once again became an arena for the incursions of petty kings and the playground for the invasion of Turkmen tribes, which has been described as the third wave of Turkmen invasion of Iran. In the meantime, the Aq Qoyunlu gathered the scattered provinces of the land of Iran together again and in a way paved the way for the establishment of the Safavid government. It was with these preliminaries that Shah Ismail Safavi, by crushing the Aq Qoyunlu and other rivals, established the Safavid dynasty and took steps towards the revival of the historical identity of Iran (Ashraf, 2016: 143). With the rise of the Safavids, a new chapter in the formation of the historical identity of Iran began. Regardless of the various historical narratives and theoretical readings that have been presented about it, it is considered the most influential pre-modern identity transformation in the history of Iran on the emergence of a new territorial identity in contemporary Iran. In a sense, in the Safavid era, which is often considered the beginning of the new history of Iran (Matthee, 2014), with the establishment of a central government, the concept of Iran, after a nine-hundred-year interregnum, acquired political and religious determination and distinctiveness and became the foundation for the evolution and development of national identity in the modern era (Ashraf, 2014: 538).

The Safavids, by creating territorial unity in the fragmented parts of the Iranian plateau and some adjacent regions, giving official status to the Shi'i sect and the

Persian language, and strengthening the foundations of government, succeeded in overcoming several centuries of territorial discontinuity and the weakening of the elements of Iran's historical identity. By combining the ancient concepts of 'the land of Iran and the monarchy' of the Sasanian era with the teachings of the Shi'i sect and Sufi beliefs with the historical culture of Iran and some Turkic traditions, they established a new political and cultural-civilisational order. Through this, in addition to restoring the historical identity of Iran, they gave themselves a special distinction against the 'other', which was the Sunni Ottoman Empire. In the Safavid era, alongside the revival of the concept of the land of Iran, for the first time since the Sasanians, a religious basis was also created for it, and the five foundations of history, geography, politics, culture, and religion, which had been formulated and recorded in the Sasanian period, were provided for it. The choice of Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran, which coincided with the growth of the great Sunni Islamic empire in the west, east, and southeast of Iran, caused the Shi'i sect to be recognised as one of the defining factors of Iranian identity in the Islamic world (Ashraf, 2016: 144).

Defenders of the discourse of 'the continuity of Iranian historical identity' and even in some readings 'the continuity of Iranian national identity,' mainly claim that Iranian identity, in its unified political, ethnic, religious, linguistic, temporal, and spatial sense, which has similarities to the concept of national identity in the modern era, enters the history of Iran in the third century AD by the Sasanian kings. After a nine-century interregnum, this identity, in its entire political, religious, and cultural integrity, is revived again by the efforts of the Safavid kings and with the help of the Shi'i sect and with the sword of the warrior Turkmen tribes (Ashraf, 1994: 530-531). This claim is debatable and criticisable from two aspects: first, the positions of the ruling dynasties and the degree of convergence and divergence of the foundations of their politics with the historical identity of Iran are not necessarily synonymous with the success of these policies and the achievement of their goals. As many researchers and historians of the Safavid era have pointed out, the Safavid dynasty, despite the special position it had in the revival of the territorial unity of the protected domains of Iran and the formation of its distinct identity, in the end, its achievement not only did not have much continuity but also, as they claim, was not comprehensive and all-encompassing. As Rudi Matthee points out in this regard: 'The Safavid state was able to centralise its organisation, but it could not remedy the political, social, and

economic division of society. Until the twentieth century, the centralisation of power faced major obstacles, and in the first place, the natural environment caused the slowness and difficulty of communications… In the early eighteenth century, one-third of the Safavid subjects were Sunnis. Iran was and is a multilingual country, and at that time, as today, people spoke several languages, from Persian and Kurdish to Turkish and Arabic. While the Safavid shahs usually spoke Azeri Turkish, the mother tongue of the urban elites and the official administrative and political language throughout the country was Persian. The Safavids, in what was their greatest political achievement, tied religion and territory together by prescribing the Twelver Shi'i sect for all their realm. Shi'ism, which was the religion of a minority of Muslims, gave cohesion to the internal unity of the Iranian state by creating a distinction for it. Despite the fact that this unity was never complete' (Matthee, 2020: 23-47).

On the other hand, national identity as a self-conscious and even unconscious collective identity structure referring to a wide range of individuals in society is a modern phenomenon, although collective territorial and cultural identity is a historical possibility that can be applied to some eras of Iranian history. Matthee, in criticising some modern readings of identity in the Safavid era, writes: 'To recognise the Safavid era as an important period in Iranian history is one thing, and to consider it a destined teleological chapter of a nationalist epic narrative is another. To speak of a nation-state in the case of early modern Iran in the modern sense of the term would of course be out of place. Solidarity and loyalty were to family, clan, and religion, not to any abstract political concept. Political solidarity was subject to tribe and lineage and rarely went beyond the birthplace and habitat. However, Iran in the late Safavid period was a contiguous territorial entity, or at least had a very distinct territorial core' (Matthee, 2020: 6).

The new identity order of the Safavid era, which was formed in opposition to the 'other' named the Ottoman Empire, and inevitably established the Shi'i sect against the Sunni sect as one of the main pillars of its identity structure, was a policy that, given the religious diversity of Iranian society in the Safavid era and the fact that despite the efforts of the government, about one-third of the inhabitants of Iran and the Safavid realm remained Sunni, created a kind of identity divergence within itself that had serious political and social consequences in different historical periods. This policy in the Safavid era, despite the serious conflict between the Safavids and the Ottomans and Uzbeks, ultimately led to

the Sunni Afghans revolting and overthrowing the Safavid state. The lack of support from the Sunni Kurds for the Safavid government in some conflicts was another aspect of this religious policy. In later periods of history, specifically the contemporary period, religious conflicts, especially the Shia-Sunni conflicts, have created one of the main areas of identity challenge in Iran, which in some cases, as a result of convergence with ethnic identity, has led to the deepening of the national identity crises in Iran.

## From the Safavids to the Qajars: An Era of Political Instability and Identity Fragmentation

With the overthrow of the Safavids by the Afghan rebels, a period of political and social turmoil once again prevailed over the lands under their rule. With the genius of Nader Shah Afshar and under his leadership, territorial unity was once again established under a single rule in an area even larger than the Safavid realm. But this success, which was solely based on the genius and high military talent of Nader Shah Afshar, became a short-lived state that soon gave way to a restless situation accompanied by endless power struggles. Finally, in the absence of a powerful rival, it was divided among the claimants to power of the Afsharids (1736-1796 CE) and subsequently the Zands, and a situation of petty kings and khans prevailed that continued until the rise of the Qajars.

Among the important points of Nader's policies regarding the discussions related to identity is his religious policy, which led to the lack of support for Shi'ism as the official religion, because he believed that Shi'ism caused conflict between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, and his army was composed of Sunni and Shia forces (Ward, 2014: 52). Therefore, alongside the four schools of Sunni Islam, he recognised the Ja'fari school as the fifth official school of Sunni Islam (Avery, 1991: 35-36). Some accounts even tell of his conversion to the Sunni sect (Hanaway, 2004: 69). Nader Shah, by abandoning doctrinal differences and choosing a policy of religious tolerance and forbearance, sought to reduce the level of conflict with the Ottoman Empire and to pursue his conquests and domestic policies with greater ease. According to Lockhart, the situation of the people of Iran during the Afsharid rule was terrible due to wars, rebellions, famine, plague, and the destruction of homes and livelihoods. Malcolm writes in 1815 that approximately one million people lost their lives in the Afghan invasion. According to estimates, the population of Iran at that time was between

6 and 10 million people. In the meantime, the urban population suffered the most, and the major cities of Iran lost two-thirds and even more than two-thirds of their population (Foran, 2013: 126-127).

After Nader's death, not only identity but also territorial integrity became unstable. His vast empire disintegrated along ethnic and tribal lines, and his colourful army melted away, and its members returned to their homes or tried to impose themselves on a suitable environment somewhere in the former territory of Iran. The political power of the country also lost its centralisation. Independent regions were created on the borders of Iran (Foran, 2013: 136-137). Iran became a scene of war and conflict among the khans. The conflict between Alimardan Khan, Karim Khan, Fath-Ali Khan, Agha Mohammad Khan, and dozens of other khans, each from a different tribe and clan, shed each other's blood as if they did not live in a single land (Amini, 2021).

The Zand period (1750-1794 CE) was another era of political instability and the continuation of multilateral power struggles. As a result of the increasing crises arising from the lack of security and the decline of the collective livelihood and the economic-cultural life of the people of Iran in the period after the fall of the Safavids, social and territorial identity was also subjected to the consequences of this fragmented and unstable situation. The most important aspect of this was the marginalisation of a narrative of Iranian identity that was constructed and promoted in the Safavid power apparatus. One of the clear aspects of the conflicts of the Afshar and Zand eras is the emergence of local claimants with different regional and ethnic origins who, according to the arrangement of the territorial space, relied most on the local and ethnic power elements attributed to themselves. However, this important principle should not be overlooked that in the pre-modern era, the basis of the social and political system of Iran was based on the tribal-clan element, and the ethnic matter was more a secondary characteristic that could at times have a greater congruence with the relations arising from the tribal-clan system. Malcolm's classification of the 'self and other' within the Zand dynasty well illustrates this fluid and unstable situation. Malcolm, describing the difficult conditions prevailing in Iran at the time of Karim Khan's rise to power, divides the internal 'other' of the Zand Khan into four categories: The first category: Iranian tribes who lived in tents and migrated between summer and winter pastures, had a military and nomadic disposition, and were always a source of fear and terror for the sultans. The second category:

Tatar, Turk, and Turkmen tribes who would all unite in all the changes of the dynasties of sultans that occurred in Iran. The third category: the inhabitants of cities and farmers who were not warriors, but in times of need, took up arms to defend their city and honour. The fourth category: Arab tribes and clans who had occupied the areas between the mountains and the shores of the Persian Gulf (Malcolm, 2000: 516-519).

In the Zand era, the index for distinguishing identity was determined solely based on the position and orientation of the tribes, ethnic groups, groups, and forces towards the person of Karim Khan and the core of the Zand power. Many of the internal forces are included among the 'other', of which many examples are reflected in the historiography of the Zand era. As Nami Isfahani, the historian of Tarikh-i Giti-gusha, attacks some of the members of the Zand dynasty who caused anarchy and internal disorder as political and internal 'others'. Nami Isfahani calls the various ethnic groups of Iran by ugly titles and epithets; he addresses the Turkmens with epithets like 'savage-natured', 'savage-mannered', 'beast-mannered', and 'the beast sect'. He also calls the Lurs of Kohgiluyeh 'savage-natured, beast-dispositioned, and fox-like deceivers', whom Karim Khan punished. He frequently uses the simile of beasts in describing the people of Tabarian. He calls the people of Urmia insects created from the desert and mountains with different religions and even attacks these people with the title 'the ominous clan' and 'the accursed people'. Nami Isfahani refers to the Afghans, who were Sunnis, as a 'religious other' and calls them 'accursed'. He considers the battle of Iran with the Afghans as a battle between Islam and infidelity. He considers fighting the Afghans as a jihad against the infidels and being killed as martyrdom. The author calls the Iranian forces against the Afghans 'ghazi' and refers to the Afghans as 'infidels' and 'the accursed tree' (Nami Isfahani, 1984: 28-29, 58, 71, 105, 44). In the Zand period, the 'self' was influenced by the tribal structure, ethnicities, languages, and various sub-cultures. Also, the concept of the 'other' is defined through the process of externalisation and demonisation of the internal and external actors present in different historical periods according to the ruling value, religious, and political components of the period (Amini, 2021: 48).

During the rule of Karim Khan, Khorasan was handed over to the Afsharid dynasty, and the Caucasus was almost ignored, and in practice, the territory of Iran was limited to the central and southern regions of Iran, in which regions

the claimants to power were constantly in conflict. The Qajars in the north, the Afghans in the west, the Afshars in the west and centre, and in other parts of Iran, the struggle for power continued and took on a more complicated situation (Hedayti, 1955: 6-7). The territorial disintegration and fragmentation of the spheres of power, endless conflicts, and the dominance of nomadic tribal forces over the guilds and urban groups, the decline of the economic situation and the indices of collective livelihood, in the period of petty kings between the collapse of the Safavids and the rise of the Qajars, from the perspective of social and territorial identity transformations, led to the collapse of the identity structure of the Safavid era. Most ethnic and racial groups in the composition of the tribal forces found the opportunity to be present in the struggles to achieve power. The change in the arrangement of the tribal forces attributed to different ethnic groups was another consequence of the post-Safavid period, which provided an opportunity for some of the marginalised tribes and clans to make their presence felt. The main supporters of Karim Khan, namely the Kurds and Lurs of Iran, were employed in the standing army, and the administration of their regions was entrusted to them. The tribes that were not favoured had their power reduced at the request of the government. Some also achieved independence in their own place because the coercive means of the central government were insufficient, or the central government did not pay attention to their desire for independence (Perry, 1979: 228-9, 235-6 & Lambton, 1977: 12, cited in Foran, 2013: 140).

## The Qajar Era: A Transition from Traditional to Modern Identity

In the power struggles of the final years of the Zand era, it was the Qajars who succeeded in creating a unified tribal network and, by dominating strategic regions, gained ascendancy over other tribes. Under the leadership of Agha Mohammad Khan, they ended the era of petty kings, established the Qajar government, and once again imposed a unified rule over the lands of Iran. The origin and nature of the Qajar government, like most of its predecessors, were based on the tribal system and clan relations, and their method of governance was also shaped on this basis. As Ahmad Ashraf notes, until the late Qajar period, when the central government was administered in an imperial manner and interfered little in the internal affairs of the provinces and vilayets, the same traditional Iranian identity was an accepted matter among the Iranian ethnic groups. In most regions, a small number of central government officials were in charge, and most local

affairs were managed by the influential figures of each locality (Ashraf, 1994: 540). Ervand Abrahamian writes about the degree of independence and authority of tribal chiefs and khans in the Qajar era: 'They were the real kings among their own tribes, implementing their own governance and laws without the interference of foreign officials. They collected special taxes for themselves and were only nominally and ostensibly subordinate to the central government. Sometimes this subordination to the government was manifested in the form of sending a small share to the royal treasury' (Abrahamian, 1974: 2). From the perspective of ethnic relations as well, the ethnic groups of Iran, which were organised in the framework of a tribal-clan social structure, continued their existence as in previous periods (Foran, 2013: 211) and, according to the exigencies of the time, lived within their closed local culture and economy without much dependence on the central government or even other peripheral regions.

It is necessary to note that the tribal organisation was not exclusive to the pastoralist way of life; rural and even urban organisations also resembled tribal organisations. The inhabitants of some villages, especially in the Kurdish, Lur, and Baloch-inhabited regions, were former nomadic groups who, despite abandoning the tent-dwelling lifestyle, had preserved their tribal networks. For example, the Kurds of West Azarbaijan were divided into fifteen tribes, seventy-five clans, and nine hundred sub-clans. Therefore, the inhabitants of those villages resembled nomadic groups, and their rural lands were still considered tribal group lands (Abrahamian, 2005: 27 & 29). Regarding the demographic structure of the inhabitants of Iran in the first half of the Qajar rule, a survey attributed to the year 1850 divides the distribution and composition of the ten-million-strong population of Iran into four major ethnic groups as follows: Iranians (Persians, Kurds, Baloch, Mazandaranis, Gilaks, Bakhtiaris, Lurs, Talysh, Hazaras, Afghans, and others); Turks (Azeris, Qashqais, Shahsevans, Turkmens, Timurids, Afshars, Jamshidis, Qajar Bayats, etc.); Arabs and non-Muslims (Assyrians, Armenians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Baha'is). From the examination of the frequency distribution of the four ethnic groups, it is inferred that Iranians constituted 64%, Turks 29%, Arabs 4%, and non-Muslims 3% of the total population of the country (Abrahamian, 2005: 16). The majority of this population, both nomadic and settled, were organised in a tribal and clan structure. Most researchers divide the tribes and clans of Iran in the said period into 5 large groups as follows: 1. The group of Kurds and Lurs; 2. The group

of Turkic-speaking tribes and clans; 3. The group of tribes and clans of Sistan and Balochestan; 4. The group of Turkmens of the Gorgan plain; 5. The group of Arabic-speaking clans (Tayebi, 1999: 316-355). Considering the grouping and ethnic distribution, it can be said that the tribes and clans had a specific geographical origin and base in the land of Iran (Akbari, 2005: 14).

The diverse linguistic geography in this period is another testament to the diversity and mosaic structure of Iranian society. According to the brief and general report of the book Bustan al-Siyaha in the year 1247 AH (1831 CE), the linguistic geographical distribution of Iran was as follows: 'The people of Iraq [Ajam], Fars, Khorasan, Kerman, and Khuzestan are generally Persian-speaking; the people of Shirvan, Arran, and Armenia and Azarbaijan are Turkic-speaking, and the inhabitants of Arab Iraq and its environs speak the Arabic language. The inhabitants of Mazandaran and Gilan each have their own specific language; the people of Kurdistan and Luristan each speak their own separate languages, and the people of Georgia and Balochestan, the Afghan tribe, the mountains of Kashan, and the villages of Isfahan each have their own specific language and separate tongue' (Shirvani, n.d.: 155). Based on the diverse and pluralistic social, economic, religious, and cultural-linguistic structure of Iranian society in this period, the collective and group identities influenced by it were also mainly manifested within a network of tribal, ethnic, religious-sectarian, and local identities, the lack of a common societal identity or a single, and in a sense, national identity being one of its prominent features. It is worth mentioning that the characteristic of the lack of a common societal identity is not solely due to the existence of multiple centres of collective identity. Because identity diversity is an inevitable matter that cannot be considered a specific phenomenon of a society. Rather, this matter related to the diversity of identities that were in conflict with each other and practically prevented an individual from simultaneous membership in multiple social groups and precluded the possibility of the emergence of a large society in national dimensions (Akbari, 2005: 36). The first half of the Qajar Iran was fraught with numerous identity conflicts and cleavages that, alongside structural economic and communication obstacles, created such a disconnected and fragmented identity situation at the macro level.

Although the social structure, the territorial distribution of tribes and ethnic groups, the cultural-linguistic diversity and difference, and in general, the components of Iranian identity in the early decades of the Qajar era continued

the historical continuity of previous periods with minor changes, it should not be overlooked that this era was the period of the emergence, articulation, and even the determination of the path of the most important identity issue of Iran's contemporary history, namely Iranian national identity. In fact, despite the fact that the Qajars, like most of the ruling dynasties of the pre-modern era of Iranian history, took the reins of power in Iran as a result of the supremacy of tribal power, very soon, and while only a few years had passed since the consolidation of their power and their rule, with the Russo-Persian wars, they found themselves and the land under their command in a new situation. The contemplation and devising of solutions for its issues and problems unintentionally prompted the custodians of the country's affairs and the people of politics and thought, especially the bureaucrats and Iranian intellectuals, to serious endeavours. In the midst of this new situation, which was the result of Iran's entry into the field of relations with the new civilisation of the Western world and which necessarily required intellectualising and choosing political, cultural, social, and economic strategies and solutions compatible with the new era under a new state system, rethinking territorial identity and building a new identity for Iran was among its fundamental and infrastructural goals. Therefore, along with reformist and modernising actions in various fields of politics, culture, and economy, the new Iranian identity gradually became an important variable in the intellectual, intellectual, and political discourses of Iran. Travellers and the first group of Iranian ambassadors and students sent to Europe and European countries at the beginning of the Qajar era were the first heralds of the ideas of the new political system of the nation-state or the national state based on the three pillars of state, country, and nation. Mirza Abdol-Latif Shushtari, in his reports on the rights of the general public in foreign societies, writes: 'No one has authority over another; if the king or amirs want to transgress against their subordinates, that person can complain in court' (Shushtari, 1984: 275). Such awareness, although not very deep, were the epistemological foundations for understanding the difference between a subject and a nation and brought with it the seed of the idea of transformation. Mostashar al-Dawla, in the treatise 'Yek Kalameh' (One Word), speaks of the word 'nation' as an entity different from a subject and considers the choice and acceptance of the nation as the basis of all government measures. According to his definition, a nation refers to a community that has natural rights, including personal freedom, security of life and property, freedom of assembly, and the

right to elect representatives before the state court (Mostashar al-Dawla, n.d.: 28-50). The works of Abdol-Rahim Talebof are other intellectual products of this period in which the words nationality, national progress, national body, and love of homeland are reflected. Regarding the semantic difference of homeland in ancient and new literature, he writes: 'We Iranians, apart from a thousand other misfortunes, have become completely alienated from the sacred love of the homeland. The time of the old philosophy has passed when they said this homeland is not Egypt, Iraq, and Syria; this homeland is a city that has no name. We must understand that this homeland, in whose preservation and progress our duty is every kind of sacrifice and devotion, is Iran…' (Talebof, 1977: 93).

Following the maturation of this kind of intellectual and cognitive transformation, its public dissemination in the press and newspapers and its reflection among intellectuals, people of politics and government, the educated strata, and groups of the middle class in large cities, gradually prepared the ground for the emergence of the discourse of nationalism and the nation-state. It is necessary to clarify that not all pre-constitutional readings of the nation and the desire for a nation were uniform and based on one intellectual foundation, but these ideas moved within a spectrum of discourses from religious Iranianness, ethnic-centric Iranianness, to secular and archaeophilic Iranianness. [1]

## The Constitution and the Effort to Establish a National Identity

The intellectuals of the Constitutional era believed that for Iran to undergo the process of modernisation, it had to manage and overcome various crises, and the crisis of transitioning from sub-national to national identities was one of these fundamental crises. Therefore, a part of the development planning and macro-strategies of statecraft in Iran inevitably had to be focused on the category of creating a national identity (Ghahramanpour, 2013: 42). Hence, the constitutional government was an effort by the elites to establish a modern nation-state in Iran, and the discourse that organised this movement sought to construct a new definition of the entire citizenry of a country as a nation in opposition to an apparatus called the state (Akbari, 2004: 87). The definitions, limits of authority, and rights of the nation are among the high-frequency words and phrases in the political literature of the Constitutional era, including political

1. See: Akbari, 2004: 55-75.

treatises, night letters, journals, newspapers, and the statutes of parties and currents. In the statutes of two very important constitutional associations, the National Assembly and the Secret Society, the goal of the struggle was defined as the salvation of the homeland and the happiness of the nation (Malekzadeh, n.d.: 239-241), and even the Constitution of the Constitutional Revolution and its supplement were referred to as the 'Statute of the Rights of the Nation' (Browne, 2001: 132). Articles eight to twenty-three of the Supplement to the Constitution of the Constitutional Revolution, which was the most important legal and juridical document and basis of the project of establishing a new state, were devoted to the definition of the nation and its rights and duties (Supplement to the Constitution of the Constitutional Revolution, 1979: Articles 8-23). Thus, an inextricable link was created between the constitution and the nation, and the demand for a constitution with the establishment of a national order and the construction of a new Iranian identity.

Although in the legal statute and the resolutions of the political system of the Constitutional era, ethnic policy in its explicit and codified sense did not find any opportunity for discussion and debate, considering the decisions and policies that were in some way linked to the political, cultural, social, and economic life of ethnic groups and regions—such as some articles of the Constitution and its supplement that refer to the equality of rights of all the inhabitants of the country (Supplement to the Constitution of the Constitutional Revolution, 1979: Article 8), the decentralised method of administering the country under the supervision of provincial and state associations (Supplement to the Constitution of the Constitutional Revolution, 1979: Articles 91-93), and in general, the foundation of the constitutional system on the principles of freedom, pluralism, and democratic principles—the implicit approach of this system to ethnic groups and ethnic issues can be considered to imply the acceptance and preservation of the ethnic diversity of Iranian society and the ethnic rights arising from it. The newspaper Tamaddon, in an editorial on the eleventh of Jamadi al-Awwal 1326 AH (1908 CE), regarding the equal rights and duties of all strata and individuals, writes: 'Iran is a house, the property of the creatures of a family called Iranian, whose number exceeds 25 groups. Every single individual of this number is an independent owner in this house with equality. In the laws of the kingdom and before the court of nationality, the king and the beggar, the rich and the poor are equal. None has the right to take an action that would lead to the annihilation of

this family…' (Tamaddon newspaper, no. 14: 1).

Ethnic life and the discussions of identity and ethnicity in the Qajar era generally went through two stages. Ethnic life until the final decades of the Qajar era was a continuation of the same ancient and traditional life that continued with its unique cultural and social components, mostly within the tribal-clan social structure. But in the final decades of the Qajar era, especially with the preparation of the preliminaries of the constitution, ethnic groups, who mostly found a social role in the form of tribes and clans, acquired new functions in political and social relations. The role of important and influential ethnic groups and personalities in the events of the constitution are clear examples of this transformation. Azarbaijan, and especially the city of Tabriz, as the seat of the heir apparent and the origin of the political reforms of the Qajar era and the main centre of constitutionalism, is one of the main centres of the Turkic (Azeri) ethnic group, from which the most prominent personalities of the Constitutional Revolution also arose.[1] Other ethnic groups in other regions of Iran also, according to the exigencies and interests of the tribe and region and the political orientation of the local leaders, played a role in the struggle between constitutionalism and anti-constitutionalism, especially during the period of minor despotism and the restoration of the constitution. The history of the constitution in Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Balochestan, and Khuzestan indicates the first movements of the ethnic regions in the course of a nationwide movement, although in some cases these movements were not very influential. McDowall writes about the constitutional movement in the Kurdistan region: 'The Kurdish tribal chiefs were generally considered part of the monarchy and the ruling apparatus and were part of it and were hostile to the constitutional movement. In their belief, legitimacy was in the person, not in an institution that was created based on foreign ideas. But these same chiefs were also themselves uncomfortable with the increasing intervention of the Qajar apparatus in the affairs of the provinces, and for this reason, their reaction was 'dual.' This group was in favour of local independence from the centre. But they did not like the political activity of the urban people. But the chiefs did not act as a class, and each pursued their

1. See: Tabatabai, S. J. (2019). A Reflection on Iran: The Theory of the Rule of Law in Iran: Part Two: Foundations of the Theory of Constitutionalism (Vol. 2). Minavi Kherad Publications; Hosseini, S. M. (2011). The role of the Azarbaijan region in the Constitutional Revolution. Politics-Journal of the Faculty of Law and Political Science, 41(3), 77-92.

own narrow interests. But the urban centres of the Kurdish-inhabited regions, places like Savojbolagh and Urmia and Saqqez and Sanandaj and Kermanshah, tended to identify their identity with the constitutional movement. Perhaps many of the villagers were also like this, and thus in a number of cities and towns, 'associations' were established' (McDowall, 2004: 154-155). It is necessary to mention that McDowall's argument about the orientation of the tribal leaders of Kurdistan varied according to the situation. As some Kurdish tribal chiefs, like Yar Mohammad Khan Kermanshahi and his allies in Kermanshah, stood on the side of constitutionalism and even lost their lives in its defence (Goudarzi, 2002 & Keshavarz, 1998). Balochestan, which due to its geographical location and distance from the centres of constitutionalism, was left out of the intellectual and political developments related to the constitution, witnessed numerous rebellions at the time of the constitution in protest against the economic conditions and the dire livelihood of the people of that land (Sepahi, 2005). This situation was more or less prevalent in other regions as well.

Another dimension of the identity transformations of the Qajar era was the transition from traditional identity to a new identity. The move towards constructing a new common identity for all the inhabitants of Iran under the title of nation was a step whose political and legal foundation was laid with the Constitutional Revolution and which became widespread as a discourse in the public sphere of Iranian society. But this transition was neither uniform and complete, nor did it have a desirable outcome. The reflection and impact of the discussions and policies of the new national identity in the heart of society had a short and limited range; firstly, the main audience of this discourse was a limited range of the middle class and the educated stratum who at least had the benefit of literacy, and secondly, the geographical scope of its effects only included the large cities and the centres of constitutionalism and did not include the majority of the rural and nomadic population and even the large and small cities of the regions far from the centre. As the newspaper Tamaddon wrote some time after the establishment of the constitutional government, regarding the public awareness of the people about constitutionalism: 'Ninety-nine percent of the people of Iran do not know what the meaning of constitutionalism is and what its benefit is… They do not understand what the benefit of the parliament is' (Tamaddon newspaper, 1906: 1).

The process of establishing a national identity was, on the whole, a chapter of

the modernisation and reform movement of the Qajar era, which finally found its institutional and legal expression in the constitution. After the institution of the constitution, by being caught in a vortex of a series of crises, failed in the democratic modernisation of politics and society in Iran and its pillars gradually collapsed, the project of establishing a national identity and a type of ethnic policy that could have been implicitly born within this discourse and to some extent guaranteed the freedoms, rights, and demands of the ethnic groups, was forgotten. By the decree of the transformations of Iran's contemporary history, this approach, in the authoritarian and absolute Pahlavi I state, which emerged from the failure of the constitution, changed its course towards centralist, exclusionary, assimilationist, and undemocratic ethnic policies.

The transformation that the new Iranian identity underwent in the course of the political and intellectual currents of the Qajar era, like many other infrastructural issues, including the nature of the new state in Iran, had a pivotal role in the future of the issue of national identity. As was mentioned, the grounds for the emergence and articulation of the issue of national identity appeared in the Qajar period, entered the arena of thought and politics, and found a political-legal order in the Constitutional Revolution. In this period, the issue of national identity, with all the shortcomings and inadequacies that occurred in its articulation and formation, was generally pursued within a relatively democratic discourse committed to the ethnic-religious diversity of Iran. But following the successive crises of the final years of the Qajar era and the collapse of the newly established constitutional structure, it finally took another path within the framework of the centralist and undemocratic discourse of Pahlavi I. Of course, it must be acknowledged that the policy of authoritarian modernisation that came to the fore in the Pahlavi I era and brought with it a different type of programme for establishing national identity and identity and ethnic policy, was the product of a discourse that had emerged years before Reza Khan came to power, from within the failed and unsuccessful experience of the constitution. In other words, in the political-social space after the Constitutional Revolution, considering the consequences of the failure of the constitution and the crisis-creating events of the First World War and the occupation of Iran, the decline of the central government, the occurrence of ethnic and local movements and rebellions from Khuzestan to Azarbaijan[1] ,

1. The ethnic and local-regional rebellions and movements of the final decade of the Qajar era are introduced and examined in detail in the following materials of this chapter under the title:

the difficult livelihood and economic conditions accompanied by the spread of disease and famine, the lack of security, and the 1919 protectorate agreement, from a historical and structural perspective, made the idea of preserving the territorial integrity and political existence of the country the inevitable priority of the arena of thought and political action in Iran. Devising solutions to get out of this crisis situation paved the way for an undemocratic, powerful, and centralist reading of the modern state,[1] whose theoretical and ideological foundations were produced and promoted in the intellectual and political policymaking apparatus of the final years of the Qajar era. With the 1921 coup of Reza Khan, its practical military and political preliminaries were provided, and finally, in 1925, with the formation of the Pahlavi monarchy, it was put into practice.

## The Pahlavi State and De-ethnicisation in Light of Homogenising Nationalism

The prevailing discourse in the journals and press of the final years of the Qajar era—such as Iran-e Azad, Kaveh, Ayandeh, Iranshahr, Nameh-ye Farangestan, Rastakhiz, Nowbahar, Mard-e Azad, and Shafaq-e Sorkh, which served as platforms for the political and intellectual figures and currents of that period, including the 'Berlin Circle intellectuals' (Behnam, 2009)—provides conclusive and eloquent evidence of the promotion of a discourse of authoritarian reforms and top-down modernisation. The newspaper Shafaq-e Sorkh, on the necessity of submitting to a top-down and authoritarian modernisation process led by a powerful and reforming individual, writes: 'A reformer, an enlightened mind and an open thought are needed to forcibly sweep the doorsteps of houses every morning, to forcibly light our alley lamps, and to forcibly make our clothing uniform and consistent. Only a serious and active mind and a clear, reforming thought can overcome this conventional course and, by force and coercion, transgress our unnatural habits. And apart from this, in today's Iran, with today's

"Ethnic Movements and Uprisings in Contemporary Iran."

1. For information on the situation in Iran in the final years of the Qajar dynasty, see: Katouzian, M. A. (2001). State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Rise of the Pahlavis. Nashr-e Markaz; Majd, M. G. (2011). From Qajar to Pahlavi, 1919-1930; Based on the Documents of the US Department of State. Institute for Political Studies and Research; Keddie, N. R. (2002). Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan, 1796-1925. Qoqnoos Publishing; Sykes, P. (1958). A History of Persia (3rd ed., with supplementary essays). MacMillan.

situation, with today's life, there is no other solution' (Shafaq-e Sorkh newspaper, 1923: 4). Thus, the historical situation and the political-intellectual discourse of the final decade of the Qajar era set the stage for a fundamental turn in the project of Iranian identity formation, which found its tangible realisation in the absolutist state of Pahlavi I. The ideas and ideologies that later manifested within the framework of the political programmes of the Pahlavi I regime were the result of the reflections of writers and intellectuals such as Taghizadeh, Jamalzadeh, Kazemzadeh, Qazvini, Pourdavoud, Dashti, Davar, and Afshar. Through a critical political and social examination of Iranian society, they undertook to delineate new political, cultural, social, and economic strategies and policies. By transforming this into a powerful intellectual current, they became the founders and intellectual leaders of the reforms and modernisation of the Reza Shah period and the ideologues of the Pahlavi I state (Salimi, 2011: 130).

With the transfer of the monarchy from the Qajar to the Pahlavi dynasty and Reza Shah's accession to the throne of Iran in November 1925, a state founded on the ideals of restoring security and territorial unity, realising the idea of a single nation, economic progress, cultural modernity, a return to the ancient grandeur of Iran, and Aryanism took the reins of power. Before anything else, it had to organise the foundations of the legitimacy of its discourse and actions under a discourse capable of gaining public favour. Therefore, concurrent with the formation of the Pahlavi state, relying on the preliminaries that had become prevalent in the intellectual and political discourses of the final years of the Qajar era, the foundations of an ideological discourse were laid, and extensive measures were taken to form and promote its components. History and historiography, which are the wellsprings of collective memory and spirit, were an influential domain that became the focus of attention in order to, by creating narratives parallel to the intentions of the ruling discourse, on the one hand, lend this system a narrative, and on the other, to erect the pillars of the creation of a new identity for the Iranian nation. In the first period of the Pahlavi government, the publication of scholarly historical works such as Hassan Pirnia's History of Ancient Iran, Abbas Eqbal's Iran from the Advent of Islam to the End of the Qajar Period, and the works of Western researchers and Iranologists including Herzfeld, Goldziher, Minorsky, Spuler, and others were put on the agenda. Herzfeld's idea about Achaemenid Iran as a geopolitical concept and an 'Aryan empire,' as well as his idea that the 'Iranian nation' in its geographical

and political sense emerged in the Achaemenid period, was chosen as the official ideological framework of the Pahlavi I state. These ideas provided the foundation for a phenomenon that Alessandro Bausani called 'Aryan and neo-Achaemenid nationalism.' A phenomenon that, with its emphasis on 2500 years of Iranian monarchy, set out to provide an interpretation of the identity of Iran and Iranians based on the monarchical system and the centrality of the Shah (Ashraf, 2016: 211-213). In other words, national identity is determined by the monarchical system and not on the basis of citizen freedom (Ashraf, 1994: 544).

In the modern era and with the emergence of modern states, nation-building and social identity-making are constructed and elaborated by the institutionalised mechanisms of the modern state and its tools. Or, to be more precise, modern states, by virtue of their specific operational basis, create social identity. Thus, the arena of social life, in the broad sense of the word, is the field of the presence and action of political power (Akbari, 2003: 225-226). The absolutist state of Reza Shah, as a modern state, inevitably had to, in addition to building the modern state of Iran, also undertake the establishment of a new Iranian nation. It is self-evident that the absolutist state of Reza Shah wanted to build an Iran in a way that would be aligned and in harmony with the project of the absolutist state and the strategies of this state regarding the modernisation of Iran, and would feel a sense of unity and congruence with it. The programme of modernism and modernisation of the Pahlavi I era, by taking as its basis the model of state-centred, authoritarian, and top-down modernisation, was formed on the foundations of statism, Westernisation, and secularism. Based on the idea of Pahlavism, which was composed of the two components of Iran-centrism and Shah-worship, it set about constructing a new Iranian identity.

In the modernisation project of the Pahlavi I period, the Iranian subject was created by relying on the elements of the Persian language, the Aryan race, a common historical background, patriotism, and Shah-worship, and by employing the machinery of homogenisation and normalisation. The industry of homogenisation was responsible for the elimination of linguistic, racial, ethnic, and cultural differences and the replacement of a common and unified language, culture, literature, art, ethnicity, and race. The industry of normalisation was responsible for creating specific mechanisms for internalising the new norms (Akbari, 2003: 227-250). Regarding the position of language in the modernisation project, in one of the reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry

of Education, it is stated that 'in the present age, a nation is only applied to a monolingual community, and it is no secret that the greatest bond of nationality, the strongest means of the ethnicity of a nation, is indeed the unity of tongue and the oneness of the language of that nation' (Letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Education, 1925, No. 57003), and in textbooks, the Persian language is referred to as the language of the homeland and the mother tongue of Iranians (Nameh-ye Iran-e Bastan, 1932: 3). Apart from the exclusionary approach to other languages, one of the prominent features of the linguistic policy in the Pahlavi I era is the animosity towards the Arabic language and, to some extent, the Turkish language as the 'other'. With the establishment of the Academy of Persian Language (Farhangestan) (Tarafdari, 2010) and vocabulary selection programmes at various levels, alongside the changing of place names, including cities, an effort was made to erase the traces of other languages from Persian. In the changing of city names in the early years of the Pahlavi government, Pahlavi names of 'Shah' and 'Shahpour' were mostly used for cities. The first name change by Reza Shah's order relates to March 1926, according to which the name of the city 'Agh Ghaleh' was changed to 'Pahlavi Dezh'. This change was made at the request of the commander of the independent northern brigade and with the approval of Reza Shah, and was announced by the Ministry of War to the Ministry of Education and Endowments. In the same year, apparently at the request of some of the inhabitants of 'Anzali' and the proposal of the government of Gilan and the approval of the cabinet, the name of the city 'Anzali' was changed to 'Bandar Pahlavi'. In 1926, also according to the request of some of the inhabitants of Qomsheh and the approval of Reza Shah, the name 'Qomsheh' was changed to 'Shahreza'[1] , (240013853-291000279-297005158, cited in Norouzi et al., 2022). The policy of linguistic homogenisation based on the centrality of the Persian language and the prohibition of the use of other languages in educational, administrative, and even press affairs, apart from its short-term consequences, also had long-term consequences and damages. This refers to the resentment that that policy created in the minds of non-Persian people and led to the deterioration of relations between non-Persian ethnic groups and the Persian ethnic group (Shirazi, 2017: 680).

Racial unity and superiority under the title of 'Aryan race' or 'Aryanism' was

1. SAKMA: National Library and Archives of Iran

another index in the identity discourse of the Pahlavi I era. In the third-year high school history textbook of the Pahlavi I period, while ranking the races and considering non-white races as insignificant and savage, by counting Iranians among the white race, it is noted: 'History is almost exclusively confined to the white race. The white race also has several branches, the most important of which is the Aryan branch' (Third-year high school history textbook, Pahlavi I period: 3-4, cited in Akbari, 2005).

The reconstruction of history and the smoothing of its uneven road as the dominant ideology requires were among the very important foundations of the modernisation project. On the 'Procrustean bed' of the homogenising ideological discourse, the superfluities, inconsistencies, and ruptures of history are eliminated, and a uniform and well-polished narrative under the title of 2500 years of immortal monarchical rule is presented. A narrative that is capable of, based on archaeophilism, which is the origin of the monarchical system and Aryanism, satiating Iranian pride and glory and guaranteeing the validity of the central pillar of the tent of Iranian history, that is, the monarchical government. In this historical narrative, the Arabs and Islam, as the factors of the collapse of the ancient era and the monarchical system, are placed in the position of the 'other', who were the cause of the destruction of the ancient and glorious Iranian culture and civilisation. In later stages, the Turks and especially the Mongols, as the destroyers of Iranian civilisation, are also added to the circle of Iranian 'others'.

Shah-worship and patriotism were another pillar of the identity discourse of the Pahlavi I era, which meaningfully placed the two elements of Shah and homeland in a single combination under one principle. This was to, while creating an unbreakable bond between the Shah and the monarchical system with the immortal element of the soil and the land, make Shah-worship an inseparable dimension of patriotism. This is clearly manifested in the slogan 'God, Shah, Homeland.' A slogan that clearly points to the Shah's mediation between the divine and human worlds, a Shah who is the manifestation of divine grace and the royal farr, and the homeland in the absence of his charismatic existence will be nothing more than a ruin. In order to instil these ideas and suggestions in the Pahlavi I era, a large volume of literature was produced and offered. Hossein Motamedi, one of the speakers of the Organisation for the Cultivation of Thoughts, says about this: 'Shah-worship is the highest and most sacred feeling

on which the greatness and independence of any country depends. Our ancestors considered the greatest duty they had for themselves to be God-worship, Shah-love, and patriotism…' (SAKMA, Document No. 291003573/102G2A1: 1). With the value equivalence of the Shah, the homeland, and God, the category of othering also took on a specific direction and content. The opponents of the Shah are no longer considered just anti-Shah, but also anti-homeland and anti-God, and therefore, an Iranian is described with attributes at the core of which is Shah-worship (Akbari, 2005: 264).

Of course. I will now translate the provided segment, continuing from the previous text. The translation will maintain the established scholarly voice and adhere to all specified rules.

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Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, who terms this nationalist ideology 'dislocated nationalism,' identifies its constituent elements and illusions as follows: 'I consider the ideas of a superior Aryan race, the glorification of the ancient era, the denigration of Islam and the Islamic period, the veneration of ancient symbols, 2500 years of monarchical rule, and so on, to be the components of a nationalist ideology that I call ‘dislocated nationalism’. This ideology has several core beliefs. First, that Iran has always existed, with an uninterrupted history stretching back 2500 years (a figure often inflated to 5000 years, or even more). Second, that the essence of Iranian identity and Iran’s greatness is to be sought in its pre-Islamic golden age. Third, the claim that Islam, imposed by the Arabs at the point of a sword, is responsible for Iran’s problems and decline. And fourth, that Iranians are of the Aryan race, and are therefore kin to Europeans and racially entirely distinct from Arabs' (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 9). In such a theoretical and discursive context, it was a certainty that any ethnic group other than the chosen one, with all its material and spiritual heritage, would be deemed an incompatible, superfluous, archaic, and invalid phenomenon that had to be effaced in the glorious march toward the creation of a new nation.

The establishment of the modern state as the sole authority competent to legislate and monopolise political power within the country was incompatible with the presence and survival of any other centre of power possessing such capabilities. The formation of such a political system necessarily entailed the elimination of incongruous and rival elements from the political arena. As Samuel Huntington observes: 'In traditional societies undergoing modernisation… the first problem

that political modernisation usually poses for a traditional, feudal, fragmented, and loosely organised system is the concentration of power to bring about change in the traditional society and economy. Modernisation in these societies is therefore accompanied by the shattering of local, religious, and ethnic power centres and the concentration of power in national political institutions, with a fundamental redistribution of power within the political system' (Huntington, 1991: 213, 208).

On this basis, the first step taken by the Pahlavi I state that can be analysed under the heading of ethnic policy was to put an end to local and regional centres of power, chief amongst them the tribes and clans, which in most cases overlapped with the geography of ethnic distribution and, in some instances, were overtly ethnic movements. Given the priority of this task, Reza Khan carried out some of the most sensitive operations against these power centres in the interval between his coup and his accession to the throne (1921-1925). Thus, in a series of operations commanded by figures such as Brigadier Amanollah Jahanbani, Hossein Agha Khan Khazai, Major-General Amirahmadi (commander of the Western Division), General Abdollah Khan Amirtahmasbi (commander of the Azerbaijan Division), Brigadier Mohammad Khan Shahbakhti (commander of the Shiraz Brigade), Brigadier Fazlollah Zahedi (commander of the Gendarmerie), Brigadier Ahmad Nakhjavan (commander of the Air Force), and Brigadier Habibollah Sheibani (commander of the Fars forces), the centres of power and resistance in most parts of Iran, from north to south and from west to east, were suppressed and dissolved.

Sardar Rashid in Kurdistan, Mohammad-Taqi Khan Pasyan in Khorasan, Amir Moayyed Savadkuhi in the north, the Jangal Movement, the Sardari and Lahouti uprisings in Azerbaijan, Sheikh Khaz'al in the south, Ismail Agha Simitqu (the Kurdish leader in Urmia), Doust Mohammad Khan Baloch in Balochestan, Solat al-Dawla Ismail Khan Qashqai, the Turkmen rebels, Eqbal al-Saltaneh Makui, and the tribes and clans of Azerbaijan, Khorasan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Bakhtiari, and Fars were all power centres that were crushed one after another. In a sweeping operation, most of the tribal chiefs were arrested and imprisoned. Indeed, in late 1930 and early 1931, Major-General Amirahmadi, in a single operation, arrested 250 Kurdish tribal leaders and sent them to prison, where they remained until 1941 (Amirahmadi, 1994: 398-399). A high level of violence and the use of policies of deception and inducement were prominent

features of these operations, which engendered a sense of general insecurity and terror among the people of local and peripheral communities. The suppression campaign of Amirahmadi and his forces in Lorestan was so brutal that it took on a legendary quality in the collective memory, earning him the moniker 'the Butcher of Lorestan' (Katouzian, 2001: 371). Mohammad-Taqi Bahar, citing the example of the suppression of the Turkmens of Khorasan, which 'ended with the most bloody and merciless events,' and the annihilation of thousands of families in Lorestan who, he believed, could have been pacified and settled with kindness, calls the use of such extreme violence not only unnecessary but also contrary to morality and justice. He identifies it as a fundamental factor in increasing the discontent and mistrust of the general populace, especially the inhabitants of the suppressed regions (Bahar, 1984: 233). The sum total of these operations of suppression and subjugation, carried out over the decade from 1921 to 1931, resulted, on the one hand, in the destruction of the traditional decentralised power structure in Iran and its centres, and on the other, compelled the inhabitants to submit to the direct authority of the central power, pay taxes, and perform the duties prescribed by the state.

The next step for the Pahlavi state in this direction was the policy of settling the nomads, known as siyāsat-e takhteh qāpu kardan-e ilāt (the policy of making the tribes sedentary). This policy, implemented between 1934 and 1937, was considered a prerequisite for achieving a modern civil society and a productive economy, in addition to eliminating the potential military threat posed by tribal forces. From the earliest moments of his rise to power, Reza Shah directed his serious attention to this matter. He explicitly refers to the necessity of dismantling the nomadic tribal way of life in his notes, writing: 'I had made the final decision to uproot the edifice and foundation of petty kingship, to suppress the heads of regions and tribes and to put them in their place forever, and in return to create a unified country, a single ruling authority, and a single channel of law' (Pahlavi, 1966: 54). Therefore, just as Seyyed Hassan Modarres had predicted when he said, 'From my discussions with Sardar Sepah, it is clear to me that in the future regime, they will eradicate the foundation of the tribal livelihood' (Zadeh-Safavi, 1987: 79), this matter became one of the undeniable and irreversible policies of Reza Khan and the state under his command. To this end, in addition to the plans and programmes pursued by military forces and army commanders as the new governors of various regions of Iran, the Majles also approved schemes

to facilitate the settlement process. In its ninth session, the Majles authorised the Ministry of Finance to 'spend the sum of three hundred thousand rials for the expenses of Tehran and the settlement of the tribes, in addition to the credit allocated in this year's state budget, from the state reserves' (Laws and Resolutions of the Ninth Legislative Session, 1931: 438). The sale of state lands (khāleseh) and the transfer of pastures and government lands were other measures taken by the Majles to encourage the tribes to adopt a sedentary life. These actions culminated in the 'Regulations for the Settlement of Tribes' (Nezāmnāmeh-ye Takhteh Qāpu-ye Ilāt), which was approved in 1933 as a set of 11 articles.

The policy of suppressing and settling the tribes had various direct and indirect consequences for the social and political order of Iran. Firstly, by marginalising the nomadic and pastoral livelihood, it brought about a fundamental transformation in the face of social life in Iran, following which the economic and political relations arising from the social structure were altered. Its most significant result in the political sphere and the transformation of the power structure was the immediate achievement of eliminating and weakening local and tribal powers, which revealed itself at once. In effect, as a result of these developments, the tribes, clans, and their leaders—as the principal actors in Iran's political history—lost their thousand-year-old position. For the first time, new power relations were formed, free from the influence of the tribal and clan elements that were the main factors of fragmentation and lack of centralisation in the political power structure. However, adopting a coercive approach in dealing with this thousand-year-old way of life in Iranian history led to extremely damaging economic, social, and security consequences. The implementation of this policy, reliant on compulsion and slaughter and lacking a comprehensive plan and necessary preparation, failed in its aim of providing a better life for the nomadic peoples. It resulted in the loss of a large part of the country's nomadic population and a vast number of their livestock (Bahar, 1984: 352; Qazi, 1993: 176). The reckless implementation of the policy of subjugation and settlement, through the use of violence, collective suppression, and intimidation, in the short term faced resistance and rebellion from tribes that had been quiet in the first decade (Lambton, 1960: 500). In the long term, it led to a vast reservoir of hatred, hostility, disobedience, and mistrust towards the central government, which brought about an ever-greater divergence between the centre and the periphery, the consequences of which are evident throughout contemporary history.

Linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and even lifestyle homogenisation and assimilation constituted one of the fundamental pillars of the identity policy of the Pahlavi I era. This was designed by the intellectual architects of modernity in the Pahlavi period without regard for the historical background, internal diversity, and plurality of Iran's multi-faceted society, and ultimately with complete disregard for ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious rights. It became the roadmap for establishing a new Iran within Reza Shah's despotic state apparatus. Mahmoud Afshar, the editor of Āyandeh magazine and a proponent of nationalism and national integration, considered the weakness in national unity to be the most critical political and social problem in Iran. In the first issue of Āyandeh, in an article titled 'Our Aspiration: The National Unity of Iran,' he elaborates on this point: 'Our social ideal or aspiration is the preservation and completion of the national unity of Iran… By the national unity of Iran, we mean the political, moral, and social unity of the people who still reside within the present borders of Iran… But the aim of completing national unity is for the Persian language to become universal throughout the country, for local differences in dress and other matters to be erased, and for the system of petty kingships to be completely eliminated. There should be no difference between Kurd, Lur, Qashqai, Arab, Turk, Turkmen, and others; they should not each be clad in their own attire and speak their own language. In our belief, as long as national unity in terms of language, morality, dress, and so on is not achieved in Iran, there is a constant risk to our independence and territorial integrity. If we cannot make all the regions and tribes that dwell in Iran uniform, that is, make them all Iranian in the full sense of the word, a dark future lies before us…' (Āyandeh magazine, 1925: 5). In the necessity of achieving his desired national unity, Afshar does not shy away from using any means, even going so far as to advocate for the use of coercive force to establish national unity through the generalisation and expansion of the Persian language. He even proposes and suggests coercive strategies for cultural standardisation and speaks of forced migration (Āyandeh magazine, 1927: 3). These were proposals and ideas that were later incorporated into the principles and regulations of the cultural programmes and political designs of the Pahlavi I state.

The law of uniform dress was another measure that, given the cultural diversity prevalent in Iranian communities and the symbolic importance of clothing among ethnic groups, especially considering certain religious and sectarian

observations, was inevitably tied to ethnic policy. In fact, this measure was implemented for two purposes: first, to remove the differences arising from ethnic, occupational, and regional affiliations among various groups of people, as was apparent in their clothing and headwear; and second, to make the people resemble Europeans by Europeanising their dress and hats (Shirazi, 2017: 690). This directive, following Reza Shah's trip to Turkey in 1935, was initially issued for government employees. However, it was not long before the Shah was not content with this and ordered the mandatory adoption of the fedora (shāpo) and European dress for the general public (Makki, 1995: 227-228). This matter, by extending to the domain of women's attire and mandating European dress for women and girls, which became known as the kashf-e hejāb (unveiling), turned into one of the most consequential social actions of this period. Based on customary, religious, and ethnic considerations, it produced a response of discontent, protest, and demonstrations throughout the country (Sanasarian, 2005). The Goharshad Mosque incident in Mashhad and the fatwas of some clerics declaring it forbidden were examples of the reaction to this policy. In some ethnic regions, including Kurdistan, severe protest movements such as the armed uprising of Mulla Khalil Mangur near Mahabad took place (Soleimanian, Moslem et al., 2020). The bitter experiences of the unveiling in the Pahlavi I era remained a current and flowing narrative in the collective memory of people in various regions, especially women, for decades, passed down from generation to generation, and the aversion and hatred resulting from it were also reproduced.

New administrative divisions were another of the Pahlavi I state's measures, implemented to consolidate the authority and dominance of the central government over the peripheral regions and to dissolve ethnic boundaries. Based on these divisions, the country was divided into six provinces, fifty counties, and their subdivisions. The country's provinces were named according to their geographical location in the four cardinal directions, including the provinces of the West, North, South, North-West, North-East, and Makran. In January 1938, with the amendment of the law on administrative divisions, Iran was divided into ten provinces. In the amendment, the provinces were named based on sequential numbers from Province One to Province Ten. The incongruity of the spatial division of the provinces with the country's ethnic composition and the naming of the provinces without regard to historical precedent and ethnic texture are clear evidence of a policy of dispersing and breaking up ethnic groups and

de-ethnicising the territorial geography. (Collection of Laws for the year 1937, Ministry of Justice, Official Gazette Publication: 62-67)

Ethnic issues, beyond domestic relations, also found reflection in the foreign and regional relations of the Pahlavi I era. In the Saadabad Pact, signed in 1937 at the Saadabad Palace in Tehran between the four countries of Iran (Reza Shah Pahlavi), Iraq (King Ghazi I), Afghanistan (Mohammad Zahir Shah), and Turkey (Mustafa Kemal Atatürk), the signatory states pledged to refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs and to respect their common borders. They also agreed to refrain from any aggression against each other's border lines and to prevent the formation of associations and factions whose aim was to disrupt the peace among neighbouring and allied countries (Bigdeli, 2001: 169-170). As is evident from the articles of this treaty, the prevention of the emergence of ethnic movements, particularly Kurdish movements, was among its main provisions.

A successful transition to a modern society through modernisation and reform requires a comprehensive and multifaceted programme that, alongside prohibitive measures and the removal of obstacles, is also sensitive and precise regarding the constructive and foundational dimension. In reality, successful transformation is only possible through the preparation of necessary and appropriate foundations; reform is not a change that can be realised solely through the channel of authoritarian power, with the tools of threat, coercion, and imposition. Whilst the Pahlavi I state compelled the vast majority of Iranian society into settlement, silence, obedience, and the unconditional acceptance of its orders, it left no new means or tools for these communities and their leaders and elites to participate in the political, or even cultural and social, arena. Indeed, it even dispossessed other influential social classes and strata, such as the clergy and the aristocracy, and prohibited any form of party, professional, or group activity. The ban that Reza Shah imposed on 'factions' and 'societies' not only applied to every non-governmental association, centre, union, and club but even included centres that his own supporters had formed (Katouzian, 2001: 431). As he said to the members of the Majles regarding political parties: 'Do not imagine that you have no party; these two factions and I myself are your party' (Behboudi, 1993: 313). The founders and architects of such situations ultimately create a contradictory space where, on the one hand, a modern and civilised society is desired, and on the other, no rights are conceived for this society. This issue assumes a double importance in the realm of ethnic policy and in relation to ethnic groups, because

ethnic groups, in addition to civil and citizenship rights, require attention to their ethnic, linguistic, and religious rights. This is whilst the state implements a policy of effacement in its grand strategy. The inevitable result of this situation is, in the first instance, discontent, conflict, and opposition, and in later stages, hostility and confrontation.

Some analysts of the nationalism of the Pahlavi I era, which is considered the model for contemporary nationalism, speak of the homogenising and anti-pluralistic approach of this discourse as a necessity for achieving a nation and a national society. It is said that this type of unity-oriented nationalism sought to transform the primary and pre-existing identities of Iranian society—in forms such as family, tribal, and clan identity—to a more comprehensive level, that is, within a national framework. This was because what was considered the central element at this juncture was not the idea of the rule of law or popular sovereignty, but the realisation of a kind of national unity in whose light the turmoil and tension in the foundations of identity would be healed (Amuzgar, 1991: 140). Such views are based on the presupposition that defines sub-national forms of collective identity as being in conflict with national identity. However, there is not necessarily any inherent conflict between other sub-national forms of collective identity and national identity in its general sense. Rather, what leads to conflict and contradiction between national identity and other sub-national forms of collective identity is a version of national identity whose elements are built on the basis of excluding and marginalising the other collective, linguistic, ethnic, and religious identities within that society.

Thus, the modernisation project of the Pahlavi I era brought about a fundamental turn in the discourse of Constitutional nationalism. By presenting a selective narrative of Iran's history, culture, race, language, territory, and cultural and social heritage, it created a new discourse in which some of Iran's ethnic groups and markers of ethnic identity were forcibly placed within its circle of the 'other'. In the realm of ethnic policy and interaction with ethnic groups, this approach led to a style of authoritarian, violent, and exclusionary policies and programmes in pursuit of cultural, linguistic, and social homogenisation. These were put into an executive phase with reliance on the standardising machinery of the state apparatus. In the social sphere, they resulted in ethnic and collective discontent and some scattered resistance. However, regardless of its consequences during the 16-year rule of Pahlavi I—where, due to the dominance of the state's repressive

machinery, there was little space for organised and structured collective protest movements—following the removal of Reza Shah and the creation of an open political space in Iran, prominent ethnic movements with specific programmes and objectives emerged. Undoubtedly, the political experiences of the Pahlavi I era were not without influence in preparing the ground for them.

The discourse of national identity of the Pahlavi I era, with minor changes in procedures and approaches, also served as the model and roadmap for identity programmes and policies during the 37-year reign of Pahlavi II. The majority of these policies, due to a lack of infrastructure, limited resources, communication and control constraints, and weak human resources during the Reza Shah period, did not achieve much success in their operational and executive dimensions and were not institutionalised. However, they defined a model and pattern for the subsequent era, which became the basis for the second stage of authoritarian modernisation in the Pahlavi II era.

A very important characteristic of this discursive apparatus relates to the formulation of the ethnic question within it. In the policymaking apparatus of the Pahlavi I era, the issue of ethnicity was defined and interpreted as a factor of disunity, discord, conflict, and sectarianism; it was an undesirable element that violated national unity and integrity and was a serious threat to territorial integrity. Therefore, its evil had to be eradicated by any means possible. This fundamental assumption caused a pervasive social reality, with all its historical, cultural, political, and legal complexity, to be defined within the social engineering programme of a modernisation process through a non-interactive, one-dimensional, and coercive encounter. This experience, due to shortcomings in understanding and a superficial approach in practice, ultimately led to the increasing complexity of the ethnic issue, and one of its clear consequences was the ever-greater divergence between national and ethnic identity.

The Pahlavi II period and the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979), in terms of the course of political developments and events, the activity of parties and movements, vast and profound transformations in the economic foundations, demographic changes and the phenomenon of migration, the growth of urbanisation, Iran's increasing entry into the field of relations with Western countries, the growth of mass media, and overall, the ebbs and flows of politics and society in Iran—especially the challenges and crises of the court and the government apparatus at critical junctures—was a completely different era from

the Pahlavi I period. The 37-year reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi is divided into several different historical periods with political and social turning points, such as the open political atmosphere between 1941 and 1953 and the ethnic movements of the first half of the 1940s, the failed assassination attempt on the Shah (1949), the coup of 28 Mordad 1953, the White Revolution (1962), and several other major and minor events. Therefore, re-examining any phenomenon and subject requires considering the criteria of each of these relatively different periods.

In general, the Pahlavi II period, in terms of the course of modernisation and consequently the policies of identity and ethnic modernisation, is divided into two distinct periods. The first period covers the years from 1941 to 1961, during which, in the shadow of instability and the open political and social atmosphere stemming from the weakness of the court and the government, the challenges following the 1953 coup, and the effort to restore the weakened authority of the monarchy, the policy of modernisation was in a state of suspension, and the realised modernisation projects of the Pahlavi I era continued with relative consistency in their established context. Of course, some of the criticised policies that relied on coercion and intimidation, such as the unveiling of women and the forced settlement of nomads, were modified or suspended after Mohammad Reza Shah's accession to the throne. The second period comprises the 17-year interval from 1961 to 1979. In this period, the second phase of modernisation of the Pahlavi era (1961-1979) was resumed in the form of comprehensive programmes and plans such as the White Revolution, land reforms, the plan for establishing a Great Civilisation, and the third to fifth development plans. In this process, the order of politics, economy, culture, and society in Iran was once again subjected to a new wave of authoritarian modernisation. Its implementers, relying on a theoretical-ideological foundation, material resources and capabilities, and tools of social control, sought to, while executing a vast and comprehensive project in the political, social, economic, and cultural spheres, prepare the ground for the final transition of Iranian society from an underdeveloped and third-world country to the level of developed countries and to realise the grand design of establishing a new Iranian civilisation and creating a single, comprehensive Iranian national identity. Under such a comprehensive identity policy, ethnic policy also acquired a unique importance and status. Therefore, ethnic groups once again became the subject of policymaking, and the Pahlavi II state, in continuation of the actions

of the Pahlavi I era, endeavoured to resolve the issue of ethnicities as a very important and infrastructural political and social challenge.

From the perspective of political developments and consequently ethnic events, the 37-year period of Pahlavi II can also be divided into four stages: 1. From 1941 to 1947: This period begins with the abdication of Reza Shah and ends with the collapse of the autonomous republics of Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. 2. From 1947 to 1953: This period witnessed the relative dominance of the central government over ethnic regions, and ethnic demands were mainly articulated within the programmes of national parties and major political currents of the country. 3. From 1953 to 1962: This period covers the decade after the 28 Mordad coup, characterized by military dominance, the expansion of central power, and the impossibility of any kind of party or ethnic political activity. 4. From 1962 to 1979: This period begins with the White Revolution and the resumption of the modernisation process and ends with the 1979 revolution and the collapse of the Pahlavi dynasty.

The accession of the young Mohammad Reza Shah to the throne during the turbulent days after September 1941, in a country occupied by the Allies, with the absence of a father deposed from the throne and sent into exile, a disintegrated army, a feeble and weak government, and a fragile and crisis-ridden economy, was more an inevitable choice than a symbol of the emergence of a young and dynamic authority in the sphere of politics and statecraft. In the first instance, it possessed only a symbolic and ceremonial aspect of monarchical succession, because the vast majority of the strong authority of the Reza Shah era collapsed with his removal. With the weakening of the state institution and its military and administrative control arms, an open political atmosphere prevailed in the country. In its shadow, while some laws and regulations concerning the restriction and prohibition of political activities were repealed or ignored, the possibility of resuming activities for parties, movements, and ethnic groups was provided, and gradually the political atmosphere of the country, despite its relative turmoil and disarray, once again witnessed political, party, and ethnic movements and activities.

Thus, the period between 1941 and 1953 and the occurrence of the 28 Mordad coup, on the one hand, due to the reduction of the unlimited authority of the court and the Shah, the government's adherence to some principles of the constitution, the relative restoration of the independence of the National Consultative

Assembly (Majles) and its influence on political decisions and actions, and on the other hand, the acquisition of a political and social base and influence by political parties and movements against the official power apparatus, together created conditions that are considered one of the important periods of political freedom in the contemporary history of Iran. [1]

In this political atmosphere, one of the issues that emerged from within society was ethnic demands and aspirations, which manifested themselves in the form of party activities and autonomy movements. Specifically, the Kurdish and Turkic/Azeri ethnic groups were at the centre of ethnic activities during this period. In 1945, in Kurdistan with Mahabad as its centre and under the leadership of Qazi Muhammad, and in Azerbaijan with Tabriz as its centre and under the leadership of Seyyed Jafar Pishevari, two autonomous republics were established with the titles Republic of Kurdistan and National Government of Azerbaijan, with the help of the Soviet Union.[2] These two governments were dissolved after about a year following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Iran and the change in the political-security equations of the region, following a military expedition by the army to Mahabad and Tabriz. In other regions of Iran, especially among the southern tribes, bloody clashes also occurred with government forces, the most important of which was the war of the Qashqai khans with the central government, the climax of which is known as the 'Battle of Semirom.' [3]

The open political atmosphere of that period was a context in which ethnic demands could flow in the form of party and organizational activities, whether national or ethnic parties, associations, and movements. The extreme weakness of

1. For further reading on the challenges and opportunities of this period, see: Fakhreddin Azimi, The Crisis of Democracy in Iran, Nashr-e Qatreh.

2. These two important and influential historical ethnic events are described and examined in detail in this chapter under the title “Ethnic Movements and Uprisings in Contemporary Iran.”

3. For further reading: Bayat, Kaveh (2010), The Battle of Semirom: The British, the Qashqais, and the Second World War, Nashr-e Khojasteh. The Battle of Semirom: The British, the Qashqais, and the Second World War is a historical book by Kaveh Bayat, a contemporary historian and researcher. This book is a study of the rebellion of the southern tribes, with the Qashqai tribe at its core, in the years 1941 to 1943. The book deals with the reasons and motivations of the parties involved in the Battle of Semirom, paying attention to influential currents such as the approaches of the central government and the cabinets of the time, the events of the Second World War, and the media atmosphere of that era. In addition to examining published works on this subject, this book has used numerous unpublished documents and records, such as the periodic reports of the British Embassy, and a section of the book is also devoted to these documents.

the central government in controlling and exercising power over various regions and areas of the country, especially the tribes and clans that had been revived, caused it to resort to the old policy of 'divide and rule.' Ervand Abrahamian, referring to this situation, writes: The British ambassador in Tehran believed that the central government could only maintain the state's influence in these regions with the old policy of inciting one tribe against another and perpetuating tribal conflicts. The ambassador reports this situation as follows: 'It is quite certain that the policy of inciting tribe against tribe will never lead to a lasting peace. But at present, maintaining a balance of power in certain areas is the only solution for the government to maintain a temporary peace and tranquility' (Abrahamian, 2005: 213). In the midst of this dynamic, turbulent, and unstable situation, the Pahlavi state gradually repaired the infrastructure of its authority and sought to gain ever more control over the political space, a process that finally, in the coup of 28 Mordad 1953, led to the complete seizure of political and military power by the court and the Pahlavi government. What is observed in this period in the form of the government's decisions and performance regarding ethnic groups is a kind of management of public affairs according to conditions and events, and it is mostly reactive. Therefore, in calling it 'ethnic policy,' one must be cautious.

In this period, an opportunity was provided for ethnic groups to, while reorganizing themselves socially and economically, also rethink their identity and, given the experiences of the transformations of the Pahlavi I era, to articulate their ethnic demands clearly and articulately in the free political space that had emerged. One of the most important demands of the leaders and ethnic and local organizations was the formation of provincial and state councils. The leftist parties and movements, specifically the Tudeh Party, were among the national parties that, based on their ideological principles, showed unique attention to ethnic rights. In the Tudeh Party's charter, while calling the ethnic groups in Iran 'nations,' it is stated about the necessity of safeguarding their rights: 'Iran is a state composed of multiple nationalities. Of course, they are linked by many common characteristics. They have had a common destiny for centuries. They have collaborated to create a rich and glorious culture. They have also fought side-by-side to preserve the independence and freedom of Iran. Despite these common characteristics, some of them have been deprived of their national rights. This factor has weakened the integrity of Iran and has hindered the political, economic, and cultural development of the entire country. The Tudeh Party is

interested in strengthening these bonds among the multiple nationalities. From the perspective of this party, a true and fundamental integrity will be achieved when equality is established among the different peoples of Iran and all forms of national oppression are eliminated. Therefore, the Tudeh Party believes that a democratic government must solve this national problem in the following ways: a) Recognition of the right to local self-government; b) Granting full social, educational, and national rights to all national minorities of Iran' (Tudeh Party, 1970: 7-8).

It should be noted that between 1949 and 1953, under the influence of the activities of the National Front led by Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, a kind of civil-political movement was formed in pursuit of restoring the pillars of constitutionalism and civil rights, from which a discourse of democratic and civil nationalism emerged and was successful in gaining the support of many liberal and civil rights-defending classes and groups (Bill & Louis, 1989). This nationalist movement, which Richard Cottam calls 'liberal nationalism,' attracted the attention and support of some ethnic groups due to its constitutionalist and civil nationalist ideals. However, this nationalist movement, in Cottam's words, was a 'short-lived victory' (Cottam, 2016: 329) that was marginalized with the coup of 28 Mordad and the removal of Mossadegh and the National Front movement.

With the coup of 28 Mordad 1953 and the severe suppression of political parties and groups and the creation of an intense atmosphere of repression and intimidation in the country, the edifice of monarchical authority and despotism regained its power and influence. By controlling the sources of power, it succeeded in imposing its control over the centre and non-central regions. The activities of parties, newspapers, and all manifestations of political and civil participation were shut down, and most political leaders and activists, from the left and the Tudeh Party to the nationalists, were imprisoned. As Abrahamian notes: An iron curtain was drawn around the sphere of Iranian politics. Opposition leaders were separated from their followers, activists from the masses, and political parties from their social bases (Abrahamian, 2005: 554). Katouzian writes about the change in the nature of political power in this period: Between 1953 and 1960, the ruling regime in Iran gradually transformed from a conservative plutocratic government into a personal dictatorship (Katouzian, 1995: 238), or as Cottam says: From 1953 to 1960, the Iranian regime transformed from a not-so-severe

authoritarian system into a comprehensive dictatorial system (Cottam, 2016: 36). During this period, the government tried to, by implementing some economic plans and development projects in the framework of the Second Seven-Year Development Plan (1955-1962), shift the public's focus from the political sphere, which was stagnant and limited, towards economic and development issues, and even to portray political freedom as something that disrupts the peace and welfare of the people (The Law of the Second Seven-Year Development Plan, 1955). As the Shah said in the presence of the representatives of the Senate and the National Consultative Assembly: 'Nationalism consists of preserving the national interest, and the national interest is preserved when the country is prosperous and developed' (Selected Speeches and Writings of His Imperial Majesty the Shahanshah Aryamehr, n.d.: 9, cited in Maqsoudi, 2003: 224).

With the consolidation of the political foundations of the Shah and the government under his command, the ground was prepared for a new wave of authoritarian modernisation, so that the project of building a new Iran, which had been suspended in 1941, could be resumed, this time with greater financial capacity and economic backing, more experienced human resources, a more modern bureaucratic organization and structure, a more equipped military and police apparatus, and a more complex approach to modernisation, under the banner of the idea of the 'Great Civilisation' and the revived ideology of Pahlavism. The government, which until this period was often engaged in resolving problems and issues in various fields and, in a sense, managed political, economic, social, and cultural affairs at the macro and micro levels, in the shadow of the tranquility resulting from the policy of suppression, elimination, and providing relative welfare from industrialisation and the consequences of the White Revolution, gradually put the programme of social, political, cultural, and economic engineering on its agenda. Given the political, social, and economic situation of Iran in the years leading up to the end of the 1950s, which was accompanied by an accumulation of widespread public dissatisfaction with the ruling establishment, the Pahlavi government found itself caught in a legitimacy crisis. Therefore, to resolve this crisis and to align the government's programmes with the new conditions and requirements, it set about creating an ideology that became known as 'Pahlavism' (Honarmand, 1970: 39), and at the end of the 1950s, Mohammad Reza Shah himself gradually took the seat of its most important ideologue as the initiator of the 'Shah and People's Revolution.'

Despite the fundamental difference in the political fate of the Pahlavi I and II eras, in the sphere of the discourse governing the idea of the nation-state and Iranian nationalism, the Pahlavi II period is the historical extension of Pahlavi I. Certainly, in some branches of the nationalist discourse of the Pahlavi II era, including in interactive procedures and executive mechanisms, differences with the Reza Shah era can be seen, but this discourse is based on the same principles and components of the Pahlavi I period and is essentially an effort to consolidate and deepen its foundations. From this perspective, all policies related to identity and national issues, including ethnic policy, with minor changes in interactive procedures and forms of encounter, follow the same pattern of ethnic policy of the Pahlavi I era in terms of outlook and strategy. Thus, the discourse of modernism and modernisation of Pahlavi II, relying on the rethought foundations of the Pahlavi I era and in the shadow of the opportunities, facilities, and abundant resources resulting from oil revenues, became a comprehensive macro-project at the centre of whose programmes was the construction of Iran and, in its own view, the modern Iranian. Corresponding to this goal, the necessary planning for social and cultural engineering was carried out.

The ethnic diversity of Iran, with all its varied cultural, social, linguistic, and religious indices, was one of the fundamental challenges on the path to establishing a new identity and national order. Given the detrimental and somewhat unsuccessful experiences of the Pahlavi I era in dealing with ethnic groups, the need for a more considered and rational policy was raised. However, the dominance of an ideological and centralist perspective was a fundamental obstacle to a principled understanding of the realities governing ethnic life and a correct approach to it. Therefore, the difference in the strategy and implementation of ethnic policy in the Pahlavi II era compared to Pahlavi I, first, relates to a distinction made in the policymaking system between the elements of ethnic culture and civilisation, and the principles of ethnic policy were designed on this basis. While in the Pahlavi I era, due to the weakness of the administrative system and the government's communication network, its policies, especially in regions far from the centre, did not achieve complete success, its ethnic policy was based on the complete denial of ethnic identity. However, in the Pahlavi II era, the elements of ethnic identity and the demands of ethnic groups were subject to a two-dimensional policy approach. Elements of culture such as clothing, handicrafts, music, etc., which had a folkloric and

artistic aspect and were not considered threatening by policymakers, were given attention and presented in cultural and artistic projects as manifestations of ancient and authentic Iranian art with interpretations corresponding to the Pahlavism discourse. The presence of ethnic groups in arts and culture festivals, music carnivals, and the implementation of cultural projects among ethnic groups (Daftari & Diba, 2013: 87-90) were the result of the implementation of such policies. This policy, on the one hand, is also rooted in the nativism and traditionalism prevalent among the cultural intellectuals affiliated with the court, especially the 'Circle of Farah's Companions' (Yazdani Moqaddam & Bigdeli, 2019: 157), who encouraged and promoted a return to traditional and native culture. Mohammad Reza Shah, to save himself from the social crises resulting from unbalanced development, benefited from the thoughts of the third generation of intellectuals (Abdizadeh Sarmi & Shahrokhi, 2021: 98). This mission was assigned to the newly established institutions of the General Directorate of Publications and Propaganda, the Fine Arts Administration, the Ministry of Culture and Arts, the Imperial Foundation of Academies, and the cultural organizations of the court (Akbari, 2003: 142). The second dimension of ethnic policy was a denialist and exclusionary approach to elements of ethnic identity that were in some way incompatible with the discourse of modern Iran or violated its components. Therefore, the teaching of ethnic languages and even, at times, publishing in these languages was prohibited. The prohibition of any political or even cultural and collective activity outside of government supervision was also among the prohibited activities subject to punishment. The second aspect of the difference also pertains to the method of implementing policies. Unlike the Pahlavi I period, where most policies were implemented through the use of violence, threats, and intimidation, in the Pahlavi II period, the executive and operational dimension of policies was carried out through milder mechanisms. The establishment of radio centres dedicated to ethnic languages, such as Tehran Kurdish Radio and Kermanshah Kurdish Radio (Kakaei, 2011), Zahedan Balochi Radio (established in 1959), Azeri Radio, and others, were initiatives in the media and cultural fields undertaken to transmit and promote the message and discourse of the central government among ethnic groups, such that SAVAK had strict supervision over their activities. However, at the same time, it was an opportunity for ethnic languages to, after years of isolation and

deprivation, benefit from a limited and selective chance for their revival. [1]

Hambly writes about the ideology of the Pahlavi government: 'As an ideology, the government promoted pleasing and satisfactory signs of nationalism in which the Islamic centuries were overshadowed by the memorable glory of the Achaemenid and Sasanian eras, and promised a more glorious and prosperous future under the so-called benevolent rule of the Shahanshah' (Hambly, 2008: 94). The monarch, who in the early 1970s had almost reached the firm belief that the foundation of his monarchy was so strong that it would last for decades, and in the shelter of this belief, had raised the banner of the movement 'Towards the Great Civilisation,' with the onset of the second half of the 1970s, two unexpected crises—an economic one affected by acute inflation and an institutional one resulting from the imposition of foreign pressures, the aim of which was to force the regime to moderate its police controls on human rights, especially the rights of political opponents in Iran—completely invalidated his idealistic and ambitious calculations and predictions (Abrahamian, 2005: 613). In such circumstances, as the tempo of opposition and protest gradually increased and, in the absence of a suitable protest space inside the country, protesters abroad were preparing for demonstrations and declaring their opposition to the policies of the Shah and the regime, the Shah still called his opponents nothing more than a handful of nihilists, anarchists, and communists (Khandaniha magazine, 1975: 1, cited in Abrahamian, 2005). Thus, the Shah, intoxicated by the rhythm of the footsteps of the 'Great Civilisation,' heard the 'cry of the people's revolution' only when no one could hear his voice. Inevitably, with the intensification of the revolutionary process, he left the country, and in February 1979, with the victory of the popular revolution, the Pahlavi monarchy in Iran came to an end.

In analysing this situation, it can be said: The ideology of the Pahlavi state, despite modernising some administrative, economic, and welfare pillars, was so rigid and one-sided that it failed to understand the contemporary social needs that in many cases arose with generational changes, and even considered Iranian utopias as deviant and anti-value. This was while a part of the Iranian utopias, while resisting the suppression of the state ideology, by situating themselves at the grassroots of society, tried to reproduce their social issues and changes. Although the Pahlavi ideology itself was derived and extracted from the utopias

1. The oral memoirs of some of the staff of these radio stations attest to the high level of audience engagement at that time.

of the constitutional intellectuals and emerged under the specific conditions of Iran during the final years of the 1910s, which envisioned the country's progress in a government with the characteristics of the Pahlavi regime, the Pahlavi ideology was only able to respond to the two utopias of security and modernity in the form of some civilisational manifestations such as railways, industrial factories, and universities, and was unable to respond to the utopias of freedom, justice, and equality, which became more radical every day with the readings of intellectuals and the Shi'i clergy. In fact, the incongruity of ideology and utopia in this era placed the social control and change of the Pahlavi state in conflict with social demands and provoked social resistance. On this basis, not only did a pattern of correspondence and understanding between the state ideology and social aspirations not emerge, but it also moved from a framework of interaction and opposition to one of conflict and hostility and the revolution of February 1979. Thus, the ideology of the modern Pahlavi state gave way to an ideology derived from Islamic utopias (Shariati & Abbasi, 2018: 96-97).

## The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Dominance of the Islamic Traditionalist Discourse

With the victory of the 1979 Revolution and the beginning of the Islamic Republic's rule, founded upon an approach of Shi'i political Islam, a profound discursive shift occurred concerning national and historical identity. In the process of its formation, the historical life of Iran and the Iranian people was narrated from a different perspective, acquiring a new identity profile. In this new construct of Iran and the Iranian, all elements and components of historical and national identity, both great and small, were re-examined and, within the sphere of a traditionalist, ideological Islamic reading, appeared with new meanings and significations. The discourse of ideological Islamic-Shi'i traditionalism, which became the dominant and governmental mode in the Islamic Republic of Iran, was one of the alternative and rival discourses to the Pahlavi identity discourse. During the political and cultural-religious struggles of the Pahlavi period, by challenging the discursive components of Pahlavism, it gradually promoted and strengthened its own foundations and indices in the social arena. Ayatollah Khomeini, as the founder and ideologue of the Islamic Republic system, insisted throughout his political and ideological struggles on a focal point from which he subjected the Pahlavi regime to the most severe critiques and attacks: the

distortion and destruction which, in his view, had occurred in the very Islamic and Iranian essence of the national identity due to the Pahlavi dynasty's West-toxified and anti-Islamic policies. This theme found a unique resonance in most of Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches and written works. One researcher, writing on the importance of identity in Kashf al-Asrar (The Unveiling of Secrets), one of Ayatollah Khomeini's earliest works, notes: 'One of the important indices of the book Kashf al-Asrar is the Imam's call for a return to Islamic identity, which for many years, for various reasons including the tyranny of rulers, the negligence of the clergy, and the slumber of the masses, had been forgotten' (Akhavan Kazemi, 1998: 65). Ayatollah Khomeini believed in a transition away from the identity heritage of the Pahlavi era and a complete reconstruction of identity in the period of the Islamic Republic. He observes in this regard: 'We will destroy all the decadent and hollow frameworks that have led the people to Westoxification over these fifty years, and we will build a government based on justice and fairness towards all classes of the homeland. We ask the people to rely on their own Islamic foundations and to turn their backs on the West and the West-toxified, who have caused the destruction of their culture… We must practically start from zero' (Khomeini, 1999, Vol. 5: 133). In this reconstruction, he also gives priority to Islam: 'We accept nationality in the shadow of the teachings of Islam… The nation is the Iranian nation, and for the Iranian nation, we will make every kind of sacrifice, but it is in the shadow of Islam; not that it should be all about nationality and a return to Zoroastrianism! Nationality, its limits are the limits of Islam, and Islam also affirms it. The Islamic countries must be preserved; defence of the Islamic lands is a duty, but not to the extent that we set aside its Islam and sit and cry out for nationality' (Khomeini, 1999, Vol. 5: 133).

Thus, with the 1979 Revolution, the ground was prepared for the enthronement of a narrative of national identity that had emerged concurrently with the first disputes over modern identity in contemporary Iran and had been present for decades as a marginal discourse in the arena of societal and national identity struggles. The essential elements of this discourse are: Islamism based on Shi'i teachings, a re-reading of Iranianness and nationality in the light of Islam, opposition to Western manifestations and elements, the rejection of archaeophilism and the pre-Islamic elements of Iran's history, and the rejection of modernity. In the words of Hossein Bashiriyeh, the very establishment of the Islamic Republic

government in its Shi'i sense, that is, according to Shi'i political theory, implied an assumption of unity and singularity in Islamic identity and the negation and denial of other existing types of identity. In this way, the traditionalist discourse was now doing what the extremist discourse of modernist nationalism of some intellectuals in the Constitutional and Pahlavi eras did to social identity, but in a different manner. Furthermore, after ideological traditionalism, as the dominant discourse, captured state power in an almost comprehensive way, it employed the instruments of power and its ideological apparatuses to undertake various policies and actions towards the comprehensive Islamisation of society, moral and cultural purification, organising public and private life according to its ideological values, and expanding Islamic identity in various fields of culture and society. The traditionalist ideological discourse has endeavoured to define and reconstruct man and society in an anti-liberal manner based on traditional and religious values. Various actions such as the imposition of compulsory covering for women, supervision and control over schools and educational institutions, ideological vetting of public officials and employees, the re-reading of history according to ideological interests, and the negation and prohibition of non-Islamic ideologies and intellectual tendencies are all considered various efforts towards homogenising a comprehensive social identity within the framework of ideology and the negation and denial of existing identity diversities. According to the revolutionary ideology, Islamic identity finds its specific determination in opposition to its 'other', namely the West. Therefore, the continuation of the theoretical conflict with the West, or anti-Westernism, was necessary for the continuation of the identity constructed by the ideology of the Islamic Revolution (Ahmadi, 2004: 127-126).

Following the victory of the Revolution and the relative dominance of the Islamic Republic's discourse over the sphere of collective identity in Iran, ethnic identity and its material and spiritual pillars were inevitably subjected to the re-examination and redefinition of this hegemonic narrative. These theoretical and discursive developments took place within a context where, on the other side, the street and the public square were the arena for the political, party, and group activities of a wide range of people who were trying to secure a suitable position and standing for themselves in the process of reshaping the macro-Iranian identity. The ethnic groups of Iran were among the active currents in the early years of the Revolution, making a concerted effort to redefine their ethnic

identity and their place within post-revolutionary Iran. The ruling discourse also sought to reinterpret and define their ethnic identity according to its own ideological principles. This situation led to two outcomes: on the one hand, the establishment of an ethnic policy by the official institution of power without considering the concerns of the ethnic groups, and on the other, the emergence of ethnic movements and campaigns in opposition to this approach. This contradictory relationship was one of the important and influential events on the course of political and social developments in the era of the Islamic Republic.

Regarding ethnic policy in the era of the Islamic Republic of Iran, two fundamental considerations must be taken into account. The first is the principles of ethnic rights explicitly stated in the Constitution, which as a national covenant should be the basis for the formation and regulation of the system's macro-policies, including ethnic and religious policies in Iran, although parts of it have yet to be actualised after nearly half a century of the Islamic Republic of Iran's existence. The second is that ethnic policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran, despite having some fixed foundations, is a function of the internal changes within the Islamic Republic system over the past four decades and its internal discursive transformations.

According to the Constitution, ethnic minorities are divided into three groups: a) Ethnic groups that constitute a specific group solely on an ethnic basis and adhere to the official state religion, such as the Azeri Turks; b) Ethno-religious minorities, such as the Baloch and the majority of Kurds, with distinct ethnic and religious characteristics; c) Religious minorities like the Armenians, etc., who, apart from their ethnicity, also have a distinct religious characteristic (Mousavi Dalini, 2010: 57).

Concerning ethnic identity and the equality of ethnic groups in law, Article 19 of the Constitution explicitly states: 'The people of Iran, of whatever ethnic group or tribe, enjoy equal rights, and colour, race, language, and the like shall not be a cause for privilege.' Therefore, based on this principle, there should be no distinction between Persians, Turks, Kurds, Lurs, Baloch, Arabs, Turkmens, and other ethnic groups in any matter, and various ethnic and linguistic groups should enjoy equal and identical rights in this regard. In the religious dimension as well, Article 12 of the Constitution chooses Islam and the Twelver Shi'i school as the official religion and sect of the country: 'The official religion of Iran is Islam and the Twelver Ja'fari school, and this principle is unalterable for

all time.' However, the Constitution has made provisions for other religions and sects that exist within the Islamic Republic system. In the same article, regarding other Islamic schools, it states: 'Other Islamic schools, including Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali, and Zaydi, are accorded full respect, and the followers of these schools are free to perform their religious ceremonies according to their own jurisprudence; their religious education and personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance, and wills) and related legal claims are recognised in the courts. In any region where the followers of any of these schools constitute a majority, local regulations, within the limits of the powers of the councils, shall be according to that school, with the rights of the followers of other schools being preserved' (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018: 19). Consequently, based on this principle, it can also be said that apart from the acceptance of the religious identity of the Islamic religious minorities in the country, their various rights have also been taken into consideration. However, it must be noted that according to Articles 110 and 115 of the Iranian Constitution, the Leader must be a jurist (faqih) and a high-ranking cleric of the official sect, and the President must also be committed to the official sect, namely Twelver Shi'ism (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018: 41 & 44), and these conditions mean the systematic exclusion of religious and sectarian minorities from various layers of power in Iran.

Article 13 of the Constitution, in the same manner, apart from accepting the religious identity of the religious minorities of Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians, has taken into account their legal equality. However, apart from the followers of these three monotheistic religions, according to Article 14 of the Constitution, 'The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Muslims are obliged to treat non-Muslim individuals with good conduct and Islamic equity and justice and to respect their human rights. This principle is valid for those who do not conspire and act against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran.' A noteworthy point in Article 14 is that although followers of other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Yarsanism, etc., cannot officially perform their religious ceremonies in any way—for example, build a temple or contract a marriage according to their own rites—they have the right to live in the country, and as long as they do not conspire against Islam, no one should disturb them. Finally, Article 15 of

the Constitution,[1] whilst recognising the diversity of their ethnic and linguistic identity in the country, emphasizes and specifies the possibility of using local and ethnic languages in the press, mass media, and the teaching of ethnic literature in schools alongside the Persian language. This article, after declaring and determining the official language and stating that 'official and administrative documents and correspondence, official texts, and textbooks must be in the Persian script and language,' mentions various freedoms for the use of local and ethnic languages, which include: the freedom to use these languages in the press and mass media and the teaching of ethnic language and literature in schools alongside the Persian language. (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018: 17 & 18) These rights ostensibly provide the possibility for ethnic groups to preserve their identity and cultural continuity.

On the other hand, the Constitution, in addition to the aforementioned articles, refers directly or indirectly to the rights of ethnic groups and minorities in Articles 7 and 64 to 106 (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018: 29-39). Regarding civil liberties, especially in terms of beliefs and social and political freedoms, the Constitution speaks of religious minorities. However, concerning ethnic groups, the same provisions that apply to the majority are in force, and regarding the provision of a specific representative or representatives for Sunnis or specific representatives for ethnic groups, no special seat has been allocated for them as it has for religious minorities. The most prominent case in which specific ethnic rights are addressed is the issue of freedom of ethnic culture and language, in which respect one can refer to Articles 15, 19, 20, 24, and 26. In Articles 24 and 26, the freedom to form 'parties and associations' and the freedom of publications and the press are also mentioned, a matter that also grants social freedom to ethnic groups. Whether parties can have an ethnic basis is left unstated in the law. However, it is clear from the text of the law that there is no prohibition, and as a rule, its interpretation is the responsibility of the relevant institutions. The term 'association' (jam'iyat), although somewhat ambiguous, can nevertheless refer to a wide range of organizations, in which case it can also

1. Article 15: 'The official and common language and script of the people of Iran is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, official texts, and textbooks must be in this language and script. However, the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and mass media, and the teaching of their literature in schools, alongside the Persian language, is permitted.' However, in recent decades, the teaching of their literature in schools alongside the Persian language has faced security challenges!

include cultural and social associations, charities, and ethnic minorities.

What is certain is that the principles contained in the Constitution, by virtue of being a general and fundamental law, are concise and general, and consequently, in the stage of implementation and the preparation of regulations, finer and more complex points will be revealed. On the other hand, the ethnic movements and crises that occurred in the early years of the Islamic Revolution in the country's ethnic regions have caused significant changes in the process of formulating ethnic policies, and the preservation of national unity and cohesion and territorial integrity has been given priority. Therefore, in the process of drafting laws, resolutions, and directives, preserving social harmony and solidarity, paying attention to nationalism and the factors and elements that create unity, and the common aspects of ethnic and national identity became the focus and acknowledgement of the legislator and turned into the dominant discourse in the drafting of laws. In this regard, one can refer to Articles 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 37, and 38 of the Constitution. Of course, most of these laws, in their implementation, have been subjected to biased readings and malicious interpretations, causing numerous conflicts and crises, to the extent that the implementation of this very constitution in Iran today would be considered a form of subversion of the ruling class! Therefore, there are several fundamental observations regarding the provisions of the Constitution concerning ethnic groups and sects. First is the self-contradiction of some of the explicit principles in other clauses or appended notes, in a way that completely diminishes their provisions. Another is that many of these legal provisions, despite the system being nearly half a century old, have not yet been actualised and lack guaranteed enforcement. The implementation of some of these principles, and even then incompletely, depends on the political conditions and internal developments of the Islamic Republic system. Therefore, with changes in the country's internal political atmosphere, some of them become the basis for government action and are subsequently shelved again after that period ends. In fact, in the culture of political behaviour and the method governing policymaking in the Islamic Republic regime, alongside the Constitution and other charters of national-ethnic and citizenship rights, there are unwritten principles that are the product of the system's security-oriented and centralist discourse, which fundamentally assesses ethnicity and ethnic identity as a serious threat. Therefore, it tries to manage it with a coercive and controlling approach. This approach itself is a

serious obstacle to the actualisation of even the minimum capacities present in the Constitution for securing ethnic rights.

In addition to the general outlines and fixed principles of politics and statecraft in the Islamic Republic regime, the course of ethnic policy and its ebbs and flows have also been subject to the discursive transformations within the system and the periodisations influenced by political and socio-economic changes, which, in a general overview, can be divided into the following discursive eras and stages:

The First Period: The Victory of the Revolution and the Establishment of the Islamic Republic (1979-1981): In this three-year period, the first issue related to ethnic matters and rights was the drafting of the Constitution. Given the inflamed revolutionary atmosphere, the resulting political-security considerations, and the reflection of the views of the leader of the Islamic Republic and the Shi'i clergy who controlled the legislative assembly, it was drafted unilaterally from the perspective of the regime's interests and without regard to the demands and opinions of the ethnic groups and their representatives. The second important ethnic issue in the first three years of the Revolution was the occurrence of unrest, war, and conflict in the majority of ethnic regions. The demands of the ethnic parties and movements in Kurdistan, Turkmen Sahra, Balochestan, and Khuzestan were among the most important collective demands of the day after the Revolution. After the failure to reach an agreement in the dialogues and negotiations between the representatives of the ethnic groups and the representatives of the Islamic Republic regime, it led to the legal prohibition of the activities of many of these parties by the central government and their being deemed hostile.[1] As the atmosphere became more radical, the regime adopted a coercive and military approach towards the ethnic movements and engaged in a wide range of massacres and executions. At this juncture, violent and repressive revolutionary action was put on the regime's agenda to ensure security and re-establish control.

The nascent discourse of the Islamic Republic, in response to ethnic and party demands and positions, called all classes, individuals, and ethnic groups to

1. See: Sahifeh-ye Imam; Vol. 9, p. 285 (Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa ordering an attack on Kurdish parties and opposition with a ruling of jihad on 19 August 1979) & Sultan-Qurraei, Hadi (2008). 'Turkmen and Turkaman Sahra'. In Kamrava, Mehran; Dorraj, Manochehr (eds.). Iran Today: An Encyclopedia of Life in the Islamic Republic. Vol. 2. Greenwood Press. p. 489 (The suppression of the Turkmen Sahra movement in Gonbad-e Kavus in April 1979 and February 1981).

religious unity, emphasizing the doctrine of the unity of the Islamic Ummah. Ayatollah Khomeini, as the founder of the Revolution and the regime's greatest ideologue, says in this regard: 'Islam has come to unite all the nations of the world, the Arab, the non-Arab, the Turk, the Persian, all of them together, and to establish a great nation in the world called the Islamic Ummah, so that those who wish to dominate these Islamic states and centres of Islam will not be able, due to the great gathering of Muslims from every group. The plan of the great powers and their affiliates in Islamic countries is to separate these Muslim strata, between whom God, the Blessed and Exalted, has created brotherhood and has remembered the believers with the name of brotherhood, and to separate them in the name of the Turkish nation, the Kurdish nation, the Arab nation, the Persian nation, and even to make them enemies of one another. And this is completely contrary to the path of Islam and the path of the Holy Quran. All Muslims are brothers and equals, and none of them is separate from another, and all of them must be under the banner of Islam and under the banner of monotheism. Those who create division among Muslims with the name of nationality and groupism, these are the armies of Satan and helpers of the great powers and opponents of the Holy Quran' (Khomeini, 1999, Vol. 13: 443-446). Thus, to speak of ethnicity and ethnic rights or linguistic and cultural differences from this ideological perspective was not only a reprehensible and undesirable matter, but also, contrary to the path of Islam and the Quran, considered a clear example of factionalism and separatism. At the same time, these very proponents of the doctrine of unity declared the official sect in the country's Constitution to be Twelver Shi'ism. Undoubtedly, such a doctrine and principles at the beginning of the Revolution, regardless of the developments on the ground, were a clear discursive sign of the hardening of all democratic, dialogue-based, and peace-oriented possibilities for reaching common ground—a position that ultimately dragged ethnic issues into the arena of war, massacre, slaughter, and execution.

The Second Period: The Eight-Year Iran-Iraq War (1981-1989): With the start of the Iran-Iraq War, in which the ethnic regions located on the western and southern borders of Iran were on the front line, ethnic issues, given the continuation of discontent, were doubly overshadowed by the war. Therefore, the atmosphere in these regions became increasingly security-oriented and militarised, and any ethnic movement was considered an act of opposition to the revolution and the system and complicity with the foreign enemy. To control this situation, its

management was mostly placed in the hands of security and military institutions with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) at their core. Throughout this period, the policy of confronting and eliminating ethno-nationalist groups was pursued with seriousness. This costly and unavoidable action left long-lasting effects, including thousands of executed, imprisoned, surrendered, and fugitive individuals and their families (Haghpanah, 2015: 74). Of course, at this juncture, the Islamic Republic regime tried to gain the social support of segments of the ethnic groups as much as possible by relying on various strategies of propaganda, infiltration, and granting financial and administrative positions to some individuals, groups, and strata of ethnic communities. The formation of the 'Organization of Muslim Kurdish Peshmerga' in some cities of Kurdistan and the recruitment of local forces into this paramilitary organization affiliated with the IRGC, and the recruitment of the IRGC among popular and native forces were among these actions (Ranjbaran, 2014). Gaining the support of some ethno-religious figures by resorting to the policy of the unity of the Islamic Ummah and the brotherhood of Shia and Sunni, including the idea of 'Unity Week,' which was officially established at the suggestion of Ayatollah Montazeri and the command of Ayatollah Khomeini (From Ayatollah Montazeri's suggestion to the sanctity of reviling the Companions, 2014), were other initiatives that proved effective among some Sunni clerics and the religious community. Infiltrating the impoverished and poor strata of ethnic communities, who were among the most deprived classes in the country, and creating a social base among them were other actions pursued through aid organizations and institutions such as the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, the Construction Jihad, and rural and tribal cooperatives.

From a discursive perspective, the discourse dominant in the first two periods of the Islamic Republic, from the Revolution to the end of the war, was a radical, authoritarian, security-oriented discourse that believed in the use of naked power, suppression, and elimination. With a logic of force and naked violence armed with Shi'i ideological fatwas and beliefs, it sought to solve, or more accurately, eliminate issues. The imprisonment, assassination, and exertion of pressure on ethnic and ethno-religious leaders was another undeclared policy that the regime adopted in this period to create a leadership crisis within the opposing ethnic parties, and as a result, some of the most important ethnic and religious leaders were eliminated. Dr. Abdolrahman Ghasemlou, leader of the Democratic Party

of Iranian Kurdistan; Ayatollah Shariatmadari, leader of the Muslim People's Republic Party in Azerbaijan; Ahmad Moftizadeh, founder of the Maktab-e Quran in Kurdistan; and the leaders of the Cultural and Political Center of the Turkmen People were among these leaders.

The Third Period: The Era of the Reconstruction Government:[1] The Reconstruction era refers to the two presidential terms of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, comprising the fifth and sixth governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This period began on 3 August 1989 and ended on 3 August 1997. The most important political event of this era was the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the accession of Ali Khamenei to the leadership. After the new leadership was established, Hashemi Rafsanjani took the helm of the government, and the primary concern of his government during this period was the reconstruction of the country after the eight-year war. Therefore, development policies and a technocratic approach to managing the country were at the forefront of the government's programmes, and the first five-year economic development plan after the revolution and part of the second development plan were carried out under this government (Borhan Think Tank, 2019).

With the end of the war, a relative security prevailed in the ethnic regions, even though they had borne the greatest amount of damage and losses from the war and ranked among the least privileged regions of the country in terms of unemployment, poverty, and underdevelopment.[2] Despite this, in the development plans, despite the slogan of deprivation removal, no special attention was paid to these war-torn areas. Rather, within the framework of macro-policies, these regions also benefited from some of the boons of the development programmes, which were mostly of a constructional nature. This was while, due to the continuation of the security-oriented perspective, no action was taken to establish heavy industries and factories in the ethnic regions. As the designers of the first development plan themselves later admitted, the preparation of provincial plans tailored to the ethnic, religious, and linguistic characteristics of each of these regions was effectively marginalised (Documents of the Third Development Plan, 1999: 71).

1. The title 'Reconstruction' for Hashemi Rafsanjani's government alludes to the post-war reconstruction period, and the use of this heading is due to its commonality in the literature describing the governments of the Islamic Republic, not as a value judgment!

2. See: Statistical Yearbooks of the country's ethnic provinces (Khuzestan, Kermanshah, Kurdistan, Sistan and Balochestan…): Plan and Budget Organization, 1997.

In the second development plan, which began in 1995, the government's focus was on economic stability. The spread of the consequences of the anti-inflationary measures of the first plan, which had affected all regions of the country, caused the government's programmes to be more focused on economic reforms, and no particular action was taken in other areas (Haghpanah, 2015: 77).

During this period, on the one hand, the security policy and coercive approach towards ethnic groups were maintained, as two special security institutions were activated under the Supreme National Security Council in the western and eastern border provinces. These two institutions were: 1. The Special Security Council for the West of the Country, composed of the governors of Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan, and Kermanshah, the directors-general of intelligence, the commanders of the IRGC, and the commanders of the law enforcement districts of these three provinces, the security affairs of the Ministry of Interior, and the Deputy for Internal Security of the Ministry of Intelligence. 2. The Special Security Council for the East of the Country, composed of the governors of Sistan and Balochestan, Kerman, and Khorasan, the directors-general of intelligence, the commanders of the IRGC, and the commanders of the law enforcement districts of all three provinces, along with the Deputy for Security of the Ministry of Interior and the Deputy for Internal Security of the Ministry of Intelligence (Haghpanah, 2015: 82). On the other hand, in order to overcome the crisis of influence, some cultural and media actions regarding ethnic groups were put on the agenda. Strengthening localism in the state broadcasting (IRIB) through the establishment of radio and provincial networks in ethnic languages, allowing the publication of magazines and newspapers in ethnic languages on a limited basis, and employing a greater number of local and native forces in educational institutions, including in the Ministry of Education, were among these actions.

The effort to achieve the highest degree of national unity by resorting to religious unity, ethno-religious characteristics, eliminating obstacles to unity, strengthening and promoting the Persian language, introducing an authentic religious and national identity, cultural independence, and promoting moral virtues were among the provisions of the document 'Principles of the Country's Cultural Policy' (Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, 1992) in this period. While emphasizing unity and referring to ethnic characteristics, its hidden implications clearly express a discriminatory cultural policy in relation to ethnic culture and identity. The superiority of the Persian language, and the

ambiguity and generality in the title 'ethnic characteristics,' without precise and serious attention to it, signal the low importance of these categories in the said discourse.

In general, the dominant perspective and the spirit governing ethnic policymaking during the years 1989 to 1999 was instrumental and based on a modernisation approach. According to its assumptions, it was thought that by accelerating the process of modernisation and socio-economic transformation, the importance of ethnic issues would diminish, and the role of ethnic identity would gradually fade. The modernisation approach, which in this period became the axis and basis of Iran's economic, political, social, and cultural development projects, led to results similar to its consequences in the macro-level of the country concerning the issue of ethnicities. This means that while achieving success in some economic and social areas, it did not produce the desired and predicted results in other fields. Acting on the basis of such a perspective not only did not bring about national integration and cohesion but also had reverse effects in terms of increasing the self-awareness of ethnic groups and increasing their demands from the central government (Haghpanah, 1998).

The Fourth Period: The Reform Era (1997-2005): The reformist movement was the result of a rethinking by a part of the revolutionary left-wing forces about the analysis of the current situation and the future of Iran in the post-war years. During the reconstruction period, by using the existing political and media space, they gradually formed a discourse on the political horizon of Iran that heralded the necessity of political development, civil society, freedom of expression, expansion of individual and collective freedom, adherence to democratic mechanisms, and moderation of centralism in power and management. This discourse was met with the general public's approval in the seventh presidential election on 23 May 1997, and Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, the reformist candidate, was elected president. The Reform Era covers the eight-year presidency of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, which is the era of the entry of the reformist discourse into the arena of political management in Iran.

In the discursive arrangement of the reformist movement concerning Iran and the Iranian lifeworld, ethnic groups and ethnic identity were also reviewed to some extent from the perspective of democratic principles, civil rights, and the requirements of sustainable development. The reform government's approach to ethnic issues and ethnic policies was manifested in the idea and concept of

civil society. Based on this approach, the view of the issue of ethnic groups was strengthened from a cultural and political dimension, and as a result, the cultural and political participation demands of ethnic groups were prioritised in ethnic policies. In sum, the reform discourse, by changing the attitude towards ethnic groups as an opportunity rather than a problem and a threat, put the utilisation of ethnic capacity on its agenda in order to eliminate political-economic discrimination and achieve sustainable development. The main frameworks of the reform government's ethnic policy can be seen in the following adopted policies, which were mostly included in the Third Development Plan implemented during this period: 1. Nativism through the employment of native managers and officials and granting more privileges and decision-making power; 2. Respect for ethnic culture and language and providing, albeit limited and controlled, opportunities for non-governmental activities in these fields, such as publishing books, magazines, and newspapers in ethnic languages, forming non-governmental organizations active in ethnic issues, etc.; 3. Limited programmes for decentralisation from the government and delegation of some powers to local and native managers and officials, of which the councils are an example; 4. Emphasis on the principle of citizenship and equality of all members of society without regard to ethnic and religious differences; 5. Economic development of ethnic regions with attention to native and regional capacities (Documents of the Third Development Plan, 1999: 29).

Given the priority of political development over economic development in the discourse of the reform government, the achievements of this government were mainly more evident in the political and cultural spheres. Following the dominance of this movement at the helm of the country's politics and management, its consequences soon became clearly visible throughout the country, including in the ethnic regions. In response to this political and cultural opening, ethnic communities also showed greater convergence at the national level and alignment with the government. The high participation of ethnic regions in the elections of these periods, and the significant presence of ethnic elites and intellectuals in the heart of political and cultural activities, were prominent examples of these new conditions. However, this situation was not a stable, improving condition but rather a tense atmosphere accompanied by occasional challenges, where in many cases, due to the obstruction of parallel institutions, the government was prevented from performing its duties.

From the perspective of identity and ethnicity, the reform discourse succeeded in gaining an understanding of ethnicity and its demands and expectations and made this understanding the criterion for its policy and action, so that during this period, a degree of convergence between ethnicity and national identity was achieved, or at least a possibility for dialogue was provided. However, the decline and eclipse of the reform discourse closed the door on this historic opportunity. The experience of reform, despite the important discursive turn it brought about and its ability to create a tangible and meaningful change in the horizon of the Iranian perspective on politics and society, despite eight years of governing and dominating the executive arena, due to a set of causes and reasons of discursive and functional weakness and the challenges and contradictions of rival discourses and movements, did not succeed in creating such stable foundations that would lead to the continuation of the dominant position of this discourse. Therefore, it soon became a marginal discourse in the contentious arena of political power, and most of its achievements were also eliminated and destroyed with the change of government and the coming to power of the principlist discourse attributed to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

With the end of the Reform Era and the renewed dominance of conservative and right-wing movements over the positions and sources of power and government, another discourse entered the arena of the country's governance. One of its strong manifestations was opposition to liberal concepts, the principles of democracy, and civil rights, and the expansion of an ideology of justice-centeredness and the global ideal of a righteous government. The emergence of this discourse and its eight-year rule over politics and society in Iran, in both domestic and international dimensions, was the beginning of a new chapter in the Iranian lifeworld. Its consequences at both domestic and global levels created the political, social, economic, and cultural grounds for a situation whose results, in both the short and long term, were a range of dissatisfactions and protests. Therefore, this period and subsequent periods, as a prelude to the emergence of the general conditions of Iran in the final decade of the 14th century SH and the early years of the recent century, when Iran was the scene of demonstrations and protest movements, are examined in the final chapter.

## Historical Genealogy, Geographical Distribution, and Cultural and Economic Profiles of Ethnic Groups in Iran

From a political perspective, contemporary Iran, officially the 'Islamic Republic of Iran,' is a country located in the Middle East and West Asia. It is bordered to the north-west by Turkey, Armenia, and the Republic of Azerbaijan; to the north by the Caspian Sea; to the north-east by Turkmenistan; to the east by Afghanistan; to the south-east by Pakistan and the Gulf of Oman; to the south by the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz; and to the west by Iraq. With an area of 1,648,195 square kilometres, it is the second-largest country in the Middle East and the eighteenth-largest in the world. The population of Iran is approximately 90 million, ranking it seventeenth among the world's most populous countries (Iran, n.d., Wikipedia). For administrative purposes, Iran is divided into 31 provinces. The official language is Persian and the official religion is Twelver Shi'i Islam. From a geographical perspective, the name 'Iran' encompasses an area broader than the country itself, covering the entire Iranian plateau. From the viewpoint of certain culture-centric interpretations that rely on linguistic affinities and cultural markers, Iran includes 'all peoples who live according to Iranian customs and speak Iranian languages such as Persian, Kurdish, Luri, Balochi, Khorasani, Gilaki, Azeri, Dari, Mazandarani, and so on' (Mojtahedzadeh, 2007: 155).

Iran is considered one of the ancient cultural and civilisational centres of Asia and the Middle East. Owing to its geographical coordinates and geopolitical position, it has a rich social history of the arrival, settlement, and migration of various ethnic groups and communities. The history of this land, from the perspective of demographic changes, social transformations, and the resulting political and cultural shifts, is a continuous history of the interactions and conflicts of elements belonging to ethnic groups. From the arrival of the Aryan peoples, which is considered the dawn of Iran's historical identity, to the political dominance of the Medes, Persians, and Parthians in the ancient era, and the arrival of the Arabs and Turks in the Islamic period, the history of Iran has been the stage for the emergence and agency of power centres arising from numerous ethnic groups. Therefore, the history of Iran can be called the history of its peoples.

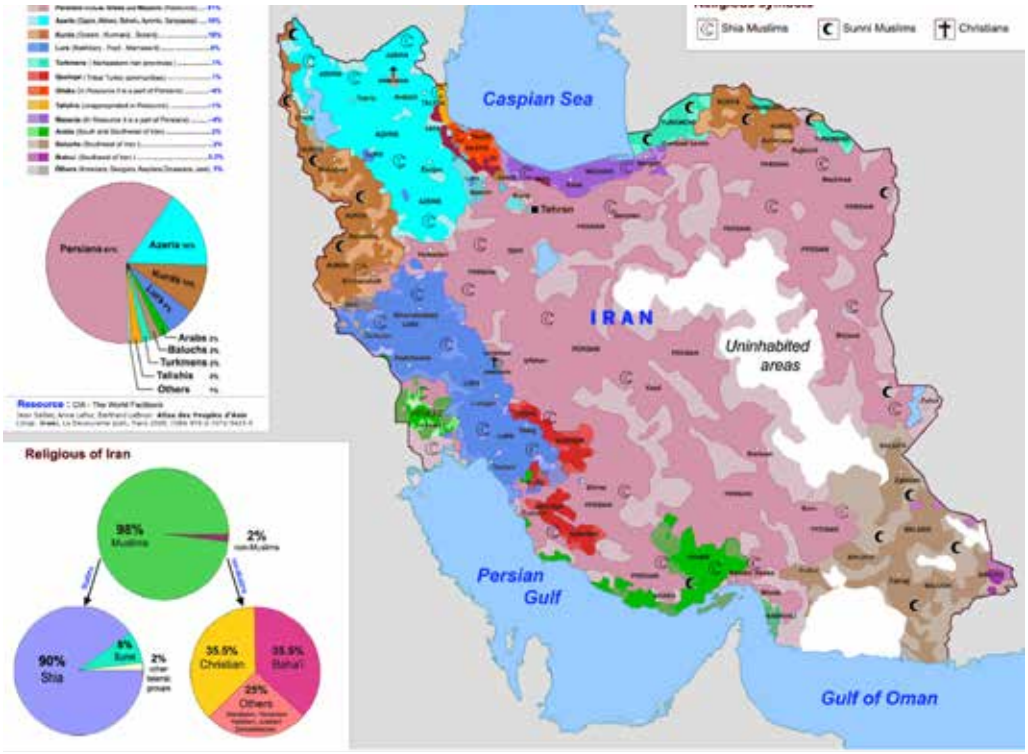



*Diagram 2-2. Map of the ethnic and religious distribution in Iran*

A reflection on the history of Iran from an ethnic perspective requires a crucial caveat: the terms 'ethnic group' and 'ethnic identity' in pre-modern and pre-contemporary history have a limited and specific semantic scope. Acknowledging this is essential for any historical re-reading and will prevent an inaccurate and anachronistic understanding of the ethnic question. In ancient times, 'ethnic group' and 'ethnic identity' were generally an anthropological and often non-political collective characteristic, which in the equations of political power was rarely the basis for individual and group behaviour and action. This is because in the pre-modern era, the tribal-clan model—based on kinship and blood relations, relatively clear and verifiable cultural and ancestral ties, and shared experiences of a common livelihood, where the element of 'asabiyyah (group solidarity) was the fundamental factor for its cohesion and continuity (Thery, 1983: 28)—was the main axis of political and even social relations. From this viewpoint, what is certain in explaining the relationship between tribe (il) and ethnic group (qowm) is that the two have a great affinity but also possess meaningful differences. The

tribe is the highest concrete level of the social structure of ethnic groups; in this respect, the ethnic group is considered the abstract level of the tribal relationship. In other words, the level of ancestral and cultural affiliations up to the tribal level is transparent, concrete, and verifiable (Goudarzi, 2006: 66). Of course, at certain historical junctures and in epoch-making events, tribal-clan political action has shown a high degree of congruence with ethnic identity. The arrival of the Aryans, Islam, and the Turks in Iran are, from an ethnic perspective, fundamental transformations in the history of Iran in which the manifestation of the ethnic element is evident, and its ethnic consequences are undeniable in all dimensions. However, the basis of the argument that ethnicity was not central to these historical events relates to the origin of the collective actions. That is to say, the reason for adopting the aforementioned collective behaviours, whether migration, invasion, or conquest, did not have an ethnic origin but rather stemmed from existential-livelihood and ritualistic-religious exigencies. This led to the history of ethnic groups being of little importance in traditional historiography, and most historical information on this subject comes from the anthropological data in works of historical geography and travelogues.

Another characteristic of the history of ethnic groups in Iran is the gradual and periodic process of the formation of its ethnic composition, which plays an important role in the configuration of Iran's historical identity. On this basis, the current structure of ethnic groups in Iran is the outcome of more than three thousand years of historical and social transformations. In every era, according to the movements and displacements of peoples and their entry into and exit from the territorial expanse of Iran, the ethnic face of Iran has taken on a new appearance. The lineage of some of the current ethnic groups of Iran goes back to ancient peoples who, based on historical narratives and primarily linguistic evidence, are mostly considered to be of Aryan descent (Harmatta, 1999: 357), such as the Kurds (Minorsky, 2019), Baloch, and Persians.

The advent of Islam and the migration of Arabs to Iran was another chapter in these ethnic changes, as a result of which the Arab ethnic element was also added to the social structure of this land. It should be noted, of course, that the presence of Arabs in Iran predates the emergence of Islam and goes back to the early Sasanian era (Frye, 1984: 10), but their conspicuous and influential presence, especially in cultural and linguistic terms, was marked by the Islamic conquests. The powerful entry of Turkic and Mongol peoples, with the two prominent characteristics of

a large population and an unstoppable military power reliant on nomadic tribal forces, was another ethno-demographic transformation that occurred in the middle centuries of the Islamic period and brought about a fundamental change in the order of Iran's culture and civilisation. The demographic-biological and cultural consequences of the arrival of the Turks were not limited to the borders of the Iranian realm; rather, their entry and presence in other Islamic lands, especially Anatolia, influenced the overall demographic and ethnic equations of the region (Sha'bani & Fakhari, 2012).

The historical formation of the ethnic structure in Iran was not solely limited to the entry of external ethnic elements. At certain junctures, internal changes resulting from migration, the forcible seizure of tribal-ethnic territory by another group, war and conflict, and forced relocation were factors in altering the ethnic structure. The constantly changing political and territorial domains of the dynasties ruling over Iran also played an influential role in the transformation of the ethnic structure, because the expansion of the ruling territory provided a suitable ground for inter-ethnic communication and mobility, and this itself prepared the way for changes in the ethnic structure.

The transformations and modernisations of contemporary Iran, in continuation of the changes and developments briefly outlined above, were factors that shaped the final stage of the construction of Iran's ethnic composition in the current period. Therefore, the presence and role-playing of the current ethnic groups residing in Iran—including the Lurs, Baloch, Turkmens, Azeri Turks, Tabari (Mazandarani), Gilak, Talysh, Arabs, Kurds, and Persians—in the expanse of Iran's historical relations, are of varying historical precedence in terms of their formation and do not have a uniform manifestation from the perspective of ethnicity and ethnic identity; rather, they have different natures. For some of these groups, ethnicity is merely an anthropological and neutral characteristic; hence, ethnic identity, in the sense of a perception coupled with commitment and ethnic action, has not been formed within their ethnic culture. However, for some others, the ethnic group and ethnic identity are a focal point in determining the direction of their goals and programmes, and ethnic identity is considered a developed and central phenomenon. Therefore, ethnic identity is a fundamental criterion in the recognition of these peoples and their nature and identity. In what follows, the main ethnic groups in Iran with conscious ethnic positions—namely the five groups (Persians, Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Baloch)—are introduced

and examined from the perspectives of historical genealogy, geographical distribution, and cultural and economic characteristics.

Before proceeding to a case-by-case examination of the ethnic groups, it is necessary to clarify that ethnic studies in Iran have always suffered from a paucity of specific statistical data from official sources regarding ethnic population, ethnic economy, ethnic geography, per capita ethnic income, and the share of ethnic groups in the national budget and resources. This deliberate statistical and informational strategy, which undoubtedly stems from the de-ethnicising perspective of the ruling regimes, is a persistent phenomenon that has continued from the Pahlavi I period to the present. Consequently, in the history of Iranian censuses from 1940 to the last census in 2016, there is no specific statistical data on ethnic groups and their composition. Therefore, most statistical data are constructed and elaborated based on the analysis and combination of other data. Beyond the failure to address ethnic indices in the country's data-mining and statistical system, most regimes have endeavoured, through the design and implementation of specific programmes, to erase ethnic markers and traces from the cultural and geographical face of the country as much as possible. The alteration of Iran's provincial geography without regard to ethnic texture, and even going further to disrupt this texture, is a deliberate action that began in the Pahlavi I period and continues to this day, nearly half a century into the life of the Islamic Republic regime. This matter, apart from its consequences in confusing ethnic data and preventing a correct assessment of the state of ethnic distribution in the country, is one of the factors exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions and discord in the country.

In general, in terms of geographical distribution, the various ethnic and religious groups in Iran have a distinct geographical distribution, such that in the four corners of Iran, peoples with different religions reside: in the north-west, the Azeris with the Shi'i faith; in the north-east and west of Iran, the Kurds with Sunni and Shi'i faiths; in the south-west of Iran, the Arabs with the Shi'i faith; in the north and north-east, the Turkmen people with the Sunni faith; in the south-east and south, the Baloch people with the Sunni faith; and in the central and northern parts, the Persian, Lur, Gilaki, Mazani, and Talysh peoples with the Shi'i faith. The spatial-geographical structure of the Iranian nation is composed of two interconnected parts: central and peripheral. In the central part, the people are cohesive and homogenous in terms of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious,

and spatial characteristics and constitute the main and major body of the nation. In terms of the aforementioned factors, they possess a uniformity and consistent density. In the peripheral part, which is inhabited in the plains and high regions on the geographical margins of Iran, unlike the dense and homogenous central part, it is fragmented and comprises a diverse collection of cultural and ethnic groups. The peoples of the country's peripheral part differ from the central part and from each other in some variables, specifically in language and dialect, ethnicity, religion, and local sub-culture (Hafeznia, 2002). From a demographic perspective, the population of Iran in mid-2023 was over 85 million, with its distribution frequency as follows: Persian-speakers 61%, Azeri 16%, Kurd 10%, Baloch 2%, Lur 6%, Arab 2%, Turkmen 2%, and others 1% (Iran, 2024).

## The Baloch People

The Baloch of Iran, with a population of between 1.5 and 2 million, are an ethnic group residing in the south-eastern regions of the country. Their ancestral homeland is the region of Balochestan in the present-day province of Sistan and Balochestan, though some are dispersed in other parts of Iran. The Baloch people are among those ethnic groups in Iran whose wider population is divided among neighbouring and other countries. The Baloch, who according to estimates

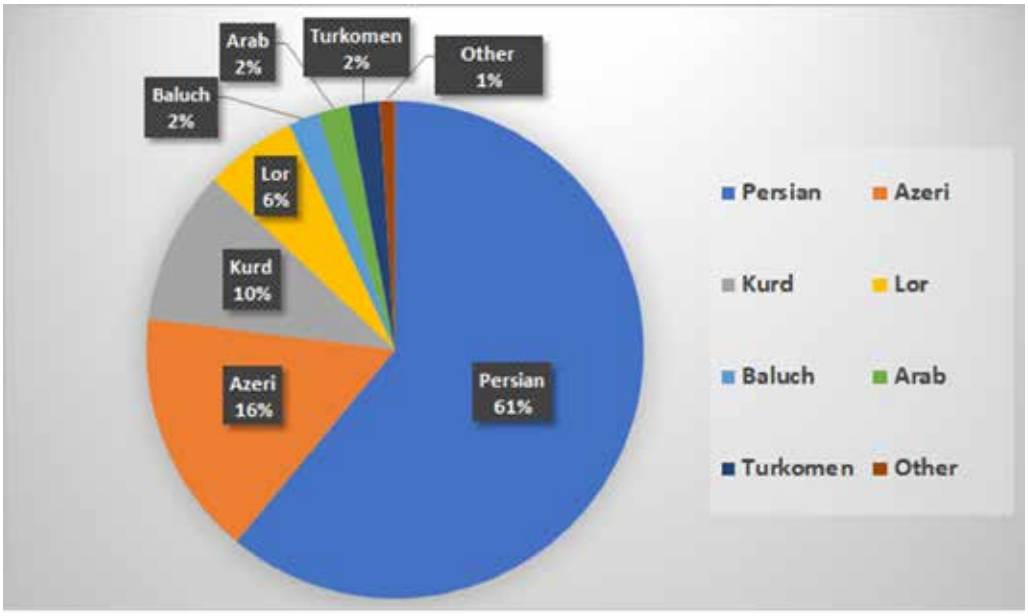



*Diagram 2-3. Ethnic distribution in Iran*

number around 15 to 17 million in total and belong to a historical-geographical region known as Balochestan, have had their land divided among three countries: Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. In the view of the Baloch and their neighbours, Balochestan generally comprises a region of over half a million square kilometres located in the south-eastern part of the Iranian plateau, south of the central deserts and the Helmand River, and the coastal lowlands between the Iranian plateau and the Gulf of Oman. Historically, it appears that its highlands were within Iran's sphere of influence and its lowlands within that of India. In 1870, the territory was formally partitioned among Afghanistan, Iran, and India (later Pakistan) (Abdollahi & Hossein Bor, 2002: 104). The Baloch population is estimated to be approximately 13 million in Pakistan, 2 million in Iran, 2 million in Afghanistan, and a further 2 to 2.5 million in India, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Turkmenistan, and elsewhere (Iran Minorities 2: Ethnic Diversity, 2013).

- ***Historical and Ethnic Genealogy***

The root and meaning of the word 'Baloch' are not precisely known, and various opinions have been expressed about it. Herzfeld considered it to be derived from the Median form of the word brza.vačiya, meaning 'a loud cry,' which also appeared in a similar form in Old Persian. Mockler conjectured that the word was derived from the ancient Greek Gedrosia. Gilbertson derived the word Baloch from Bālicheh, of the Chauhan Rajput dynasty of India, whilst others have suggested it comes from the Sanskrit word mleccha, meaning 'barbarian' or 'infidel.' Some have interpreted Baloch as a compound of the Persian bal or pahl, meaning 'hero,' and the Sanskrit uch, equivalent to the Avestan uz, meaning 'high,' rendering it altogether as 'tall and lofty hero.' They suggest that the Jat people (Jat, Zutt), who came to the present land of Balochestan during the Sasanian period before the Baloch, called the newcomers, whom they saw as taller and stronger than themselves, 'Baloch' (Blokbashi, 2004: 503). Historical sources indicate the use of the word Baloch during the period of the Arab Muslim arrival, and it generally appears from Islamic works that at the time of the Muslim invasion, the word Baloch was used for the people of the region. The Arab Muslims who entered Makran in 644 CE said that in the mountains of Kerman they encountered peoples called Koch, Qufs, Baloch, or Bulus (Baloch, 2023: 19). Based on historical evidence and documents, the use of the word

Baloch probably became common from the mid to late Sasanian period, although the reason for these people becoming known as Baloch is still not entirely clear, and sources suggest various reasons such as the migration of other peoples. Naseer Dashti speaks of the possibility of a forced migration of a people called 'Bālachegān' to this region by the Sasanians (Dashti, 2015: 49).

In historical works, different and contradictory images of the Baloch people are depicted. The author of the book Hudud al-'Alam writes about the character, behaviour, and life of the Baloch: 'They are a people between these cities [Jiroft and Bam]; they are Baloch, they are desert-dwellers, they engage in raiding, are bloodthirsty, and are pastoralists, and they are very numerous. Khosrow (Anushirvan) tried to exterminate them by various methods' (Anonymous, 1999: 100). However, Yaqut al-Hamawi, in a different view, speaks of the civilisation of the Baloch: 'They are a tribe like the Kurds, and they have vast lands between Fars and Kerman at the foot of the Qufs (Koch) mountains. They have great power, strength, and numbers. The Qufs (Koch) people, who are another tribe, with all their strength, fear no one but the Baloch. The Baloch are possessors of wealth and hair tents, and people are safe from the Baloch; they do not engage in brigandage, do not kill people, and their harm does not reach anyone, unlike the Qufs' (al-Hamawi, 1993: 492). In Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, under the sixty-year reign of Kay Khosrow, after mentioning the king of Makran, the Baloch and Koch are mentioned as inhabitants of Makran: 'An army of the heroes of Koch and Baloch // Contemplating war and raising a battle cry' (Shahnameh, under the reign of Kay Khosrow).

Geographers of the 10th century CE mention two mountain-dwelling groups in Kerman named Koch and Baloch (Qufs and Bulus), and among them, they describe the Baloch as a brave, hard-hearted people with a passion for raiding (Ibn Hawqal, 1979: 269; Maqdisi, 1906: 470-471). Historians and researchers of Baloch history have expressed different opinions about the historical and ethnic origins of these people. Some consider them to be ancient Babylonians. A group, relying on linguistic characteristics, calls the Baloch Iranian and Aryan, and some of the Baloch people themselves believe that they are descendants of Syrian or Hejazi Arabs and from the family of the Prophet's household (Ghorab, 1985: 19). One Baloch historian attempts to resolve the difference of opinion regarding the geographical origin of the Baloch by proposing three homelands for this people. He considers one group of Baloch to be from Aleppo, another

from the Alborz mountains in northern Iran, and a third group to be natives of this very land of present-day Balochestan (Blokbashi, 2004).

Studies in the field of the physical anthropology of the Baloch show their connection, in terms of the shape and size of the skull, cheekbones, and the shape and colour of the eyes and hair, to the Indo-Iranian type of the people of the Iranian plateau. Ivanov explicitly considers the origin of the nomadic Baloch to be Iranian, but in terms of physical characteristics, different from the Iranians and Kurds. Linguistic studies on the Balochi language also confirm the connection of this people with the Iranians and the Iranian Tajiks. Many researchers, such as Curzon, consider the Baloch to be Iranian and their language to be an Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. In terms of linguistic affinity, Balochi belongs to the Western Iranian group of languages and has a close kinship with the major Middle Iranian languages and Parthian (Blokbashi, 2004).

The ethnic evolution of the Baloch people from the ancient era to the present indicates that Balochestan has been the native homeland for several thousand years of peoples comprising various tribes who were collectively called 'Maka.' The name Makran is derived from them. Among these ancient tribes, the Meds and the Hots can be mentioned. These tribes spoke a language that is today called 'Dravidian.' In fact, these tribes, from the ninth millennium BCE, were among the first peoples to inhabit Balochestan and were the owners of the civilisations of that period. After that, around the seventh century BCE, the Parthians, as one of the seven tribes of the Median confederacy, were the first major group of invaders to enter this land. Since these migrants were not ordinary settlers but came in the guise of conquerors and then rulers of Balochestan, they had a significant effect on the language and culture of the native peoples of Balochestan. Then the Scythians appeared as the second major group of migrants in Balochestan. After entering present-day Balochestan, which included Sakastan, Turan, and Makran, and forming powerful governments in the north of the region, they were eventually assimilated among the Baloch but also left their own traces. For a period, they were known as Koch and Baloch, and finally, in the present era, all these groups have come to be known as 'Baloch' and form the current ethnicity of Balochestan. This means that the present-day peoples of Balochestan have a history of more than 9,000 years, during which they have witnessed many transformations. However, ultimately, while preserving very ancient names such

as 'Makran,' in recent centuries all the tribes have come under the dominion of the name Baloch (Baloch, 2023: 146-147).

• ***Geographical Distribution***

The land that is today called Balochestan has been referred to by about fifteen different titles in historical texts, documents, and sources. These titles are presented below: Maka and Makkeh (Yaghmai); Makia and Mikian (Herodotus and Abbas Mokhber); Paricanians (Diakonoff); Gedrosia and Kadrozia (Barthold, Arrian, Herodotus, Sykes, Pirnia, and Curzon); Ichthyophagi (Barthold, Sykes, and Holdich); the Land of the Fish-Eaters (Barthold and Holdich); Kosun (Sykes); Arbah (Nearchus and Ra'in); Jardos and Jad Rus (Bastani Parizi); the Land of Swamps (Yaghmai); Makareneh (Stephanus of Byzantium and Barthold); Kasmakoran (Marco Polo); and Makuran and Makran (Sykes, Mostowfi, Mokhber, Pirnia, Maqdisi, Kayhan, Ibn Hawqal, Ya'qubi, and Abu'l-Fida) (Mirmohammadi, 1995: 88). Among these, 'Makran' is the most familiar and frequently used historical name applied to the land of Balochestan. Makran in the Balochi pronunciation (Makkora) and in the old pronunciations 'Makran' and 'Maka' is one of the ancient regions of the world whose name is mentioned in the oldest historical books. Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian and the father of historiography, in his book The Histories, mentions Makran as the dwelling place of the 'Mukians' or 'Makas' (Herodotus, 2009: 119). Yaqut al-Hamawi (1178–1229 CE) writes about the reason for naming Makran as such: 'As has been mentioned, the biographers say that Makran was named after Makran ibn Farak ibn Sam ibn Nuh, peace be upon him, because he came to this region and settled there' (al-Hamawi, 1993: 180). Makran became famous from the name of its original inhabitants who bore the same name (Baloch, 2023: 15). As the famous Russian historian Barthold writes about the etymology of Makran: 'Makran is derived from the name of a Dravidian people whom the Greeks called Makai or Mukai. Therefore, Makran is not a name derived from Aryan' (Barthold, 1928: 203). Ali Blokbashi also emphasizes that the name of this region became famous based on its inhabitants, because in the Sasanian period the word Kush and Kus was used, and this region was generally called 'Kosun' (Blokbashi, 2004), which was probably taken from the name of a people in the east called (Koch) who lived in this area before the Baloch. In general, it appears from various historical documents that Makran is an ancient name, and it becomes clear that

this historical name is derived from the ancient inhabitants of the region, and also that the name Makran existed before the migration of Aryan-speakers to the region and does not have an Aryan root (Baloch, 2023: 16).

The earliest historical information about this land and its people dates back to the Achaemenid period and Greek writings. In the Old Persian cuneiform inscriptions from the time of Darius at Behistun and Persepolis, this land (present-day Balochestan) is mentioned by the name 'Maka,' with the ethnic pronunciation 'Machiya.' Kiessling, in an article that Frye considers the best history of this region up to the Muslim conquest, writes that the original inhabitants of Balochestan were the Dravidian 'Maka' and the 'Paricanians,' over whom the Iranian Gedrosians gained supremacy sometime before the conquest of Alexander. Later, a part of the Makas moved towards the coast, from the Persian Gulf to Arabia, and another part remained in Balochestan around the present-day Mashkid. During the Sasanian period, as the name Gedrosia disappeared, the name Maka appeared and became common as Makran (Frye, 1961: 44-45). Sykes is of the opinion that Makran is composed of the two words maka + arniya or irina, meaning 'barren land' or 'swamp,' and in the Sindhi language, it is Makran (Sykes, 1941: 91).

From Greek sources, it appears that the region now known as Balochestan, from the Indus River to Carmania (Kerman), from the Strait of Hormuz to the port city of Karachi, and from the north to Arachosia (Kandahar) and Drangiana (Zarang of Sistan), and from the south of the former Sea of Makran, was known in history as the geographical limits of Makran. According to Herodotus, in the mid-Achaemenid period when this region was under their control, in this large land, the fourteenth satrapy of the Achaemenids, in addition to the inhabitants of present-day Balochestan, the Zarangians also lived. This means that the two present-day lands of Makran and Sistan (present-day south-west Afghanistan) were a common region, which itself indicates the ethnic kinship and historical affinity of these two regions that later came to be known entirely as Balochestan (Baloch, 2023: 17-19).

The Iranian part of the historical region of Balochestan (Makran) is today located in the province of Sistan and Balochestan, Iran. This province, as the most extensive province in the south-east of the country, according to the 2016 census statistics, has a population of 2,775,014 and an area of 181,785 square kilometres. Including its territorial waters, its area is 187,502 square kilometres,

which comprises 11.5 percent of the country's area. This province has a 1,210-kilometre land border with the two countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan and a 370-kilometre maritime border on the northern shores of the Gulf of Oman. It is bordered to the north by South Khorasan province, to the south by the Gulf of Oman, to the east by the countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to the west by the provinces of Hormozgan and Kerman. The total borders of the province are approximately 1,580.2 kilometres, which is equivalent to one-sixth of the total borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The length of the province's borders with Afghanistan is 288.5 kilometres, equivalent to one-third of the total border of Iran with Afghanistan, and the length of the common borders of the province with Pakistan is 921.7 kilometres, which constitutes the entire common border of Iran and Pakistan. The length of the province's maritime borders with the coast of the Gulf of Oman is 370 kilometres. The province of Sistan and Balochestan is composed of two northern and southern regions. The north of the province is a region formed from the alluvium of the Helmand River, which contains the largest freshwater lake in the world. The lifeline of the region, the Helmand, shows considerable annual fluctuations. The blowing of the 120-day winds from late spring to the end of summer is effective in the dryness of the environment. The northern region of the province includes the counties of Zahedan, Mirjaveh, Zabol, Zahak, Nimruz, Hamun, and Hirmand. The south of the province has tied its climatic diversity to the Gulf of Oman. This valley has a mountainous nature. The southern regions of the province, due to their proximity to the Gulf of Oman and benefiting from the monsoon winds, have a different climate. A high average temperature and low fluctuations are the basic characteristics of the region's climate. Due to low precipitation and the absence of snowy mountain sources, most river flows are temporary and seasonal, and in a large part of the province, limited groundwater resources are the only means of water supply. The existence of the Taftan volcanic cone with a height of 3,941 metres in the north of central Balochestan has provided diverse and interesting climatic conditions. The southern region of the province consists of the counties of Khash, Saravan, Sib and Suran, Mehrestan, Iranshahr, Bampur, Sarbaz, Dalgan, Nikshahr, Qasr-e Qand, Fanuj, Chabahar, and Konarak (Geography of the Province, 2020).

- ***Social and Cultural Characteristics***

Baloch society was a stratified society in which four distinct social classes

were discernible: hākomzāt, Baloch, shahri, and ghulām, which, in a simpler interpretation, corresponded respectively to the aristocracy, nomads, peasants, and slaves. Each of these classes had its own specific hereditary characteristics. The three classes of hākomzāt, Baloch, and shahri each had their own special social organization, local grouping, and specific territory. The hākomzāt gave importance to lineage and affinal ties, the Baloch to kinship ties, and the shahri to lateral relations. The great mass of the Baloch (nomads) and shahri (peasants) were subject to the power of the hākomzāt. Hākom is the Balochi form of hākem (ruler) and was one of the common terms in the Qajar period. Hākomzāt referred to the extended families of the chiefs (sardārs) of the tribes who could establish direct contact with the ruler of Balochestan in Bampur. The Baloch were a large nomadic ethnic group who brought the name Baloch and the Balochi language with them to this land, which was named Balochestan. This nomadic group has preserved all its identity values in its life. Shahri refers to the peasant village-dwelling group. The shahri were probably descendants of non-Baloch landowners and from the peasant group. The ghulām were slaves who had been brought from various places to central and southern Balochestan. Some of the dark-skinned slaves were also called naqib (Pastner, 1984: 93).

From the perspective of social stratification, in the rural and tribal areas of Baloch society, a special form of stratification existed, which some researchers have noted. For example, in the geographical area of Bint in Balochestan, six zāts in rural society and five zāts in tribal society were identified, with each zāt forming a social stratum. In rural society, the Khan (the ruling group and their relatives), kadkhodā (landowners or large landowners), arbāb (small landowners), ostād (artisans including goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and carpenters), darzādeh (agricultural workers without water and land = the productive force of society), and ghulām (slaves, servants); and in tribal society, the Hot, Karankash, Baloch (each the name of a zāt or nomadic tribe), Jat (camel drivers), and tiyeh (slaves) respectively enjoyed hierarchical social value, prestige, and status. The individuals of the darzādeh and ghulām strata in rural society, and the Jat and tiyeh in tribal society, were considered the lower strata of Bint society and did not have social rights (Borqei, 1977: 66-72).

The political structure of Baloch society followed the structure of the tribal-clan system. Each Baloch tribe had a chief who was called a sardār, and in some tribes, a mir. The sardārs, with their families and members of their lineage, lived

in fortresses in the settlements of Balochestan, and their immediate dependents, the tribesmen, and the slaves lived in mud houses or huts and tents around the fortresses. These settlements usually also had cultivated fields, palm groves, and fruit orchards, but there were no bazaars or commercial activity in them. If there was any trade, it was carried out by non-Baloch individuals. The important factor in the selection of these fortresses was their fortress-like nature for the protection of the sardārs. The sardār-inhabited settlements became the centres of the territorial regions of Balochestan, such as the fortress of Sarbaz, the centre of the Sarbaz region, and the fortress of Zabol, the centre of the Zabol region. The traditional method of selecting sardārs depended on their personality, lineage, and marital alliances. The people of each tribe would choose their sardār with the advice and consent of the chief of the larger tribe or the confederation of tribes, who was considered the ruler of Balochestan. The Baloch would bring their disputes before the great sardār and accept his judgment among themselves and would support him against the sardārs of the tribes of the confederation. The tribal sardārs would give him a portion of the income of the lands of their territory as tax and would use the rest for their own expenses. Among the rural communities, the tribal sardār would choose the village officials, including the kadkhodās, and propose them to the people (Blokbashi, 2004).

After the central government's influence penetrated Balochestan and peace was established among the Baloch tribes (1928 to 1935), the scope of the sardārs' authority in Balochestan was limited. With the change in the role of the great sardār, who was the intermediary between the confederation of tribes and the representatives of the government, a profound transformation occurred in Baloch society (Razmara, 1941: 44). The social, economic, and political developments in Iranian Balochestan over the past half-century have brought about a fundamental change in the form of the social classes of Baloch society and the traditional stratification of rural and tribal communities. With the collapse of the centralised system of leadership power in the political structure of the society, the base and power of the leadership apparatus and the status and prestige of the hākomzāt class and the sardārs and khans collapsed. Today, with the change in the type of social and economic relations between the upper and lower strata of society, the social and economic position of the lower strata, that is, the main producer groups of the tribal and rural communities of Balochestan, has evolved and developed, and the class distinctions among them have disappeared (Blokbashi, 2004).

The religious beliefs of the Baloch at the beginning of the Islamic period and before it are not very clear. Some Muslim researchers, such as Jan-Mohammad in 'The Cultural Heritage of the Baloch,' have considered the early Baloch to be followers and believers of the Zoroastrian religion and Gabri or Magianism (Ahmadi, 1999: 108). Whatever religion and creed the Baloch had, they were probably among the first peoples outside the Arabian Peninsula to convert to Islam following the first Islamic conquests in south-eastern Iran or, according to one account, during the Abbasid period (Ibn Hawqal: 270). Today's Baloch are mostly Sunni Hanafi, and groups of them, such as the Shirvanis and Bameris, and some of the Baloch who migrated to Khorasan and Kerman are Shi'i. The Baloch who migrated to Arab lands and the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf have mostly adopted the Hanbali school (Blokbashi, 2004). The management of religious and legal affairs of the Baloch people is with the mullahs and mawlawis who have mostly been educated in religious schools in Pakistan. The mawlawis enjoy great prestige and influence in Baloch society and often compete with the sardārs in status and position. It is said that in the Darul Uloom Deoband in India, the ranking of mawlawis is as follows: 1. Mawlawi Alim, roughly equivalent to a bachelor's degree. 2. Mawlawi Fazil, equivalent to a master's degree. 3. Mawlawi Kamil, equivalent to a doctorate. From the 1960s onwards, the interest in performing religious duties and precepts and participating in religious activities has increased among the Sunni Muslim Baloch, which is sometimes considered a form of opposition to the Shi'is. Many of the nomadic tribesmen have received religious education and have become mullahs. The mullahs have gained increasing influence and have added to their religious activities in guiding the people and supervising their religious acts and ceremonies. On holidays (especially Fridays), when people gather for prayers and worship, they also engage in educational and political propaganda activities (Salzman, 1992: 52-53). The spread of the influence and dominance of central governments throughout Iranian and Pakistani Balochestan in recent decades has led to a decrease in the power of the sardārs and an increase in the power of the mawlawis educated in India and Pakistan among the Baloch, especially the Baloch of Iran. The representation of the Sunnis by the mawlawis in the political affairs of the society and the replacement of the power of the sardārs by religious power in the region have been factors in increasing the Islamic awareness of the Baloch and their greater attention to religious matters (BALUCHISTAN i,

1988).

The purposeful organization of religious and sectarian affairs and its continuous promotion and propagation among Baloch society in recent decades have led to a growing increase in religious and sectarian tendencies among the Baloch people. If we do not say that it has led to the precedence of religious identity over ethnic identity among the Baloch, we can claim that it has given their ethnic identity, more than before, a religious and sectarian flavour, such that today, from the perspective of public opinion, the most prominent identity characteristic of Baloch society is its religious profile. This identity transformation is the product of a process in which an organized and institutionalised reading of religion is placed on the agenda. Religious scholars, by discrediting the old conditions and mullahs and calling them unfamiliar with religious teachings and lacking serious literacy, seek to shape a specific social and cultural order in the region. In a sense, they invite the Baloch people to re-embrace true Islam, as expressed in the primary and fundamental texts of the religion and in accordance with the interpretation they themselves provide to the people. Mawlawi Hosseinpour (director of the Ain al-Uloom religious seminary in Gosht, Saravan, and one of the oldest, most prominent, and most learned scholars of Balochestan) says in this regard: 'His Holiness and personalities such as Mawlana Shahdad, considering such conditions, rose up to combat these corruptions and also to reform baseless innovations and customs. If someone were to narrate the history of that era for us in all its details, we would find that it did not differ much from the situation in Mecca before Islam; the only difference was that the people of Mecca had not yet become acquainted with Islam, whereas the people of this region, despite their claim to be Muslims, had not yet been freed from many of the customs and habits of the age of ignorance' (Hosseinpour, 2011: 61-55). From a historical perspective, the structural factors necessary for the fundamental expansion of religious fundamentalism in Iranian Balochestan were provided after the Islamic Revolution. However, until approximately the second half of the 1980s, religious fundamentalism was in the process of finding itself and also of institution-building and taking wing. From the second half of the 1980s, with the necessary conditions in place, religious fundamentalists began to socially expand their discourse. In fact, to gain the social support of the people, they initiated the programme of educating the people according to their teachings. For this, alongside launching systematic educational programmes,

they asked the general public that to achieve happiness in this world and the next, they must reorganize their daily lives in accordance with the teachings they put forward. Thus, gradually, the discourse of religious fundamentalism renders rival discourses inert and, by consigning them to oblivion in Baloch society, becomes the dominant identity discourse of the society. Therefore, the common currency of the time becomes the formation of a general trend of the religionisation of daily Balochi life, with the presence of multiple social strata. [1]

Another cultural and identity marker of the Baloch people is the Balochi language, with its ancient historical background. The Balochi language, despite being prevalent in south-eastern Iran, is, in terms of linguistic criteria, considered one of the North-Western New Iranian languages, spoken by Baloch speakers in Pakistani, Iranian, and Afghan Balochestan, and by Baloch migrants in other countries. This language has a great affinity with the Tati, Kurdish, Mazandarani (Tabari), Gilaki, and Talyshi languages. The Balochi language has characteristics that give it affinities with some of the Middle Iranian languages, including Parthian. At the same time, this language has its own specific characteristics which, because of these features, distinguish it from all Middle Iranian languages, including Parthian. For this reason, it can be said that, in fact, the Balochi language is not a remnant of any of the Middle Iranian languages and is an independent language of which we only have works from its new period. Since the Balochi language is prevalent in various countries, there has not been a consensus among linguists on its classification from the very beginning. Therefore, there are various classifications for it. For example, some, like Afshar-Sistani and Bahram Farahevashi, have said 'Northern Balochi and Southern Balochi,' and others, including Grierson, have said 'Eastern and Western Balochi.' Researchers like Sir George Grierson, who have recently put forward this view, say that Balochi is divided into three categories: Eastern, Western, and Southern. But if we want to set aside these somewhat complex divisions and refer to the most important and, in fact, the most well-known dialects of Balochi, we must refer to the Rakhshani dialect, which is one of the most widely spoken dialects of Balochi and has speakers in Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan (Tameh, 2017; Rezai Baghbidi, 2003; Balochi, Great Islamic Encyclopaedia). About one-third of the Balochi

1. For a study on this, see: Jahantigh, Hossein; Khajeh, Akbar; & Jahantigh, Zahra. (2021). The Precedence of Religion over Ethnicity: Islamic Organizations and Institutions of Hanafi Sunnis of Iranian Balochestan. Journal of Islamic Sects, 8(15), 317-335.

vocabulary consists of loanwords from Persian-Arabic. In addition, the Balochi language has borrowed many words from Indian languages, especially Sindhi, Lahnda, and recently Urdu. Brahui loanwords in the Balochi language are very few. In this case, the influence of Balochi on Brahui has been greater, such that about 20% of Brahui words have a Balochi origin (Elfenbein, 1989: 358-60).

### • *Economic Conditions*

Baloch society in the pre-contemporary era had a multi-source economy and was engaged in a collection of various income-generating techniques. The traditional productive activities of the Baloch included the breeding of sheep, goats, and camels, irrigated and rain-fed cultivation of grains, date palm cultivation, hunting animals, and gathering food and natural raw materials. Now, all these activities remain stable, and wage labour and smuggling of goods have also been added to them (Salzman, 1996: 52). In the annual economic life cycle of the Baloch, there were usually two or three different productive activities carried out simultaneously. At any given time, a Baloch had to perform at least two tasks, often in two separate locations. This issue had created a kind of division of labour and assignment of duties among Baloch families, such that each individual could be present for work and performing duties in more than one place at one time. Migration is the most important form of accessing natural resources among the Baloch nomads. The Baloch had two types of migration: pastoral migration in the Sarhadd region and multi-source migration from the pastoral areas of Sarhadd to the date-cultivating areas in the Mashkel basin. These two types of migration and the products obtained from them were complementary to each other and, to some extent, interdependent, and together with other economic resources, they shaped and organised the economic order of Baloch society.

Agriculture in Balochestan is dependent on seasonal rains. Wheat cultivation almost entirely requires rainwater. Two good rainfalls at the beginning of spring assure the Baloch farmers of a good harvest. Some irrigated fields are irrigated by river water, and some others by qanats. The Baloch were not familiar with qanats and their excavation and called the canals that connected to the banks of perennial rivers qanats. The agricultural products of the Baloch are dates, wheat, rice, and corn. Dates and wheat are the most important products of this region. Dates are an important part of the ordinary people's diet, and the surplus is one of the few annual exports of Balochestan (Spooner, 1946: 57-58).

The Baloch who live on the coast of the Gulf of Oman mostly make their living through fishing. These fishermen, who are called 'Med,' mostly reside in the ports of Chabahar, Konarak, and Tis (or Tiz). In addition to fishing, the Meds were also engaged in boat ownership (lanj-dāri), seamanship, and collecting salt from salt pans. The Baloch fishermen would usually salt the surplus fish from their consumption and exchange it for grains and legumes that were brought to their place of residence from within Balochestan (Blokbashi, 1969).

In terms of the economic situation in the current period, the province's proximity to the two countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan, with their unrivalled consumer markets on the one hand, and the special conditions prevailing in those countries on the other, have made this province very important. On the other hand, the Sistan region is currently facing many problems and challenges in its economic and social sectors due to successive droughts and the cutting off of the Helmand River's water, as the neighbouring country fails to comply with bilateral agreements and does not respect the water rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This province, due to being located in a metallogenic mineral belt that starts from Europe and, after passing through Minab and the Jazmurian heights, continues towards Khash and Zahedan, is rich in mineral resources in the field of metallic and non-metallic minerals. Studies have shown that mineral capabilities are among the important development potentials of the province, and many of the known metallic and non-metallic deposits can form the basis of large mineral industries. Among the important mineral potentials of the province are significant reserves of granite (199,423 thousand tons), copper (36,054 thousand tons), chromite (340 thousand tons), titanium (22,714 thousand tons), iron (193,000 thousand tons), gold (3,669 thousand tons), antimony (160 thousand tons), marble (11,177 thousand tons), and iron ore (210,869 thousand tons). In total, the identified reserves of the province are equivalent to 1,100,000 thousand tons, ranking 9th in the country, and the total number of exploitation licenses in the province is 200, ranking it 18th in the country (General Profile of the Province, 2020).

The province of Sistan and Balochestan has a suitable climate for cultivating profitable export products, especially tropical and subtropical fruits such as dates, bananas, citrus fruits, mangoes, papayas, chikoos, pistachios, and ruby grapes, which are among the tropical and subtropical fruits of Sistan and Balochestan. The most important agricultural product of the Sistan and Balochestan region

is wheat. In terms of animal husbandry, the province has 3,400,000 head of livestock. In Balochestan, extensive animal husbandry, like other nomads of the country with its patterns of seasonal migration, is rarely seen. Instead, camel breeding is more prosperous among the nomads of this region and is kept more for carrying loads and occasionally for smuggling than for its meat and milk. Also, the existence of rich marine and aquatic resources and suitable lands and climate on the southern coasts for the development of fisheries and fishing activities and related industries is suitable due to the province's location adjacent to the warm waters of the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean (Ebrahimzadeh, 2001: 171). The southern parts of Sistan and Balochestan province are adjacent to one of the largest water resources of the country, the Gulf of Oman. This proximity has provided a special opportunity for tourism and recreational exploitation and various water sports from the shores of the Gulf of Oman, especially during the winter (Negaresh, 2006: 62-81; Bikmohammadi, 1996: 11-13).

Regional statistical results in 2002 declared the province's gross domestic product to be 11,073 billion rials, which constitutes about 1.12 percent of the gross domestic product. A comparison of the province's share in the country's gross domestic product (1.12 percent) with the province's share in the country's population (3.4 percent) indicates the inability of the economic structure, especially the formal economy, and the not-so-strong participation of the province in national production. From the Gini coefficient index of income distribution, this coefficient in the eastern areas of the province has increased from 0.45 percent in 1999 to 1.03 percent in 2011, and in rural areas from 0.45 percent in 1999 to 1.01 percent in 2003, which indicates the inequality of the distribution of facilities at the provincial level (Kiani & Taheri, 2022: 34). The issue of underdevelopment in Balochestan is more a political matter than an economic one and is a consequence of a discriminatory ethnic policy that purposefully refrains from creating any political and economic opportunities for the peripheral regions.

The livelihood economy of the people of Iran has always been subject to political transformations. Any political transformation leads to a change in the economic indicators of the people. In addition to changes in people's livelihoods, another economic challenge for Iran is the distribution and redistribution of capital among different regions of the country. A major part of the political demands of Iranian ethnic groups, which sometimes leads to violence, is rooted in this very

issue. Centralised economic policies have led to the formation of a periphery, and the farther the regions are from the centre towards the border, the more the economic and livelihood gap becomes apparent. Although some economic policies are rooted in the centre's view of the inhabitants of the periphery of Iran (Iranian ethnic groups), the livelihood and income boundary cannot be precisely determined based on ethnicity.

The evidence of the last hundred years in Iran indicates an unequal distribution of opportunities and facilities. In a society where justice is not prevalent in various dimensions of the social system, or the feeling of individuals indicates a lack of justice, national identity in all its components will face crisis and instability, because the formation of national identity is based on the formation of a national community. A community whose constituent members consider themselves members and, in a sense, 'citizens' of that society. Citizenship itself implies responsibility, commitment, affection, and belief, and is intertwined with rights and, on the other hand, duties. On the other hand, the member individuals or the same citizens compare themselves with each other and, in the use of defined facilities, resources, and privileges, within the framework of society, consider themselves deserving of receiving them and demand the observance of justice in various dimensions. It is obvious that a large part of the implementation of justice is the responsibility of the government or the political system of the society. In the case of individuals' disbelief in the observance of justice, their citizenship identity, belief, commitment, responsibility, and affection—all of which are manifestations of their national identity—are damaged. This issue leads to social alienation, social isolation, and ultimately, the disintegration of social cohesion and consensus, which guarantees the continuity of the life of any society. Therefore, strengthening balanced socio-economic development, improving the quality of life indicators for citizens, and the appropriate distribution of facilities and spatial justice are necessities for sustainable development and guarantee the preservation of political and social security and ultimately, lasting peace.

## The Azeri People (Azeri Turks)

The Azeri Turks of Iran, who comprise more than 85 percent of the Turkic or, more precisely, Turkic-speaking community in Iran, are, with an approximate population of 15 million, the second most populous ethnic group after the Persians (Azerbaijani people, Britannica). They reside predominantly in the

provinces of Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Zanjan, Qazvin, and Hamadan. In addition to these regions, a large number of them also live in other cities, including Arak, Karaj, Qom, and Tehran; indeed, some statistics estimate the Turkic and Azeri population of Tehran to be as high as 25 percent (Tehran, Looklex Encyclopaedia). Like many other ethnic groups, the Azeris take their name from their historical homeland, the region of Azerbaijan, a land divided between the two countries of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, which in Azeri ethnic literature are referred to as Southern and Northern Azerbaijan.

The Azeris, who are known by titles such as Azerbaijani, Azeri Turk, and Turkic-speaking Azeri, number between 30 and 35 million people worldwide and live, in addition to Iran, in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia, and the Dagestan region of Russia (Sela, 2002: 197).

- ***Historical and Ethnic Genealogy***

Among the peoples of Iran, the ethnic origin and historical lineage of the Azeri Turks have been subject to more dispute and varied interpretation than those of any other group. In the field of historical and ethnological studies of Azerbaijan, two distinct and contradictory schools of thought have emerged. The first perspective, under the sway of the discourse of Iranian national identity, holds that the Azeris—both the current inhabitants of Iran and the people of the Republic of Azerbaijan—are an Iranian people with ancient historical roots. Racially and ethnically, they are held to have no connection to Turkic peoples; rather, following the migration and invasion of Turkic tribes into various parts of the Iranian plateau and their dominance over Azerbaijan, the language of the people of Azerbaijan shifted to Turkic, resulting in the assimilation of the original Azari language, which belonged to the Iranian family of languages. From this viewpoint, the Republic of Azerbaijan is a separated part of the land of Iran and lies within its civilisational sphere, possessing historical, cultural, and religious ties with its motherland (Javadi Arjmand et al., 2015: 220). The second perspective, in a completely different reading, considers the identity of the Turkic/Azeri people to be of entirely Turkic origin in terms of language, culture, and race. It maintains that the term 'Azari' is a fabrication and distortion created by Iranian nationalists to detach the Azeri community from the broader Turkic people, and that Turks have an ancient and deep-rooted presence in Iran. On the other side of this discursive conflict, Iranian nationalists likewise describe

the view of Azeris being Turks as influenced by Pan-Turkist ideas, claiming that identity-seeking movements in the form of Pan-Turkism[1] seek to redefine Azerbaijani identity within a Turkic framework (Ebrahimi et al., 2015: 8).

According to the historical narrative that posits an ancient presence of Turks in Iran, the first migration of Turkic peoples to Azerbaijan began in the 7th century BCE, reputedly with the migration of the Scythians. Subsequent migrations took place in the 5th century CE with the arrival of the Huns. During this period, ancient Turks (Bulgars, Khazars, Aghach-Eri, and Sabirs), who also migrated to Eastern Europe, came to Azerbaijan and settled there (Heyat, 1987: 169). This perspective also points to certain historical documents from the era of the Islamic conquests, such as the History of al-Tabari, the Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk, and Ibn Kathir's al-Bidāya wa-l-Nihāya, regarding the significant presence of Turks in Azerbaijan in the early Islamic centuries. In the first volume of his history, in mentioning the kings of Yemen, al-Tabari writes: 'Tubba', the king of Yemen, was a contemporary of Bishtasb and also of Ardashir Bahman ibn Isfandiyar ibn Bishtasb… He went to Anbar and then Mosul, and from there he made his way to Azerbaijan, where he saw the Turks and defeated them' (al-Tabari, Vol. 1: 404). Al-Tabari also writes regarding the events of the year 90 AH (709 CE): 'In this year, Maslamah ibn Abd al-Malik fought with the Turks and reached the region of Bab al-Abwab (Derbent) in Azerbaijan, and there he conquered cities and fortresses' (al-Tabari, Vol. 5: 226). It should be noted that the semantic implications of these texts, due to differing translations, have themselves become a point of contention regarding the veracity of the historical presence of Turks in Azerbaijan. Some Iranian historians consider these arguments to be influenced by flawed translations, incorrect understanding, and the distortion of historical realities. [2]

Regardless of the historical disputes about the early presence of Turks in

1. Pan-Turkism is a type of identity-seeking discourse with its own specific characteristics. In the Pan-Turkist discourse, signifiers and concepts such as anti-Islamism, separatism, anti-Iranism, hostility towards other ethnic groups, the falsification of history and territory, symbol-creation, and feminism are given meaning alongside the central concept of 'the unity of the Turkic race'.

2. In 2000, Dr Parviz Varjavand, in a letter to Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, the president of Iran at the time, warned about the activities of a group called the 'Azerbaijan Democracy Centre' aimed at distorting historical texts. This letter has other dimensions that are indicative of the thinking and realities governing ethnic issues in Iran. The full text of the letter is available at: https://iranchehr.com/?p=4315

Azerbaijan, the mass migration of Turks to Iran, particularly to Azerbaijan, took place during the Seljuk era. In the time of Malek Shah, Turkmens came to Azerbaijan, and soon cities like Ganja, Khoy, Urmia, and Hamadan were filled with them; the city of Khoy was even nicknamed the Turkestan of Iran. Besides the Oghuz, the Kipchak Turks also migrated to Azerbaijan. A significant portion of the Kipchak tribes passed north of the Caspian Sea and came to the Caucasus; another part adopted Christianity and were assimilated among the Georgians. The Kipchak element played a large part in the formation of the inhabitants of Tabriz (Heyat, 1987: 170). The migration of the Oghuz Turks from Turkmenistan continued until the Mongol period, to the extent that many of the Ilkhanate forces were Turks, and this was one of the main reasons for the Turkification of the language of Azerbaijan. During the Safavid period, the Turkification of Azerbaijan increased with the influence of the Qizilbash. The word 'Azerbaijan' is derived from the ancient name of the province 'Atropatene', indicating that despite the change in language, local names, albeit with slight modifications, remained separate from the process of Turkification (Yarshater, 1988). Thus, with the large-scale entry of Turks into Iran, given the suitable climate, the fertile pastures of Azerbaijan became one of the main centres of Turkic settlement, and this base was strengthened in later periods. With the rise to power of the Turkic dynasties of the Aq Qoyunlu and Qara Qoyunlu in this region, the Turkic position grew stronger, and with the emergence of the Safavids, who were from the Turkic families of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan assumed a completely Turkic character, which even led to the changing of place names and regions.

The pivotal position of Azerbaijan, with Tabriz as its centre, in the transformations of contemporary Iran marks a turning point in determining the status of the Azeri people in modern times. This has conferred upon their political, social, economic, and cultural conditions a distinctiveness in comparison to other ethnic groups. With the beginning of the Qajar era, Tabriz became the seat of the crown prince (dār al-saltaneh) of Iran, and alongside the Qajar heir apparent in this city, a wide array of great Iranian bureaucrats were always present. Due to constant contact with Russia and the Ottoman Empire, this region served as a gateway for the entry of new Western ideas and achievements. Consequently, Tabriz and Azerbaijan gained a leading position in the process of Iran's entry into the modern era. The Azeris, especially with the start of the Constitutional Revolution, were among the first founders of Iranian nationalism. This geopolitical position caused the

Azeris, as a peripheral ethnic group, to forge a different relationship with the centre. This factor, alongside the Azeris being Shi'i Muslims, became the basis for a unique trajectory in the formation of Azeri ethnicity. Despite being Turkic-speaking and subject to other centrifugal forces, they continued to play a role as an integral part of the Iranian nationalist narrative, the consequences of which are evident in all spheres, especially the economic one.

- ***Geographical Distribution***

In the past, Azerbaijan was the name given to a land that was bounded to the north by Arran, to the south-west by Assyria, to the west by Armenia, and to the east by the Mughan Plain and Gilan. Its capital was the city of 'Ganzak' (present-day Takht-e Soleyman) near Takab (Zandjan, 2002: 446). Azerbaijan is located in the north-west of Iran at the intersection of the Alborz, Zagros, and Caucasus mountain ranges and is a predominantly mountainous land. The rivers of Azerbaijan mostly flow into the basins of Lake Urmia and the Caspian Sea. The climate of most parts of western and north-western Azerbaijan is moist Mediterranean, and in the southern areas, it is Mediterranean with hot summers (Hoveida, 1973).

The Azeri regions in contemporary Iran are bordered to the north by the Aras River, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Armenia; to the south by Kurdistan and Zanjan; to the east by Gilan province and the Caspian Sea; and to the west by Turkey and Iraq. In terms of administrative divisions, it includes the three provinces of East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, and Ardabil. Within this, a large part of the geography and inhabitants of West Azerbaijan province is comprised of Kurdish regions and Kurds.

Various theories have been proposed regarding the etymology of the land of Azerbaijan. a) One group equates the emergence of this name with fire and fire temples in this land and interprets Azerbaijan as 'guardian of fire' (Āzar + bāyjān). Al-Tabari, author of History of the Prophets and Kings; Yaqut al-Hamawi, author of Mu'jam al-Buldan; Charles Lebeau, a French scholar; A. V. Williams Jackson, an American scholar; and Bahram Farahevashi, among others, subscribe to this view. b) Some derive the name Azerbaijan from a person named 'Aturpat' in Pahlavi or 'Āzarbād' in Persian. Ibn al-Muqaffa', al-Maqdisi, Hamdallah Mustawfi, Nöldeke, Barthold, Herzfeld, Ghirshman, Minorsky, Diakonoff, Edwin Wright, and Pirnia, among others, defend this viewpoint. c)

The two preceding views interpret the word Azerbaijan based on Persian roots, whereas another view considers it a Turkic compound word and holds that ‘Aturpat’ existed even before the rule of Atropates and was the name of one of the great tribes of Azerbaijan (Salehi Amiri, 2009: 204). Mohammad-Hossein Khalaf Tabrizi, author of Burhan-i Qati’, defines Azerbaijan as follows: 'Āzar in the Turkic language means high, and bāygān means great ones and notables' (Khalaf Tabrizi, 1982: 24).

From a geographical and historical perspective, the land that is today called Azerbaijan, and which is also colloquially termed the 'Median isthmus,' did not have a specific name of its own until the mid-9th century BCE. With the arrival of the Aryan Median tribes on the Iranian plateau, the Median tribes formed an alliance and established the Median kingdom. The territory of the Median kingdom consisted of two parts, Media Magna and Media Atropatene, and 'Media Atropatene' is the name applied to present-day Azerbaijan (Diakonoff, 1966: 18-13). Darius I, in his inscriptions, called this kingdom 'Media,' a name that in the Sasanian period was transformed into the word 'Mādi' and in the Islamic centuries to 'Māh.' The geographers of antiquity believed in two Medias. 'Media Magna,' formerly known as Iraq-i Ajam, included Hamadan, Garrus, Kermanshah, Qazvin, Aran (Arak), Nahavand, and Rey, which extended to the pass of the Caspian Sea that separated Media from Parthia. 'Media Atropatene' was applied solely to Azerbaijan. The name Āzarbādgān or Āzarbāygān, the Arabised form of which is Azerbaijan, is taken from a fire temple that was established by the Magi in present-day Tabriz (Vakili, 1983: 9).

Azerbaijan was one of the most important and largest satrapies of the country during the Achaemenid period (Taheri, 1995: 23). In the Seleucid era, it became an independent satrapy, and in honour of the name of 'Atropates,' the ruler of this land, it was called 'Atropatene' or 'Āzarbāygān' (Dibaj, 1967: 1). In the book The Persian Wars, authored by Procopius, a 6th-century CE Byzantine historian, the name of this region appears twice in the form 'Adarbaygānon.' At the end of the 4th century CE, Faustus of Byzantium, an Armenian historian, used the name in the forms 'Ātrpatakān' and 'Ātrpāyakān' (Zaryab Khoei & Ganji, 2019). Some also believe that the meaning of the name Atropates is rooted in the Zoroastrian religion and means 'Āzarbod' or 'guardian of fire' or 'protected by fire' (Chaumont, 1987). During the Sasanian period, Azerbaijan gained special importance. One of the three reputable fire temples of the Sasanians, the Adur

Gushnasp fire temple, was located in Shiz, Azerbaijan. The Sasanian kings would hasten to make a pilgrimage to it in times of hardship and present many gifts. This fire temple was a sign of the union of religion and state and was considered a symbol of the Sasanian state. In terms of territorial divisions as well, the Sasanian Empire consisted of 4 kusts (large sections), of which Ādurbādagān—comprising Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Arran, Daylam, Royan, Tabaristan, and Rey, which included the northern and north-western regions of the Sasanian realm—was one, taking its name from its main territory, Azerbaijan (Nöldeke, 1999: 185).

In the post-Islamic era as well, there is a difference of opinion regarding the precise borders of Azerbaijan, and this difference of opinion is especially greater concerning the northern borders. Regarding the relationship between Arran and Azerbaijan, two general types of views have been expressed. Individuals such as Ibn Khordadbeh, author of Al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik in the 9th century; Istakhri, author of Masālik al-Mamālik in the 10th century; and Ibn Rustah, author of Al-A'lāq al-Nafīsah in the 10th century, are among those who consider Arran to be independent of Azerbaijan and regard the Aras River as the border between these two lands. However, individuals such as Ya'qubi, Bal'ami, Mas'udi, Ibn al-Athir, and Khalaf Tabrizi, who produced their works in the 9th, 10th, 13th, and 17th centuries respectively, consider Arran to be a part and province of Azerbaijan and extend the borders of Azerbaijan to Derbent and the Caucasus (Ra'isnia, 1991: 78-79). This issue, due to its importance in ethnic and territorial land disputes, has been highly contested, and each viewpoint, relying on sources and in a selective manner, seeks to present an argument that supports its own view. For instance, a group, by emphasizing the separation of these two regions, is of the opinion that the part of the region north of the Aras that has taken the name Azerbaijan today was formerly called 'Albania' and 'Arran.' Ahmad Kasravi writes in this regard: In the treaties of Turkmenchay and Golestan, the name Azerbaijan was not given to the northern part of the Aras River. It is only in the 20th century that the names Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani take on an ethnic character (Ahmad Kasravi, 1978: 255-257). The name Azerbaijan replaced the original and historical names of Caucasus, Arran, and Albania in 1918 during the congress of the Musavat Party. This naming was done with the aim of separating Iranian Azerbaijan.

In general, present-day Northern Azerbaijan, located north of the Aras River,

which is now known as the Republic of Azerbaijan, was generally considered a separate region from Azerbaijan until the 9th century. However, after the suppression of Babak Khorramdin's uprising and the complete rule of the Abbasid Caliphate over the north and south of the Aras, Arran became administratively subordinate to Azerbaijan (Ibn Hawqal, 1987: 81). Despite the administrative dependence of Arran and sometimes Armenia on Azerbaijan during the Islamic period, the Aras River was still considered the northern limit of Azerbaijan until the advent of the Seljuks. However, after the migration and dominance of the Seljuks over the region, the north and south of the Aras became unified in linguistic, religious, cultural, and to some extent, political terms (Tale'i, 2011). It was from this time onwards that, according to Barthold, 'Arran was directly annexed to Azerbaijan' (Barthold, 1979: 67), to the extent that the name Arran was overshadowed by the name Azerbaijan and was rarely used in writings alongside Karabakh and Shirvan. For example, the use of 'Karabakh of Azerbaijan' instead of 'Karabakh of Arran' became common (Haydar Mirza Dughlat, 2004: 720). In the same vein, some sources from the Zand period refer to the flow of the Aras River through the 'middle of Azerbaijan' (Nami Isfahani, 1984: 110), and some sources from the Qajar period refer to the separation of the 'seventeen cities of Azerbaijan' from Iran (Fazl ol-Molk, 1982: 300).

- ***Social and Cultural Characteristics***

If the Azeri people are considered one of the inheritors of the culture of Turkic societies, they must be seen as heirs to a lifestyle and social relations based on a tribal and clan system reliant on pastoralism and nomadism. Favourable climatic conditions and a verdant region with rich pastures and abundant rivers created circumstances that made Azerbaijan a centre for the life of large and powerful tribes that played a significant role in the history of Iran. Among the great tribes and clans of Azerbaijan are the Turkmen, Shahsevan, Afshar, Qashqai, Khamseh, Khalaj, and Shaqaqi, who, in addition to Azerbaijan, also reside in Khorasan, Fars, Mazandaran, Golestan, and some other regions (Ravandi, 1975: 2). The tribal organisation of most tribes followed a similar pattern with defined hierarchies and classifications and a specific mode of production, the preservation of which guaranteed the survival of tribal life. For example, the tribal organisation and economic pillars of the Shahsevan, one of the most famous tribes of Azerbaijan, were as follows: The Shahsevan tribes consisted of a hierarchy. The families of

the ilbeyg and several others traced their common ancestry to Yenser Pasha, the ancestor of Badr Khan, and called themselves the 'Begzadeh' tribes. Other tribes were called ra'iyat (subjects) or hāmpā (companions). Each Begzadeh tribe also consisted of two classes. The members of the ruling family formed the central core of the tribe. This class bore the name of the tribe's ancestor. Appointment by the government, ownership of pastures, and descent from the tribe's paramount ancestor were the instruments of this class's rule. The Begzadeh class had a number of servants in their service. The Begzadeh class did not pay taxes, did not engage in labour, and was considered the owner of everything. In some tribes, the number of this class exceeded half the tribe's population (Tapper, 2005: 147). The pyramid of the productive organisation of the Shahsevan tribe started from the household and ended with the lineage (tireh) and the tribe (tāyefeh). In the past, the tribes were headed by khans, who enjoyed considerable social, economic, and political advantages. The leaders of the Shahsevan were much more powerful than the khans of tribes like the Qashqai. At the head of each small unit was a leader called an āq-saqqāl [white-beard]. With the expansion of urbanisation and the sedentarisation of most of Iran's nomadic population, the people of this tribe also settled in various parts of the country, and its tribal structure has almost disappeared.

The period of continuity of the tribal structure in Iranian Azerbaijan was longer compared to the parts north of the Aras [Northern Azerbaijan]. Since important Iranian dynasties such as the Safavids and Qajars essentially emerged from Azerbaijan and were Shi'i, the Azeri tribes had much friendlier relations with the central governments of Iran. Compared to other ethnic regions, Azerbaijan played a more active political role in the history of Iran. Uruj Beg Bayat lists 32 tribal groups, including the Qajars and Afshars, as the initial supporters of the Safavid dynasty (Bayat, 1959: 67-68). The Safavid state even took steps to create and strengthen tribes in this region, an example of which is the great Shahsevan tribe, which Shah Abbas created as a deterrent against the Qizilbash. The tribal chiefs, as allies of the central government and the monarch, enjoyed great autonomy and political influence in the region and effectively controlled all non-urban areas of Azerbaijan. Tribal groups such as the Shahsevan controlled the north-eastern regions of Azerbaijan until the emergence of Reza Shah (Ahmadi, 2003: 206-208).

Among the cultural and social markers of the Azeri people, the language of

the people of Azerbaijan is the most controversial element, about whose process of change and transformation no consensus has yet been reached. According to some findings of historical linguistics, the ancient language of the people of Azerbaijan was Azari, which belongs to the Iranian family of languages. With the arrival of the Turks, the Azerbaijani Turkic language, from the Oghuz branch of languages, gained dominance in this region and came to be used among the Azeri Iranians. This language includes several dialects such as Afshari Turkic, Shahsevani, Sonqori, and Aynallu (Knüppel, 2000). As mentioned, the root of the language of the Azeri people is one of the main points of contention in recognising the origin of the Azeri people, and the arguments for and against it are the basis of extensive debates about their ethnic identity. Mehrdad Azari says about the language of the Azeri people: 'The Turkic language that the people of Azerbaijan speak is not the original and authentic language of the people of this land, and some people, either mistakenly or with malicious intent, call it the Azari language. The Azari language, which was the authentic and ancient language of the people of Azerbaijan, is one of the branches of the Pahlavi language and, according to many historians, is the same as the Avestan language' (Azari, 1982: 53). Touraj Atabaki is also of the opinion that the Turkic language entered the Azerbaijan region following the extensive migration of Turks to Asia Minor in the 11th century CE (5th century AH) (Atabaki, 1995: 22). Ahmad Kasravi is one of the most famous historians who believes that the Turks of Azerbaijan entered this land during the Seljuk period and that the Turkic language also became common in Azerbaijan from this period. Before this period, the common language of Azerbaijan was the Azari language, which is itself a branch of the Persian language (Kasravi, 2000).

Reza Salehi Amiri writes about the linguistic transformation of Azerbaijan: 'Various languages existed in the Azerbaijan region. Some believe that since the Avesta appeared in Azerbaijan and it was the birthplace of Zoroaster, they have mentioned Avestan as the ancient language of the people of Azerbaijan. Istakhri, in the book Al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik, mentions the language of these people as a mixture of Arabic and Persian. Others, including Ibn Hawqal, Yaqut al-Hamawi, Hamdallah Mustawfi, al-Khwarizmi, al-Mas'udi, al-Maqdisi, Kasravi, Ibn al-Nadim, al-Ya'qubi, Marquart, and others, have mentioned the language of the people of Azerbaijan in previous centuries as 'Pahlavi Azari,' which was a branch of the Persian language. From the collection of statements and quotations,

it is concluded that the ancient language of the people of Azerbaijan was Azari, which many authors of the Islamic period have referred to as 'Pahlavi.' But it must be said that whether we consider the language of the people of Azerbaijan to be Azari or Pahlavi, both of these languages are called dialects or branches of the Persian language, and these two branches must be considered among the Persian languages. Today, some mistakenly call the current language of the people of Azerbaijan, which is Turkic, the 'Azeri Turkic' language. The Azari language was one of the Iranian languages and has and had no kinship with the Turkic language' (Salehi Amiri, 2009: 199-200).

The process of the spread of the Turkic language in Azerbaijan began from the Seljuk period and especially with the coming to power of the Atabegs of Azerbaijan (12th century) and the establishment of their government in Ardabil and Tabriz (Barthold, 1996: 166). The gradual elimination of the Azari language, as one of the Iranian languages in Azerbaijan, intensified after the Mongol invasion in the 13th century due to the extensive migration of Turkic-speaking tribes to this region and the establishment of the Ilkhanate capital in the cities of Maragheh, Tabriz, and Soltaniyeh. This process continued with the selection of Tabriz as the capital by the Chupanid, Jalayirid, Qara Qoyunlu, and Aq Qoyunlu governments throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. Finally, the Azerbaijani Turkic language, which had Turkic grammatical rules but included Azari and Arabic vocabulary, became completely common in the important centres of Azerbaijan by the late 16th century, corresponding to the Safavid period; although at the beginning of that century, that is, the early Safavid period, this dominance was not yet complete (Ajand, 2001: 536).

The establishment of the unified Safavid state by Shah Ismail and his economic and political measures to establish security and welfare changed the social situation of this region and prepared the ground for the growth of culture and literature. During the time of Shah Ismail, the Azerbaijani Turkic language became common in parallel with the Persian language. Literary Turkic was also officially used in administrations, the court, and military institutions and was taught in schools in parallel with Arabic and Persian (Heyat, 1987: 204-205). In the 16th century, Azerbaijan was the scene of war between the Safavid and Ottoman states. Despite the successive military campaigns of the Ottoman sultans and their prolonged stay in Tabriz in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, they could not dominate Azerbaijan. The good policy of Shah Tahmasp

and Shah Abbas I, and more importantly, the permeation of the Shi'i sect in Azerbaijan, caused the people of Azerbaijan not to submit to the obedience of the Ottomans. However, during the Safavid period, the issue of the Turkification of the language of the people of Azerbaijan became more practical and realised (Zaryab Khoei & Ganji, 2019). Jean Chardin, the French traveller of the late 17th century, also says about the use of Turkic languages in Safavid Iran and its relation to Azerbaijan: 'The Persians usually speak one of three languages: Persian, Turkic, Arabic. They believe that Persian is the natural and national language of the Iranians… The courtiers, military personnel, notables, and the women of the influential in the house all speak Turkic, because the king and the members of the royal family have risen from Azerbaijan, where the language of all its people is Turkic' (Chardin, 1993: 946).

Despite numerous historical ups and downs, at present, what distinguishes the Turks of Azerbaijan from other Iranian ethnic groups are symbolic differences, especially language. The Turks of Azerbaijan speak the Turkic language, which is a branch of the Ural-Altaic languages, and its main linguistic characteristic is the agglutinative nature of that group of languages (Heyat, 1987: 219).

Most Azerbaijani people in Iran and in the country of Azerbaijan are Muslims and followers of Shi'ism. Although in some regions of the country of Azerbaijan and scattered in West Azerbaijan, there are also Sunni Azeris (who are colloquially called Koresunni), they were originally inhabitants of Turkey who migrated to Iran in different periods.

Most of the Kurds of Azerbaijan are also Sunni Muslims and followers of the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence (Kurdish Religions, The Kurdish Project). Armenians, Nestorians, and Assyrians were other historical inhabitants of the Azerbaijan region whose numbers gradually decreased following demographic changes, and today only a small minority of Armenians reside in Tabriz and Urmia. In 1892, George Curzon estimated the Nestorian (Assyrian) population of Azerbaijan at 44,000 and the total number of Armenians at 28,890 (Curzon, 1994: 693-695). After the Treaties of Golestan and Turkmenchay, the Russian rulers encouraged the migration of Muslims from north of the Aras to the south and the migration of Christians from south of the Aras (who were generally Armenians) to the north. This policy was implemented so seriously by Russia that it eventually led to the protest of the Qajar government, and it reached a point where the Russian government promised in a contract to abandon this policy;

but in practice, this did not happen and eventually changed the demographic and religious composition of the geography of Azerbaijan (Hosseini, 2015). The Azeris differ from the Persians in the variables of language and ethnicity, but in the variable of religion and sect (Shia) and also in speaking the official language of the country, i.e., Persian, they are common with the majority of the nation, and some of their elites have been the intellectual and religious leaders of Shi'is in Iran and abroad. The Azeri region of Iran is similar to the Azeris of the Caucasus in the three variables of language, ethnicity, and religion, because before the treaties of Golestan and Turkmenchay, they were an integrated part of Iran.

In Azerbaijan, in addition to the Turks, there have always been native and invading population groups such as the native Albanians of the Caucasus, Medes, Scythians, and other Iranians, Greeks, Romans (Italians), Khazars, Arabs, Oghuz Turks, Seljuk Turks, Armenians, and Russians (Yarshater, 1988), among whom the Kurds have a more prominent position.

The Kurds, after the Azeris, are the second largest linguistic group residing in this region, who today live in the province of West Azerbaijan. In such a way that the 5 counties of Bukan, Mahabad, Piranshahr, Sardasht, and Oshnavieh in the south of the province (the Mukriyan region) with a population of 819,854 in the year 2016 (Results of the 2016 Iran Census), are almost completely Kurdish. In other counties of West Azerbaijan as well, speakers of both Azerbaijani Turkic and Kurdish languages mostly live alongside each other, and these are considered bilingual regions. The Kurds living in the northern part of West Azerbaijan (from the county of Oshnavieh northwards) speak the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish, and a large part of them are from the Shakak tribe. The Kurds of the southern part of West Azerbaijan also speak the Sorani dialect of Kurdish, and the Mukri tribe is one of the largest tribes of this region (Mukriyan). Of course, other Kurdish tribes with smaller populations also live in both the northern and southern parts of the province; for instance, in the Kurdish-inhabited parts of Urmia county, alongside the Shakak tribe, the Begzadegan, Herki, Zarza, and Mamesh tribes also reside (Farahani, 2006: 314). In the past, the presence of Kurmanji-speaking Kurds in Azerbaijan extended to the north of the Aras, but they were later relocated by Shah Abbas I in the early 17th century to North Khorasan province to counter the attacks of the Uzbeks. So much so that the dialect of the Kurds of northern West Azerbaijan is more similar to that of the Kurds of North Khorasan than to the Kurds of southern West Azerbaijan. This group of Kurds in northern Khorasan

formed the Shadlu tribe, and indeed, they used some of the geographical names of the Caucasus in Khorasan (Yazdanqoli, 1995: 2). Reliable sources have pointed to the historical presence of Kurds in the Azerbaijan region. As an example, Guy Le Strange, in mentioning the cities of Azerbaijan, citing historical sources regarding the situation of Oshnavieh in the Abbasid Caliphate era, writes: 'In the north-west of Pasva, was the city of ‘Oshneh’, where in the time of Ibn Hawqal [10th century CE], the Kurds resided, and Hamdallah Mustawfi also wrote its name in the form of Oshnavieh' (Le Strange, 1998: 177). In 1892, George Curzon numbers the border and Azerbaijan Kurds at 250,000 to 450,000, considering them one of the three main sections of the Kurds living in Iran, and writes about them: 'In this province and its neighbouring areas reside the famous and formidable Kurdish people, whose name in the world is synonymous with martial valour and belligerence.' He lists the major Kurdish tribes living in Azerbaijan as follows: 'Herki' (2,000 households), 'Mukri' (2,000 households east and north-east of Savojbolagh), 'Shakak' (1,500 households), and 'Ziza' (Zarza) (1,000 households north-west of Oshnavieh). He identifies 'Savojbolagh' (Mahabad) with a population of 15,000 as the seat of the Kurds of Azerbaijan, whose Kurdish ruler was subordinate to Tabriz (Curzon, 1994: 156, 702-704).

- ***Economic Conditions***

The economic situation of Azerbaijan does not follow the dominant pattern of underdevelopment in peripheral ethnic regions compared to central areas; Azerbaijan is considered one of Iran’s industrial hubs. This is rooted in the relationship of the Azeri people with the general equations of power, politics, and economy in Iran, which follows different rules from other ethnic groups like the Kurds, Baloch, and Lurs. In Azerbaijan, large and infrastructural industries such as machine manufacturing, automotive, cement, oil and petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals and chemicals, and food industries are located around the major cities. A few of the largest industries in this region include: Tractor Sazi Tabriz, Tabriz Machine Manufacturing, Tabriz Refinery, Tabriz Petrochemical, and Artawheel Tire Industrial Complex in Ardabil. The concentration of large factories and industrial centres in Tabriz is so dense that the city has become known as the 'City of Industry' (Faraji, 1987: 215-216).

Given the high rainfall in many parts of Azerbaijan compared to many parts of the Iranian plateau, agriculture is more prosperous in this region. Agricultural

products include grains like wheat, as well as orchard products. Animal husbandry and livestock breeding, alongside agriculture, are the dominant occupations of the villagers of Azerbaijan. The north-western region of Iran, including the lands of East and West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, and part of Gilan, has a diverse climate due to its mountainous terrain. Sparse forests, green meadows, and vast pastures are characteristics of this area, which has led to the life of nomads in this region. Currently, Azeris are among the most important industrial and agricultural producers in Iran. Azerbaijan ranks first in Iran in terms of the production of agricultural products, with the exception of rice. Tabriz is an important centre for Iran's automobile manufacturing, machine manufacturing, and tractor manufacturing industries, and with its oil refinery, it provides a major part of the fuel for the western provinces of the country. Azeri merchants have played an important role in turning the Tehran bazaar into an important commercial centre and still have great influence in the Tehran market (Ahmadi, 2003: 124). Many of the people of Azerbaijan make a living through handicrafts. The most important handicraft in Azerbaijan is carpet weaving, and some of the carpets woven in this region, including the carpets of Ardabil, Tabriz, and Heris, are world-renowned. Silverwork and engraving are other common handicrafts in this region.

Given the lack of demographic, economic, production, and educational data corresponding to the ethnic geography of the country, to assess the economic situation of the Azerbaijan region and compare it with other provincial centres belonging to other ethnic groups of the country, the economic situation of East Azerbaijan province is examined in general and as a case study. According to a report by the Statistical Centre of Iran, the unemployment rate for the population aged 15 and over in East Azerbaijan in the spring of 2023 was reported as 7.7 percent, which is in a more favourable condition compared to the national average of 8.2 percent (National Portal of the Statistical Centre of Iran). This province, with 3.5 percent of the national gross domestic product, is among the top 7 provinces in the country (Economic Ranking of Provinces, 2020). In total, the development indices in the dimensions of human, economic, cultural, social, education, welfare, and health in the provinces of Azerbaijan are in a completely better condition compared to other ethnic regions. The 'Aras' Free Trade-Industrial Zone in the Jolfa county of East Azerbaijan province is another clear example of the different economic situation of the Azerbaijan region compared to other ethnic regions. According to assessments carried out by the secretariat

of the Supreme Council of Free Zones of Iran, the Aras Free Zone, after the Kish Free Zone, is the second most developed and growing free zone in the country (Arab-Baghi, 2014).

## The Kurdish People

The Kurds in Iran, with a population of approximately 8.5 to 10 million, are considered one of the five largest ethnic groups in the country. Their primary homeland is the eastern regions of Kurdistan, located in the west and north-west of Iran. Alongside the inhabitants of the Kurdish regions, some Kurds also live in other cities and areas of Iran, particularly Tehran. Like other major ethnic groups in Iran, the Kurds have a population and territory divided among several neighbouring countries. The global Kurdish population is estimated at 40 to 45 million (The Kurdish Population, 2017), of which around 8.5 to 10 million live in Iran, 16.5 to 20 million in Turkey, 6.5 to 8 million in Iraq, and 3.5 to 4 million in Syria, with an additional 3 to 4 million Kurds living in Western countries and other regions of the world (Kurds, en.wikipedia). The Kurds, sometimes referred to in political literature as 'a nation without a state' (Deschner, 2011), are ranked among the important and influential ethnic groups affecting the regional equations of the Middle East due to their demographics, the geographical distribution and geopolitics of the territory of Kurdistan, and the economy of its energy resources, water, and so on.

### • *Historical and Ethnic Genealogy*

Various opinions have been expressed regarding the historical and ethnic origins of the Kurds, among which two perspectives take precedence. The first view holds that the Kurds predate the arrival of the Aryan peoples and that their lineage traces back to the Zagros mountain peoples such as the Gutians, Lullubi, Kassites, Hurrians, and Urartians before 2000 BCE. The second view maintains that the Kurds have Aryan roots and lineage, and even more specifically, considers them the historical descendants of the Medes (Minorsky, 2019: title). C.J. Edmonds writes about the ancient origins of the name ‘Kurd’: 'This term is perhaps an echo of similar names used by earlier writers in a more limited sense, such as the Gordyene mountains and the Kurtioi robbers of Atropatene Media whom Strabo mentions, and the Kardouchoi who, in 400 BCE, attacked

Xenophon and his ten thousand Greek soldiers retreating from the Zagros region in that interesting fashion' (Edmonds, 2003: 12). Ferdinand Hennerbichler considers the root of the name Kurd to be Sumerian (Hennerbichler, 2011). This view strengthens the pre-Aryan origin of the word Kurd and consequently the Kurdish people. Professor Howorth believed in the derivation of Kurdistan from Gutium. Honigmann similarly derives the name 'Kurd' from 'Guti' and says: 'The Kurds are natives who have lived in the Middle East for thousands of years. Their name is derived from the ancient Guti (Guti/Gurti/Kurdi), the conquerors of Babylon. The vast majority of scholars from various fields of history, anthropology, ethnography, and linguistics have recognised the contemporary Kurds as descendants of the ancient Gutians of Sumer. Abundant evidence in support of the connection between the Kurds and the Gutians is provided mostly by the place names of Kurdistan. In fact, the local name of Mount Judi and the Kurdish tribe of Judikhanlu are fossilised remnants of the formidable name used by the 'Gutians' in the past' (Jamie, 2009: 380). Xenophon, the Greek historian, in his book Anabasis, mentions the region of Corduene, south of Lake Van in present-day eastern Turkey. Referring to the warlike and mountain-dwelling people of this land under the title Carduchi, he recounts the hardships that the ten thousand soldiers under his command endured in their encounter with this warrior people (Gunter, 1996: 5). Various historical sources, in referring to the inhabitants of the geography of present-day Kurdistan in the ancient era, have used different names: Kardu, Kordouene, Kordyaeos, Kordiaya, Kurti, Kurt, Qurdu, Kurduk, and Kard, which have a great affinity with the name 'Kurd'. In the view of many of these scholars, the word Kurd is rooted in these names. Given the historical documents and linguistic evidence, the ancient origin of the word 'Kurd' is hardly in doubt, although some biased views on the historical discussions of the Kurds and Kurdistan, by resorting to the weakest arguments and citations, are clearly attempting to refute this evidence.

In fact, the origin and usage of the word Kurd and its semantic implications are one of the most contentious topics in Kurdish studies, which has for many years been a serious point of dispute between Kurdish nationalist researchers and the deniers of Kurdish ethnic and national identity. The deniers of Kurdish identity as a people or human group with a distinct collective identity, citing some sources from the early Islamic periods, consider 'Kurd' to be equivalent to 'nomad' and 'pastoralist'—a generic term, not the proper name of a specific human group.

This argument, particularly at the political level and in ethnic disputes, has often become a pretext for some ideologues and deniers of ethnic rights. In contrast, the defenders of the historical identity of the Kurds as a human group possessing the components of an ethnicity have presented some evidence, which mainly includes later works of the Islamic period, to refute the view of the first group and to defend the ethnic reality of the Kurds in history.

In general, a review of Islamic sources shows that, apart from cases where the sources used the word Kurd in isolation and without specific semantic signs and clues, in the first few centuries of the Islamic period, this word was sometimes used to refer to an ethnic group and in other cases with the meaning of nomad and mountain-dweller, or the nomads of the Zagros region. In addition, there are reports in the sources that indicate the Kurds were renowned for their nomadic way of life. So much so that, in some reports, non-Kurdish nomadic peoples were likened to the Kurds because of their nomadic lifestyle. Thus, it can be stated that the word Kurd originally had an ethnic denotation, but due to the prevalence of nomadic life among the Kurds and their renown for this way of life, sources sometimes likened other nomadic peoples to the Kurds… In terms of chronology, reports indicating the ethnic meaning of the word Kurd are found throughout the Islamic period. In contrast, reports from which the nomadic meaning of the word Kurd is inferred belong approximately to the period between the 7th and 12th centuries CE. After that, if the word Kurd is used in historical, geographical, and other sources to mean nomad, it is a repetition of older material or is influenced by it. At the same time, from approximately the 13th century, we witness a restriction in the meaning of the word Kurd, in the sense that the use of the word Kurd in the sense of nomad was gradually abandoned, and this word was used exclusively in its ethnic sense. This first became evident as sources began to distinguish between the Kurds and other nomadic peoples, especially the nomads of the Zagros region. The prevalence of the term Kurdistan as a geographical-ethnic concept referring to a specific area is another sign of this. However, the turning point in the process of the formation of the concept of Kurd as a purely ethnic concept, which had begun centuries before, was manifested at the beginning of the 17th century with the writing of the book Sharafnama, the first history dedicated to the Kurds and Kurdistan. In the Sharafnama, the Kurds, despite their political dispersion and division between the two Safavid and Ottoman empires and the dozens of Kurdish emirates and families that Bidlisi

refers to, are considered to possess an 'essential unity and plurality' and are seen as a people or a single whole, whose past and history needed to be written. In the Sharafnama, there is a section titled 'Kurds of Iran,' the meaning of which is somewhat ambiguous. The first thing that is understood from this title is that Bidlisi, under this heading, has dealt with the Kurdish families and tribes that are in the territory of the Safavid state. However, he has mentioned the Kurdish families who ruled within the borders of Kurdistan under familial or regional headings, without regard to whether they were in the territory of the Safavid or Ottoman state (Sa'idi & Zargari Nejad, 2017: 111-112).

Among the numerous opinions and narratives about the ethnic and historical lineage of the Kurds, despite all the differences of opinion, the proposition on which a consensus can be built is the antiquity and ancient heritage of the Kurds in the geography that is today called Kurdistan. Therefore, whether the origin of the Kurds is considered pre-Aryan or belonging to the Aryan peoples, or whether their dominant lifestyle in the Islamic era was nomadic or sedentary, none of these, in sum, contradicts the principle of the antiquity and ancientness of the lineage and the cultural, linguistic, and belief roots of the Kurds in the land that is today called Kurdistan. This subject has been unanimously confirmed by the sciences of history, archaeology, and historical linguistics.

- ***Geographical Distribution***

The Kurds, after the Arabs, Persians, and Turks, are the largest ethnic bloc in the Middle East (Olson, 2003: 6; cited in Abdollahi & Qaderzadeh, 2009). They generally reside within the border areas of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, in a land known as 'Kurdistan.' Thus, Kurdistan, meaning the land of the Kurds, is a relatively defined geographical-cultural region in the Middle East and West Asia, where the majority of the inhabitants are Kurdish people, and the Kurdish language and culture are dominant. Kurdistan, with an approximate area of 500,000 square kilometres, generally includes four regions: East Kurdistan (Iranian Kurdistan), South Kurdistan (the Kurdistan Region and other disputed areas in Iraq), North Kurdistan (Turkish Kurdistan), and West Kurdistan (Syrian Kurdistan). It should be noted that in some of the independent republics of the former Soviet Union, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia, there are also areas with a native Kurdish population (Kurdistan, Wikipedia).

Islamic sources, before and after the currency of the term Kurdistan, report the

presence of Kurds in lands such as Zozan, Armenia, Akhlat, Azerbaijan, Jibal, Fars, and so on, or have used terms like Zumum al-Akrad (Kurdish pastures), Jibal al-Akrad (Kurdish mountains), Bilad al-Akrad (Kurdish lands), Ard al-Akrad (Land of the Kurds), and Mawdi' al-Akrad (Place of the Kurds) to refer to regions where Kurds lived. Apparently, the first source in which the name Kurdistan is mentioned is an Armenian one. Matthew of Edessa, an Armenian historian who lived in the 11th and 12th centuries, mentions the name Kurdistan while reporting the events of the city of Edessa (Urfa) in the year 1031 CE. He does not specify the borders of Kurdistan, but as it appears from his report, by Kurdistan, he specifically had the region of Mayyafariqin in mind. Among Persian sources as well, Hamdallah Mustawfi, in the early 14th century, not only mentioned the name Kurdistan but also specified its boundaries. Of course, for Hamdallah Mustawfi, Kurdistan was the name of an administrative unit whose centre was the fortress of Vehar (Bahar) near Hamadan, and in the time of the Ilkhan Oljeitu, it was moved to Sultanabad Chamchamal near Mount Bisotun in Kermanshah. Perhaps for this reason, he has placed many other areas of Kurdish settlement such as Jazira, Diyarbakir, Erbil, and some regions of Armenia and Azerbaijan outside the boundaries of Kurdistan. In addition, some other late Ilkhanid sources have also mentioned Kurdistan. Qashani, under the events of the year 1928 CE, reports the uprising and claim of Mahdihood by a person named Musa Kurdistani in the mountains of Kurdistan. Shabankara'i has also mentioned the name Kurdistan on various occasions. In the same period, the term Kurdistan even found its way into some Arabic-Mamluk sources. For instance, al-Nuwayri reports the killing of one of Amir Chupan's sons in Kurdistan. In later periods (Timurid to Safavid, 15th to 17th centuries), we witness the expansion of the use of the term Kurdistan, both in terms of its frequency of repetition in the sources and in terms of its geographical referent becoming clearer. At the end of this period (early 17th century), the book Sharafnama, as the first history dedicated to the Kurds and Kurdistan, was written. Bidlisi, in the Sharafnama, clearly specifies the boundaries of Kurdistan, which for him is tantamount to the entire geography where the Kurdish people are in the majority, and he has called a vast area from near the Persian Gulf to near the Gulf of Alexandretta, Kurdistan. Bidlisi divides the Kurdish tribes and clans into four general elements, namely: Kurmanj, Goran, Kalhor, and Lur, and despite differences in language and some customs and traditions, he places all of them under the more general concept of

'Kurd' (Sa'idi & Zargari Nejad, 2017: 109-110).

Kurdistan is a predominantly mountainous land with fertile valleys, extending from the eastern slopes of the Zagros Mountains in the east. From this part, it extends southwards to the area between Hamadan and Sanandaj. On the southern side, it ends at Kermanshah, Ilam, and parts of Lorestan, and on the other side, at Kirkuk and Mosul. From the north, it extends towards Mardin, Viranşehir, and Urfa, then northwards towards Malatya and the Euphrates basin, reaching Kemaliye. In the northern parts of Kurdistan, it is bounded by the Mergan-Dağ and Haral-Dağ mountains, which extend towards Erzincan and Erzurum. The imprecise boundaries of Kurdistan prevent an exact estimation of its area. The Encyclopædia Britannica estimates the length of Kurdistan to be 600 miles (960 kilometres) and its width to be 150 miles (240 kilometres) (Kurdistan, Britannica). The Qamus al-A'lam (Istanbul, 1896), which is about the Kurdish provinces of the Ottoman Empire, gives its length as 900 kilometres and its width between 100 and 200 kilometres. Currently, the various provinces of Kurdistan cover 190,000 square kilometres in Turkey, 125,000 square kilometres in Iran, 65,000 square kilometres in Iraq, and 12,000 square kilometres in Syria. The total area of Kurdistan is estimated to be approximately 392,000 kilometres (Kurds, Kurdistān, 1986). It should be noted that in this assessment, parts of the geography of Kurdistan, including the Kurdish regions outside the administrative geography of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, have not been included.

Mohammad Mardukh Kurdistani describes the boundaries of Kurdistan and its important provinces and cities as follows: 'Kurdistan is divided into six provinces as follows: 1. The province of Diyarbakir, whose centre is also the city of Diyarbakir, and its major cities are Mayyafariqin, Mardin, Arghani, Siverek, Amid, Jazirat ibn Umar, Siirt, and Larjaki. 2. The province of Mosul, whose centre is the city of Mosul, and its major cities are Erbil or Hawler, Sulaymaniyah, Botan, Kirkuk or Aranja—which is the homeland of Sultan Saladin Ayyubi—Sinjar, Amadiya, Rawanduz, Kifri, Salahiya, and Gulanbar. 3. The province of Sanneh or Ardalan (Sanandaj), whose centre is Sanandaj, and its major cities are Bijar or Garrus, Saqqez, Baneh, and Avroman. 4. The province of Sablagh, whose centre is Mahabad, and its cities are Sardasht and Mahabad. 5. The province of Kermanshah, whose centre is Kermanshah with a long historical background, and Gilan-e Gharb, Sonqor, Kangavar, Kerend, Harunabad, Sarpol-e Zahab, Qasr-e Shirin, and Harsin are its cities. 6. The province of Lorestan, which

includes the cities of Borujerd, Khorramabad, Seymareh, Malayer, Nahavand, and Tuyserkan' (Tabani, 2001: 27-28).

Edmonds, in his book Kurds, Turks, and Arabs, describes Kurdistan and its territorial limits as follows: 'The term Kurdistan, in its widest sense, is applied to the territory where the Kurds have settled as a homogeneous community. This land is divided between Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, with small parts extending into Syrian and former Soviet territory. For this reason, its borders do not coincide with any of the international borders or customary administrative divisions within a country. In the north, this border is approximately a line passing through Yerevan, Erzurum, and Erzincan, and from there, in an arc, it turns from Marash towards Aleppo. In the south-west, it proceeds along the foothills to the Tigris, and from there, east of the river, it continues in the direction of the water's flow. Then, a little north of the Jabal Hamrin line, it turns towards a point on the Iran-Iraq border, near Mandali. In the east, that is, Iran, the limit of the Kurds extends in a south-easterly direction from Yerevan and includes the areas of Maku and parts of Khoy, Rezaiyeh (Urmia), Mahabad (Savojbolagh), Saqqez, and Sanneh up to Kermanshah' (Edmonds, 2003: 7).

Powerful states and regional-local ruling dynasties, such as the Atrians, Hadhbanis, Hasanwayhids, Banu Ayyar, Fadluyehs, Marwanids, Shaddadids, Rawadids, Ayyubids, and the emirates of Baban, Ardalan, Soran, Botan, Jazira, and others, are considered among the Kurdish and Kurdish-descended ruling dynasties of the Islamic period. Given the political, cultural, linguistic, and economic impacts they had on the society under their command, they were influential in shaping the general outlines of the historical ethnic and territorial identity of parts of Kurdistan.

From a geopolitical perspective, Kurdistan has a rugged and difficult-to-traverse geography, which has had a significant impact on the internal cultural, political, economic, and social relations of its own communities on the one hand, and on the communication of Kurdish communities with external societies on the other. The difficulty of the region and the formidable military talent of its inhabitants have always made Kurdistan a natural border for the empires that have arisen adjacent to it. None of these empires could extend its rule and authority over more than a part of this land. As a result, Kurdistan was divided according to the political borders of the countries that encompassed it. The wars between the Iranian and Ottoman empires established the current border of

Iran with Turkey and Iraq. The British and French conquests in the First World War separated Syria and Iraq from the Ottoman Empire. This new demarcation divided Kurdistan into four parts, often splitting the territories of tribes in two (van Bruinessen, 2004: 24).

The Kurds in Iran reside in the west of the country, adjacent to the eastern part of Iraq. This geography, which is the homeland of the Kurds located in Iran, is known by titles such as the Kurdish regions of Iran, the Kurdish-inhabited regions of Iran, Iranian Kurdistan, the Kurdish areas of Iran, Eastern Kurdistan, and East Kurdistan. The homeland of the Kurdish people, which is located in the slopes and scattered plains of the central Zagros mountain range, consists of the provinces of Kurdistan, Ilam, Kermanshah, Lorestan, and parts of northern and southern West Azerbaijan. It is bordered to the north by East Azerbaijan, to the east by Zanjan, Hamadan, and Lorestan, to the south by Khuzestan, and to the west by the country of Iraq. In general, the Kurds mostly live in the west and north-west of Iran and are distinguished by different dialects and accents. There are also groups of the Kurdish people living in Mazandaran, Gilan, East Azerbaijan, Qazvin, and Khorasan.

- ***Social and Cultural Characteristics***

The Kurds, in terms of their collective life, are heirs to both sedentary and nomadic ways of life. Therefore, in various historical periods, city-dwellers, villagers, and nomadic tribes have lived in the expanse of Kurdistan. However, the social organization of the Kurds, despite differences in livelihood, followed the macro-pattern of the tribal system in most regions, which had a defined hierarchy, and social affairs were ordered according to its mechanisms. Van Bruinessen, while noting that within the diverse communities of Kurdistan, apart from the general pattern of tribal division, in some areas non-tribal Kurds constitute the vast majority of the region's population, adds that these non-tribal Kurds are in almost all cases politically and economically subordinate to Kurds who are organized according to tribal relations. Thus, the tribal structure is something that is added to the prevailing quasi-feudal relations (van Bruinessen, 2004: 65-66). Khenan and Adamson, in describing the social structure of the Kurds, write: 'The largest political unit of the Kurds is the 'ashira, and this Arabic word means tribe (il), which is headed by one person. The 'ashira is a confederation of tribes for which a chief is appointed. After the 'ashira is the tireh (lineage), which is the

landholding unit, and its members are from one family. The tireh is also divided into the kheyl, which is a collection of houses gathered in a village or who have pitched their tents in one place. The Agha or Bey is the head of the kheyl, tireh, and ’ashira' (Khenan & Adamson, 1979: 15-16). In this regard, Minorsky also says: 'From the point of view of social status, the Kurds are generally composed of separate clans. Each clan is composed of two groups. The first group are the warriors; these are the leaders (Aghas and Arbabs) and also the owners of the land and possessors of servants and retainers. The second group are the peasants (ra’iyat), that is, those who are destitute. The rights of ownership of land and membership in the tribe or lineage or family are closely linked… Customarily, each tribe is linked with a specific region or regions, and vice versa. The right to use pastures is clearly a common right; grazing livestock in the pastures of the lineage is the undeniable right of every member of the lineage, and no one can monopolize this right for himself' (van Bruinessen, 2004: 70-71).

Contrary to the image that many people have of the Kurds, only a very small part of them are tent-dwellers. The majority of the Kurdish people are farmers, although they may also keep a few head of livestock. In the mountainous regions, little more than a subsistence level is produced; in the plains, some surplus is produced in addition to subsistence. The plains of Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan are the granaries of these two countries… As a general rule, it can be said that the peasants in the mountainous regions own the land they work on, while in the plains, the land belongs to urban landlords (van Bruinessen, 2004: 27-28).

The tribal structure and its modes of production were prominent social and economic characteristics that persisted in the regions of Kurdistan until the advent of the modern era and the political and social transformations of the modern state. Despite changes in some elements and relations, it remained the dominant model.

Kurdish culture and Kurdistan are the context for the formation of a language, or rather languages, that are known as the 'Kurdish language' and are considered the most prominent element of Kurdish culture. The Kurdish language or languages are a dialect continuum of Indo-European languages in the Western Iranian branch, which the Kurds currently speak. The Kurdish languages are among the North-Western Iranian languages and are related to Persian, Pashto, Balochi, and Luri. Various and sometimes contradictory opinions have been presented regarding the age and origin of the Kurdish language. Mardukh Kurdistani says

in this regard: 'The root of the Kurdish language is Median or Avestan, which was spoken by the Aryans around 3,000 years before Christ' (Mardukh Kurdistani, 1972: 2). Professor Minorsky, the Russian Kurdologist; Ilya Gershevitch, the Russian linguist; and John Limbert, the American Orientalist, believe in the linguistic continuity of Kurdish and Median. However, some other linguists, while acknowledging the ancient roots of the Kurdish language and vocabulary, consider the current form of the Kurdish language to be among the new languages. From this perspective, only a handful of words from the Median language have survived in the works of other languages, and naturally, based on a few words, no language can be considered a remnant of the Median language. Also, the Avestan and Median languages belong to the ancient period of the Iranian languages and have no known remnants in the middle period of the Iranian languages. The Kurdish language belongs to the new period of the Iranian languages and has no direct ancestor in the middle period (Paul, 2008).

The main dialects of the Kurdish languages and their sub-dialects are: 1. Northern Kurdish: Kurmanji, Badini, Bayazidi, Botanî, Shakaki, Khorasani, etc. 2. Central Kurdish: Sorani, Jafi, Mukriyani, Ardalanî, etc. 3. Southern Kurdish: Kalhori, Ilamî, Laki, and Feyli. 4. Zaza and Hawrami.

Among the existing works in the Kurdish language, the book Mishefa Reş (The Black Book), in the old Gorani dialect of Kurdish, which contains the teachings of the Yarsan faith in the 20th century CE, is introduced as the first written work in the Kurdish language. Other early Kurdish texts include the diwan of poems and works of Sheikh Ahmad Nishani, known as Malaye Jaziri (1570-1640), Faqi Tayran (c. 1590-1660), and Ahmad Khani (1650-1707), which are written in the Northern Kurdish dialect. Today, the Kurdish language in all its dialects is considered a living and dynamic language, which a wide range of speakers use orally and in writing. Among these, the Northern and Central Kurdish dialects have priority in terms of the production of literary, cultural, and scientific works.

The rights of Kurdish language speakers in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria have different statuses. The Turkish government, after decades of a policy of denial and eradication of the Kurdish language, under the influence of pressure from the international community and the resistance of the Kurdish community, has adopted a more balanced policy in the late 20th and early 21st centuries and has authorized the teaching of the Kurdish language at the public level, its teaching in some universities and institutions, and printing and publishing in the Kurdish

language. The teaching of the Kurdish language at Mardin University, the educational activities of the Kurdish Language Institute at Istanbul University, the issuance of a license for the administration of religious affairs and religious education in the Kurdish language, and the launch of a government television channel in the Kurdish language are some of these measures (Yilmaz, 2017: 51). In Syria, from its formation until the last decade and the beginning of the events of the Arab Spring and the subsequent war with ISIS, not only the language but also the Kurdish identity was in a way denied in this country and lacked basic citizenship rights. However, following the internal developments in Syria in the last decade and the establishment of the Democratic Autonomous Administration in the Kurdish regions of Syria, today the Kurdish language has found its way into the official education sphere (Hamid, 2015). In the history of the Kurdish struggle in Iraq, linguistic rights and education in the Kurdish language have always been considered one of the main demands, and in various conditions, a concerted effort has been made to preserve and expand it. With the formation of the autonomous government of Kurdistan in 1991 CE, the Kurdish language was made official as the language of government and education in the regions under the administration of this government, and later, with the collapse of the Ba'ath government and the formation of the federal government of Iraq, the Kurdish language was chosen as the official language of Iraq alongside the Arabic language based on the principles of the constitution (Iraq's Constitution of 2005: 4).

In Iran, speakers of the Kurdish language, in terms of geographical distribution, live in the provinces of Kurdistan, Ilam, Kermanshah, West Azerbaijan, North Khorasan, Razavi Khorasan, and Gilan. A significant number of Kurdish migrants are also present in other cities and regions. The policy of successive regimes in Iran towards the Kurdish language has been intensely discriminatory and reductionist, such that it has always been tried to be considered a dialect or at best a patois of the Persian language, and with the argument that it is a subset of the Persian language, the violation of its independent linguistic rights has been justified. In the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, under Article 15, regarding the right to mother tongue education and with the mention of local languages, some linguistic rights regarding non-Persian languages, including Kurdish, have been specified. However, despite all its shortcomings and the serious criticisms leveled against it, it has not been implemented within

its legal limits except in a few cases. The only turning point in the teaching of the Kurdish language in Iran is the teaching of the Kurdish language and literature major at the University of Kurdistan in Sanandaj since 2015 (Sajadi, n.d.). In the documents obtained from the American embassy in Tehran in the early days of the 1979 Revolution, it is stated about the Kurdish language: 'The Kurdish language is the most important hereditary factor of the Kurdish culture. The Kurds' demand for the official recognition of the Kurdish language in the Kurdish-inhabited regions has always caused conflict with various governments' (Students Following the Line of the Imam, n.d.: 37-38). This indicates the importance of linguistic rights in the context of ethnic demands, an issue that has been one of the main challenges for the government in the Kurdish regions in recent years.

Religious and sectarian tendencies among the Kurds have followed the historical course of religions and sects in the geographical territory of the Iranian plateau. Historical documents from the ancient era and Kurdish linguistic findings, alongside archaeological evidence such as the great and sacred fire temple of Adur Gushnasp from the ancient complex of Takht-e Soleyman near Takab, to which the Sasanian emperors would make pilgrimages on foot for worship, the Anahita temple in Kangavar, and the Paveh fire temple in Kermanshah (Yasemi, 1983: 129), all indicate the prevalence of the Zoroastrian religion among the ancestors of the Kurds and in the historical land of Kurdistan.

With the entry of Islam into the land of Iran, the Kurds also converted to Islam. With the emergence of Islamic sects and schools of thought, including the four Sunni schools of law, the majority of Kurds, following Imam Shafi'i, whose school was prevalent during the reign of the Seljuk Turks, joined the Sunni Shafi'i sect. However, some followed other Sunni and Shi'i sects.

From the perspective of the religious distribution of Kurds in Iran, if we divide the Kurdish regions of Iran into two religious zones, most of the Sunni Kurds reside in the northern half. The geographical border of the religions of the Kurds of Iran passes through Kermanshah province, such that from the counties of Salas-e Babajani, Javanrud, and Ravansar northwards, they are Sunni, and from the counties of Sarpol-e Zahab, Dalahu, and Kermanshah southwards, they are mostly Shi'i. There is another group among the Kurds called Yarsan (Kaka'i / Ahl-e Haqq). Most of the followers of this faith live in areas of the counties of Harsin, Kerend, Islamabad, and Sarpol-e Zahab and the adjacent villages.

Followers of this religion also live in the southern parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, parts of Turkish Kurdistan, and Syrian Kurdistan. In addition to these sects, other religions and faiths, including Christianity and Yazidism, have followers among the Kurds, who generally reside in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The intensity and type of ethnic identity among the Kurds of Iran are also to some extent dependent on religion and religious beliefs. The Kurds who follow the Sunni sects have more and deeper ethnic demands compared to the Shi'i Kurds. The Shi'i Kurds, who generally reside in the southern parts of Kermanshah province and Ilam province, although they identify themselves as Kurds and Kurdish identity is evident among them, show less divergence from Iran compared to the Sunni Kurds, and sometimes their national identity takes precedence over their ethnic identity. It is worth mentioning that apparently, ethnic identity-ism among the Shi'i Kurds has been on the rise in recent years, concurrent with the weakening of Iranian identity among ethnic and religious minorities, and especially the national solidarity of the Kurds has shown greater prominence after the Kermanshah earthquake in 2017. However, no scientific and statistical research has been conducted on this matter, and this is only a routine and apparent view that social networks portray.

The considerable history of cultural and identity symbols among the Kurds, the events and changes of the contemporary era such as the intensification and deepening of new communication-information technologies, the further opening of social borders, global interconnectedness, and the development of international values have led to an increase in the number of Kurdish networks and televisions, the formation of virtual ethnic communities with nationalist content, discussion of the Kurdish issue at the international level, and an increase in intercultural, social, and economic relations among the Kurds (Abdollahi & Qaderzadeh, 2009: 2).

The Kurds celebrate Nowruz and the Mawlud festivals (the birth of the Prophet of Islam). Nowruz is considered an ethnic festival among the Kurds; in some Kurdish legends, the origin of this festival is attributed to Keyumars, the first Pishdadian king. Keyumars (in Kurdish, Ki Muros), in the mountains of Rawanduz, east of the city of 'Diana,' fights with Ahriman and is victorious over him. On this occasion, he orders fires to be lit on the mountains and heights to spread the news of the victory everywhere. He commands the people to celebrate the day of victory and to continue it for nine days.

Among the festivals that are held in all Islamic countries as well as in Iran are the Islamic festivals. The Kurds hold religious customs and festivals, such as Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, and especially the birth of Prophet Muhammad, in high esteem. On the two Eids of Fitr and Adha, people, after performing the special Eid prayer, while wearing new clothes, visit each other. In addition, the celebration of the Eid of the Prophet's Ascension, which is held in the month of Rajab, is of special splendour. The festival of the birth of the Prophet of Islam, known as Mawlud, is also celebrated in the month of Rabi' al-awwal, which is a month of joy and happiness. In these ceremonies, sometimes votive foods, including a special type of stew, are cooked and distributed among the people, and along with it, the ceremony of the dervishes' dhikr, the playing of the daf, and the chanting of special invocations, including Mawlud recitations, praise and glorification of the Prophet of Islam, and prayers to God, are also performed. In these widespread ceremonies, which are performed under the title of Mawlud recitation ceremonies, most often literary texts written by Muslim scholars and Kurdish poets and writers about the life and biography of the Prophet of Islam are recited. In these sessions, which are usually held in mosques, poetry and religious sermons are also presented, but most often the preachers and poets use this opportunity to refer to political and national issues and consider it an occasion to express protest.

In the religious-sectarian history of Kurdistan in the Islamic period, Sufism is considered a powerful ideological and social current that, with its functions of unification, worldly detachment, facilitation of religious affairs, and tolerance, has left a profound impact on the social, cultural, and political structures of Kurdish society. So much so that from the perspective of political sociology, the schools and orders of Sufism in contemporary Kurdistan have been the origin of many social and political movements and have played an indelible role in the general mobilization of the Kurdish people. Nikitine writes about the tendency of the Kurdish people towards Sufism: 'Although the religious scholars did not approve of the Sufi orders, the masses of the Kurdish people widely opened their arms to the spread of Sufi orders in Kurdistan' (Nikitine, 2001: 331; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). This situation was growing so much in the Kurdish-inhabited areas that in the first half of the 20th century, the number of Sufi lodges and khanqahs in Kurdish cities was equal to or even greater than the number of mosques (Mazhar Ahmad, 1978: 35; Hawri Bakhevan, 2003: 249,

275; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). The two major currents of Sufism in the history of Kurdistan are: 1. The Qadiri Order: The Qadiriyya are followers of Sheikh Abd al-Qadir Gilani, one of the great sheikhs and mystics of the 12th century. Some writers have written that Abd al-Qadir Gilani was of Kurdish descent and from Gilan-e Gharb, in the southern Kurdish-inhabited areas (Minorsky, 2000: 108; Bois, 1966: 91; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). The supreme guide of the Qadiri order in every age and time is considered the custodian of his shrine in Baghdad, and this guide is the principal sheikh of the Qadiri order's khanqah. This order found followers among the Kurds living in Iran and the Ottoman Empire from the very beginning of its activity; but the general reception of the Kurds to this order occurred in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. At this time, some of the elders of the old Barzanji Sayyid family converted to the Qadiri order and prepared the ground for its spread among the Kurds. The first person from this family, Sayyid Ismail Qazanqayi, son of Sayyid Muhammad Nodehi, went to Baghdad and, after adopting this path and returning to his homeland, began to propagate it (Sanandaji, 1996: 57-58; Zaki, 1951; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). 2. The Naqshbandi Order: The Naqshbandi order is essentially a continuation of the Khwajagan order, which was founded by Abd al-Khaliq Ghijduwani (d. 1220), and Baha' al-Din Muhammad Bukhari (d. 1389), by adding principles to it, created the Naqshbandi order (Ruhani, 2006: 233; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). He is the main founder of this order, and his tomb in Bukhara is a place of pilgrimage for his disciples and followers (Sanandaji, 1996: 61-62; Ahmad, 2009: 143; Bois, 1966: 91; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). The widespread dissemination of the Naqshbandi order in the Islamic world dates back to the 15th century, when the caliphs and sheikhs of this order dispersed, and from the 16th century, the centre of this order was transferred to India. In the Kurdish-inhabited areas, the Shi'i Sufi orders (Ni'matullahi and Khaksariyya) and the Sunni Qadiri order were a serious obstacle to the penetration of the Naqshbandi order into these areas until the early 19th century, when the Kurdish mystic, Mawlana Khalid Naqshbandi (d. 1827), spread this order in the Kurdish-inhabited areas of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. He is attributed to the Mika'ili lineage of the Kurdish Jaf tribe. He was born in the late 18th century in 'Qaradagh,' a dependency of Sulaymaniyah in Iraq, and studied under the scholars of Kurdistan (Golzari, n.d.: 104; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). On a journey to the Hajj, he met an emissary from India named Muhammad Rahim Allah and became acquainted with the

Naqshbandi order. Upon returning to his homeland, he decided to go to India. Mawlana Khalid went to Khorasan via Tehran and from there, via Afghanistan, he made his way to India. Upon returning to Kurdistan, he began to propagate this order. However, due to the great power of the sheikhs of the Qadiri order in Kurdistan, he was forced to reside in Baghdad, and from there, under the protection of the governor of Baghdad, he sent his deputies to the Kurdish-inhabited areas (Sanandaji, 1996: 65-67; Ruhani, 2006: 257; Ahmadi, 2009: 143; Bois, 1966: 91; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). Later, with the support of the Kurdish rulers of Baban, the Naqshbandi order spread among the Kurds (Mir ba Sari, 2002: 56; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). He travelled to Damascus in 1826 and died there (Ruhani, 2006: 262; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). The reception of the Kurds to the spread of the Naqshbandi order was such that in 1820, Mawlana Khalid Naqshbandi had 120,000 disciples, and according to one European traveller, the people considered him a saint and looked upon him as a prophet, attributing to him the power of any supernatural ability (Rich, 1992: 157; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). He had 67 deputies in various places, of whom 34 were Kurds and were responsible for propagating his order throughout the Kurdish-inhabited areas (Ruhani, 2006: 277; cited in Azimi et al., 2014). Among these, the sheikhs of Tawela and Byara, the sheikhs of Barzan, the sheikhs of Shamzinan, and the sheikhs of Bamarni are the most famous (Ruhani, 2006: 279; al-Azzawi, 1973: 189; Bois, 1966: 91; cited in Azimi et al., 2014).

The sheikhs and elders of Sufism and other religious leaders, including the first-rank scholars, were considered the most influential personalities in Kurdish society, whose function always went beyond religious and belief matters and played an important role in social and political decisions and processes, and even in the economy and land ownership. Although the dawn of the new era was considered the sunset of the old era and its appurtenances, Sufism and religious personalities in Kurdistan were among the traditional currents that succeeded in preserving their strength for many decades in the contemporary period. With the entry of Kurdistan into the arena of the new discussions of the world of politics and the maturation of ethnic demands and nationalism, they played an influential role in this arena. The political movements attributed to the Sufi orders and the national uprisings of the Kurdish sheikhs and great scholars, including the Barzan movement, the uprising of Sheikh Said Piran, the uprising of Sheikh Mahmud Hafid, Qazi Muhammad, and others, were among the most important

contemporary movements of Kurdistan. Therefore, the prominent and influential leadership and role-playing of the sheikhs and scholars are considered important components of the contemporary political sociology of Kurdistan.

Among the non-Islamic faiths, the Yarsan faith, due to its historical interconnectedness with the society, culture, and language of Kurdistan, is considered a unique faith. The Yarsan faith is one of the historical faiths of Kurdistan that has followers in various regions of Kurdistan. This faith, which is also known by other titles such as the Yari faith and the Ahl-e Haqq faith, is a faith with esoteric beliefs whose exact date of formation is not known, but its followers believe in the pre-eternal and post-eternal nature of this faith. This religion has passed through various historical periods. Although the antiquity of the oldest religious texts of the Yari faith dates back to the 10th century CE (the period of Shah Khoshin) and the antiquity of some of its places of worship also dates back to before Islam, its current structure was founded in the 15th century by Sultan Sahak, who holds the highest position in the belief system of the Yarsan people (Heydari, 2019). The Yari faith shows signs of the influence of the teachings of various religions on its practical teachings and some of its theoretical foundations, and similarities with other religions such as Mithraism, Manichaeism, Judaism, Christianity, and Shi'ism are visible in this faith (Mardani & Elhami, 1998: 3). Regarding Islam, although there are elements of Islamic teachings and ideas and respect for some of the lofty personalities of the history of Islam in the Yarsan faith, Yarsan is not considered one of the Islamic sects or schools of thought. The followers of the Yarsan faith are known by general names: Yari, Yarsani, Ahl-e Haqq, Kaka'i, or the names of Yarsani tribes such as Qalkhani, Sarli, Goran, Sartalebi, and others (Taheri, 2009: 119-117). The Yarsan faith, despite having non-Kurdish followers, is considered a Kurdish faith in terms of its geographical origin, language, religious texts, and great Yarsani personalities. Therefore, it is of high importance in the re-reading of the cultural history of Kurdistan. The Yarsan community today, although free in holding its rites and rituals, does not have the legal rights of an independent and officially recognized religion and is often subjected to discrimination and even contempt because of its religious and belief positions.

- ***Economic Conditions***

The Kurdish regions of Iran, with a suitable climate, high rainfall, fertile

agricultural lands, rich pastures and grazing lands, high potential for horticulture, and abundant mineral and energy reserves on the one hand, and the capacity for foreign interaction with the countries of Iraq and Turkey on the other, alongside the benefit of a high potential for natural and historical tourism, are considered among the most capable economic areas of Iran. Despite these opportunities, they suffer from the challenge and problem of poverty, a high rate of unemployment, and a lack of infrastructural development.

In the northern parts of the Kurdish-inhabited regions, there are orchards of apples, grapes, and other fruits, but in the southern regions, due to the presence of pastures and the lack of fertile land, dry farming and animal husbandry are more prevalent. The Kurdish-inhabited regions of Iran, due to their border location, the occurrence of the Iran-Iraq War and the war with opposing Kurdish parties, political discrimination, and being far from the centre of Iran, have not developed much in terms of advanced industries. However, in recent years, a number of large and small factories have been built in this region. In addition to agriculture and animal husbandry, there are many stone and metal mines in these regions whose products, after extraction, are transferred to other cities for processing, whereas the exploitation of these mines on-site would be more economically advantageous and would lead to the development and economic growth of the region. In large parts of the border regions, other occupations under the title of border trade (in its legal form) and porterage (kolbari) (in its illegal form) exist, which always expose the people to mortal and financial dangers. Despite the existence of border markets in several points of the western border strip, these markets are limited to specific goods and individuals and, in general, have not been able to improve the livelihood of the people.

Although no official statistics specific to the Kurdish regions and geography of Iran are published, and ethnicity is fundamentally not a criterion for distinction in the political-administrative structure, an assessment of the economic situation of various parts of the Kurdish regions in Iran, which in cases like the provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and Ilam includes the entire province, is a measurable unit for explaining the economic situation of the Kurdish regions.

The economic ranking of the provinces based on regional gross domestic product, based on the calculations of the value-added of the country's provinces in the years 2018, 2019, and the spring of 2020, indicates that more than half of the country's gross domestic product is the share of five provinces: Tehran,

Khuzestan, Bushehr, Isfahan, and Razavi Khorasan. The income of Khuzestan in this ranking is due to oil sales, the proceeds of which have no relation to the economic situation of the market of that province but are specific to the huge oil and petrochemical projects that belong to the centre. In this ranking, the provinces of Kurdistan with 0.9%, Kermanshah with 1.5%, and Ilam with 1.2% together have a share of less than 4% of the gross domestic product (Economic Ranking of Provinces, 2020). The oil-rich province of Ilam is another example that, despite having 4 percent of the country's oil resources and a gas refinery, striking natural and historical landscapes, and a border location, still has a high rate of poverty and deprivation and, apart from the lack of infrastructural development, also suffers severely from a lack of welfare and living facilities. According to a study conducted by Majid Einiyan and Davoud Souri titled 'Poverty and Inequality, Household Savings Behavior, Decile Inflation' commissioned by the research projects office of the 'Institute for Management and Planning Studies' during the years 2015 and 2016, the urban areas of Ilam province had a poverty headcount rate of 16.0 percent, and the rural areas of this province had a poverty headcount rate of 14.1 percent (Einiyan & Souri, 2015-2016: 41-62). Reports presented by the Statistical Centre of Iran on the latest employment situation of the country's provinces in the winter of 2023 indicate that the highest unemployment rate is for Kurdistan province with an unemployment rate of 20.5% and Kermanshah with an unemployment rate of 15.1% (National Portal of the Statistical Centre of Iran).

Therefore, in a general assessment of the economy of the Kurdish regions, discrimination and centralism can be cited as the cause of poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, and the low figure of gross domestic product and per capita income in this geography. A general look at the statistics of large-scale governmental and quasi-governmental investments and the establishment of basic industries in the Kurdish regions and other ethnic geographies of Iran is clear evidence of this institutionalised discrimination.

## The Arab People

The Arabs, or the Arab people, are the world's largest Semitic ethnic group, residing mostly in the lands known as the 'Arab world' in West Asia and North and East Africa (Rogan, 2011). Minorities also inhabit countries such as Iran, Brazil, Turkey, France, Indonesia, Israel, and other nations across the globe.

The Arab world, with an area of 13,130,695 square kilometres and a population of 464 million (as of 2022), encompasses 22 Arab countries, comprising 10 in Africa and 12 in Asia (Arabs, en.wikipedia). Iran is one of the countries into which groups of Arab people have entered and settled during various historical periods. These Arabs, whose settlement in Iran began in ancient times and has continued into the contemporary era, are known as the Arabs of Iran.

### • *Historical and Ethnic Genealogy*

The Arabs of Iran, with a population of approximately 2,400,000 (Survey of Public Culture Indicators, 2012), are an ethnic group of the southern and south-western regions of the country, residing predominantly in the province of Khuzestan. In view of their linguistic, cultural, and political elements, and their millennia-long history of life in the land of Iran, the Arabs of Iran are considered one of the five principal ethnic groups of the country. At the same time, this group is part of the vast Arab world and possesses linguistic and cultural-ritualistic ties with other Arabs, especially those in neighbouring countries such as Iraq and the Persian Gulf region.

In various sources, different interpretations and viewpoints have been cited regarding the meaning and etymology of the word 'Arab', which have been examined and defined from various etymological, linguistic, cultural, and racial perspectives. Musa Siyadat, in his book The Geographical History of the Arabs of Khuzestan, citing the Old Testament, the Lisan al-Arab dictionary, Philip Hitti's History of the Arabs, Zarrinkoub's History of Iran after Islam, and Pigulevskaya's The Arabs at the Borders of Byzantium and Iran, mentions five common and comprehensive interpretations of the word 'Arab' with the following meanings:

1. The word 'Arab' is a Hebrew term found in the Book of Isaiah and the Book of Jeremiah, which refers to the desert and wilderness or to desert-dwellers (Bedouins) whose homeland is the Arabian Peninsula. The Holy Qur'an uses the word A'rāb to mean Bedouin.

2. The term 'Arab' is derived from the fact that the first person to speak the Arabic language was Ya'rub ibn Qahtan, the father of the people of Yemen. They are named after him, the al-'Arab al-'Āribah (the Pure Arabs). After him, Ishmael, the son of Abraham, grew up among them, married a daughter from the Jurhum tribe, and then spoke their language, becoming known as the al-'Arab al-Musta'ribah (the Arabised Arabs).

3. It is said that the children of Ishmael were born in a city called ‘Arabah’ in ‘Tihāmah’ (the coastal region of the Red Sea in the west of the Arabian Peninsula, situated between the mountains and the sea) and were named ‘Arab’ after that city.

4. ‘Arab’ is an eloquent and articulate term, and anyone who speaks with this term is called an Arab.

5. The theory of W. Caskel regarding nomadism in Arabia, which he dates to around 100 CE, posits that the destruction of small states along the caravan route pushed them towards the desert, resulting in the emergence of new terminologies. The name ‘Arab’ as a new concept was applied to the migrated tribes and as a designation for a nomad (Siyadat, 1995: 102-103).

According to genealogical and historical research, the early ancestors of the Arab people are divided into two large and original groups. The first group was called the Qahtanite tribes or the Yemeni (Yamani) tribes, and the second group was called the Adnanite or Ma’add tribes. These tribes later founded states in the Arabian Peninsula, which included southern, northern, and central categories (Mosaheb, 2002: 1758-1757).

Regarding the historical origin of the Arab people and, more broadly, the Semitic race, Philip Hitti, the renowned historian of the Arabs, says: 'It is highly probable that the Arabian Peninsula is the birthplace of the Semitic race, and that the peoples who later came to the Fertile Crescent and acquired the titles of Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians, and Hebrews developed there. The desert land of the peninsula is the wellspring from which, by consensus, the pure Semitic race emerged, and the essential crucibles of Judaism and subsequently Christianity appeared there, and all the characteristics that later evolved and became part of the distinctions of the Semitic race are the product of this very desert' (Hitti, 2001: 7-8). Thus, the Arabian Peninsula is the primary abode from which the Arabs, in various groups and for diverse reasons, moved towards other parts of the world and, after settling in different areas, made new homes. In the past, Arab tribes, like other tribes and clans of the world, migrated from their original homeland of Yemen and the Hejaz to other regions for economic and geographical reasons. Some Semitologists, based on studies they have conducted on the historical migrations of Semitic peoples from the Arabian Peninsula, believe that this peninsula, over long periods—approximately a thousand years—would become like an overflowing reservoir of population and

was forced to expel its surplus people (Azizi Bani-Torof, 1993: 7).

Some historians consider the migration of Arabs to southern Iran to be contemporaneous with the migration of Aryans to the Iranian plateau. Before this, the Elamites—one of the Semitic peoples—had a brilliant civilisation in south-western Iran, of which Chogha Zanbil at Haft Tappeh is an indicator (Azizi Bani-Torof, 1993: 7). Our knowledge of the relationship between the Arabs and the Achaemenids and Parthians is very limited. Some historians believe: 'In the Achaemenid era, the Arabs advanced northwards, and tribes of them entered Iraq and added to the area of land they had previously inhabited. During this period, they also advanced westwards, expanding in the country of Syria from Mount Sinai to the banks of the Nile River. They rendered many services to the Iranians in the advance of the Persians towards Egypt' (Ali, 1993, cited in Azizi Bani-Torof, 1993: 9).

Regarding the process of the Arabs' entry into Iran, Ahmad Kasravi is of the opinion that: 'Iran became a destination for Arab migration later than Syria and Iraq. Nevertheless, as far as is certain and for which there is evidence, the history of this migration must be dated to centuries before Islam and from the beginning of the Sasanian monarchy. During the Parthian era, the gates of Iran were open to the Arabs… and it was during their time that the Tanukhids and Lakhmids, with their great numbers, migrated to Iraq, and no one hindered them. Perhaps some groups also came into Iran at that time and settled, but since there is no evidence in this regard, one cannot be certain. However, in the Sasanian period, it is certain and there is evidence that tribes of Arabs had settled in the warm regions of Iran, from Khuzestan and Bahrain to Pars and Kerman. One of these tribes was the 'Banu al-'Amm', who were perhaps the first Arab tribe to have migrated into Iran. The reliable information we have about this tribe is that at the beginning of Islam, when the Arabs rose up for conquest in the name of jihad and the spread of Islam and began to fight with the Iranians, this tribe was settled in Khuzestan in the two cities of 'Nahr-Tiri' and 'Manadhir al-Kubra' and were considered natives there. According to what al-Tabari narrates (al-Tabari, Vol. 4: 208, cited in Kasravi, 2009: 143), this tribe was from the famous Banu Tamim tribe, and their ancestor, 'Murra ibn Malik ibn Hanzala,' with his group, aided Ardashir I in his war with Artabanus IV of Parthia. Since neither al-Tabari nor others have written anything about his migration and that of his tribe to Khuzestan and their settlement there, it appears that they had been settled there

from the time of Ardashir or even before. It is for this reason that we consider this tribe to be the first Arabs to have come to Iran. During the Sasanian period, the Persian monarchy had a close relationship with the Arabs… However, the Sasanian kings always prevented the migration of Arabs to the soil of Iran and, except for those who had migrated before or some tribes that the kings themselves settled in some warm regions, they blocked the others. At this time, the Arabs, especially the nomadic desert tribes, had turned to migration in such great numbers and had approached the borders of Iran to such an extent that if this prevention had not been in place, in a short time they would have overrun all of Iraq, Khuzestan, Fars, and those regions. Shapur II settled a group of the Banu Taghlib in Bahrain, a group of the Banu Abd al-Qays, Banu Tamim, and Banu Bakr ibn Wa'il in Kerman, and the Banu Hanzala in Ramila in the land of Ahvaz' (Kasravi, 2009: 142-145).

The emergence and spread of Islam was a global transformation that, by relying on the tools of the universal call of the Islamic faith, conquests and raids, and the establishment of new political and military relations, caused a significant and meaningful change in the relationship of the Arab world with other parts of the world, including the nearby countries and realms. Iran was among the lands and civilisations adjacent to the Arabian Peninsula that, in the very first decades of the Islamic era, was brought within the geographical borders of the Islamic world and came under the rule of the Islamic Caliphate. This situation provided for the extensive and massive migration of Arabs to Iran. As is apparent from the books of historians of the first centuries of Islam, Arabs settled in various cities such as Qazvin, Nahavand, Nishapur, Bukhara, Tus, Kashan, Merv, Herat, Azerbaijan, and most of the cities of Khuzestan, and even in some cities, they constituted the major part of the population (Azizi Bani-Torof: 10). Kasravi writes about the entry of Arabs into Iran at the beginning of the conquests: 'What is certain is that in the first centuries of the Hijri history, there was hardly a city in Iran where a major part of its people were not Arabs. As Ya'qubi, one of the authors of the 9th century, in his book Kitab al-Buldan, in which he names each of the cities of Iran, provides very useful information in this regard. For concerning Sirvan, Saymareh, Hulwan, Dinavar, Qazvin, Nahavand, Nishapur, and Bukhara, which were among the large and important cities of Iran, he writes this phrase: 'Its people are a mixture of Arabs and Persians.' And concerning the city of Qom, he writes: 'Most of its people are from Madhhij and the Ash'aris,' both of whom

were tribes of Yemeni descent' (Kasravi, 2009: 150).

According to historical documents and anthropological studies, the Arabs of Iran in the contemporary period, apart from the Arabs attributed to the Banu Tamim tribes of Khuzestan who have a lineage attributed to the ancient era, the majority of the Arabs of Iran from Khorasan to the south and the central and south-western regions entered Iran with the spread of Islam and all have an Arab tribal lineage. Due to their tribal culture and the preservation of group solidarity (’asabiyyah), they have mostly succeeded in preserving their language and lineage until the modern era.

### • *Geographical Distribution*

The centre of Arab settlement in Iran is the south-west of the country, namely parts of Khuzestan province. However, the Arabs of Iran are specifically present in the provinces of Khuzestan, Khorasan, Hormozgan, Bushehr, Qom, and Ilam. Some of them are also scattered in other parts of Iran as a result of migration. Regarding the exact population of Arabs in Iran, like other ethnic groups, no official and precise statistics are available. However, most reliable assessments, including the World Factbook, the Ethnologue encyclopaedia, the Looklex encyclopaedia, the Library of Congress, the New America Foundation, the Survey of Public Culture Indicators, and estimates based on comprehensive and national censuses[1] , estimate the Arab population in Iran to be between 2 and 2.75 percent of the total population of the country. In Qom, there are also some Iraqi returnee Arabs who are considered part of the Arab community of Iran.[2] Based on the detailed statistics of the 2016 census, approximately 1,600,000 Arabs reside in Khuzestan, about 50,000 in Bushehr province, about 80,000 mainly Khamseh Arabs in Hormozgan province, about 60,000 in Isfahan province, about 200,000 mainly Khamseh Arabs in Fars province, about 50,000 Arabs of Khorasan, about 40,000 in Qom province, and about 100,000 Arabs in other parts of the country. Thus, the total population of Arabs in Iran is about 2,200,000 (2.75 percent of

1. See https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world factbook/geos/ir.html & http://looklex.com/e.o/iran.peoples.htm & http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iran.pdf & https://www.ethnologue.com/language/acm/

2. Regarding the Iraqi returnees (ma’āwedin), see: Pahlavan, Changiz, Population Movements in the Region, Ettela’at-e Siyasi-Eghtesadi monthly, numbers 123 and 124, December 1997-January 1998.

Iran's population in 2016) (Survey of Public Culture Indicators, 2012).

Given that over 80% of the Arab population of Iran resides in Khuzestan, the Arabs of Khuzestan usually represent the Arab community of Iran, and most of the political and socio-cultural developments of the Arab ethnic group in Iran occur in Khuzestan. It should be noted that the Arab population in Iran is presented in much higher figures by some sources and personalities of the Arab people than what other sources indicate. Yusef Azizi Bani-Torof, an Arab researcher and activist, in a speech on 14 September 2012 at the French Parliament, estimated the Arab population of Iran to be between 6 and 8 percent (Azizi Bani-Torof, 2012). Karim Abdian, another Arab activist, in a report on the population of Arabs in Iran, says: 'The population of Arabs in Iran is considered to be 8-10 percent of the total population of Iran, of which more than 5 million reside in the south-west of Iran in Khuzestan province, near the border with Iraq and Kuwait' (Abdian, n.d.). Therefore, according to these views, the Arabs in Iran have a population of between 5 and 9 million. Regardless of the size of the Arab population in Iran, what has given importance to this ethnic population, however small, is the strategic and geopolitical-geoeconomic land that they inhabit on the south-western borders and which is considered their historical homeland.

The geographical distribution of Arab tribes and clans in Iran generally includes the following groups, areas, and regions: The Arabs of Khorasan: This group is considered to be descendants of the northern and southern Arabs (Adnanites and Qahtanites) who migrated to the regions of Khorasan in the early days of Islam (Gheim, 2009: 565). Their population is estimated at about 50,000 and includes the Arabs of Sabzevar, Shahrud, Nishapur, Sarakhs, Birjand, and the Khaza'i, Tamimi, Ta'i, and Khafaji tribes (Oberling and Hourcade, 1986: 215-220). Among these Arabs, some recent Iraqi immigrants are also found. The Arabs of Khorasan speak a dialect known as 'Khorasani Arabic' (Jani, 2008). The Kuti tribe in Varamin and Garmsar: The independent Arab Kuti tribe is one of 19 nomadic groups present in the Varamin region of Tehran, whose history of settlement goes back to the land of Najd in Oman. Members of this Arab tribe were assigned or migrated to the Khuzestan and Fars regions during the Umayyad or Abbasid caliphates, and in the Qajar period, lineages of them were forcibly relocated to the Varamin region of Tehran. Until recent years, they were engaged in pastoralism as nomads in some of the villages of Varamin. This tribe is the largest nomadic Arab tribe living in a region close to the metropolis of

Tehran, and from a cultural perspective, they still speak their Arabic language and have more or less preserved their nomadic culture. The population of this tribe is 130 households and 1,059 individuals (Hashemi, 2013: 69, 70, 78). The Khamseh Arab tribe of Fars: The Khamseh Arab tribe is one of the Arab tribes of the Khamseh tribal confederation of Fars province. The Khamseh Arabs are composed of the two Arab tribes of Jabareh and Sheibani. This people speak a dialect of Gulf Arabic that has a large number of Persian loanwords. The Khamseh Arabs are Muslims and mostly Shi'i. This large tribe is mainly scattered from north to south and also on the eastern side of Fars province. The Bavi tribes in the Basht and Kuh-e Mareh Sorkhi region of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province. The Arabs of Bushehr and Hormozgan provinces, including the inhabitants of Kangan, Nakhl, Banar, Asaluyeh, Bandar Lengeh, and the islands of Qeshm and Kish. The Arabs living in the areas north of Fakkah and the county of Musian in Ilam (Gheim, 2001: 192). The Arabs of Khuzestan: The plain region of Khuzestan province, which begins south of the cities of Dezful, Masjed Soleyman, Ramhormoz, and Behbahan and extends to the shores of the Persian Gulf and the Arvand Rud, is the main area of Arab settlement. This region covers 65 percent of Khuzestan province. Among the 25 counties of Khuzestan province, the highest concentration of Arabs is in the counties of Ahvaz, Mollasani, Shush, Hamidieh, Susangerd, Hoveyzeh, Bostan, Shadegan, Mahshahr, Sarbandar, Ramshir, Omidiyeh, Khorramshahr, and Abadan (Gheim, 2001: 192). The lineage of the current Arab tribes and clans of Khuzestan either goes back to the Banu Tamim, who lived in this region before Islam, or to the Banu 'Ubada and Banu Sa'id and the like, who came to Iran in the first three or four Islamic centuries (Azizi Bani-Torof, 1993: 10). According to a survey by the Public Culture Council in 2010, about 33.6 percent of Khuzestan province were Arabs, which, when aligned with the results of the 2016 census, allows for an estimated population of 1,600,000 for the Arabs of Khuzestan province (Survey of Public Culture Indicators, 2012). Among the Arabs of Iran, the Arabs living in the south of the country, especially the Arabs living in Khuzestan, form a cohesive ethnic, cultural, and geographical entity and, beyond their tribal and clan identity, have dynamically preserved their ethnic identity and status.

- ***Social and Cultural Characteristics***

The Arabs, whether urban, rural, or nomadic, have a tribal lineage. From an

anthropological point of view, a hierarchy of tribe (qabila or il), clan (’ashira), and then sub-clan (tāyifa) exists among them. Of course, among the Arabs of Khuzestan, ’ashira and tāyifa have the same meaning. The word tireh is used for the Arabic batn (belly/lineage), and khāndān for the Arabic bayt (house/family) (Azizi Bani-Torof, 1993: 14). The social organisation of the Arab ethnic community of Khuzestan is based on the following divisions: 1. Bayt: The smallest unit of the Arab social organisation, consisting of several families with a common ancestor. 2. Hamula: A group of several bayts with a common ancestor. 3. ’Ashira: A collection of several hamulas, from whose main core a sheikh is usually chosen. Each ’ashira has its own specific banner… Respect for the banner is equivalent to respecting and honouring the clan. 4. Tāyifa: Composed of several ’ashiras, its main core being clans with a single ancestor. 5. Qabila: Formed from the gathering of several tāyifas and ’ashiras. Although in the aforementioned divisions, after the ’ashira come the tāyifa and the qabila, the sheikh of the ’ashira has full authority in his relevant duties (Gheim, 2001: 213-214).

Among the Arab tribes and clans, the sheikhs assume the leadership role in all affairs. Until the period of Sheikh Khaz’al, the tribal sheikhs would pay their taxes to the governor or ruler of the region, who, if he was under the dominion of the central government of Iran, would pay a portion of it to the central government. The sheikhs had extraordinary power and were the owners of the necks of the members of their clan or tribe. In Khuzestan, since the lands had continuously been in the hands of the governments throughout history and had the form of state land (khāleseh), after Islam, land ownership never became as widespread as in other regions of Iran. The sheikh was a landowner or smallholder who, with his economic backing, exercised his political dominance over his clan or tribe. However, the political dominance of the sheikhs did not solely derive from their economic power within the tribal society; superstructural issues such as the customs and traditions of the tribes, which are an accumulation and remnant of many centuries, have contributed to this process. For, as we see now, despite the growth of capitalist relations in Khuzestan, with an urbanization rate of over sixty percent and the society’s departure from the form of relatively separate tribal groups and its entry into the process of capitalist relations and urban life, we still witness the influence of the sheikhs and tribal traditions among large segments of the people, especially in the villages and among the semi-urban,

semi-rural slum dwellers of the cities of Khuzestan (Azizi Bani-Torof, 1993: 12).

The Arabs of Iran, like other Arabs, speak the Arabic language, which is from the Semitic family of languages, the sacred language in Islam, the official language in the Arab world, the language of Arab minorities in other countries, and one of the six official languages of the United Nations (UNESCO, World Arabic Language Day). Arabic is the official language of 27 countries and, with about half a billion speakers, is among the most spoken languages in the world. Today, this language has 13 different dialects and varieties. However, Modern Standard Arabic has been accepted as the official written language in all Arab countries (Wright, 2006: 492). Given the racial diversity, territorial expanse, and global dispersion of the Arabs, the Arabic language is considered the most important element of Arab identity and a factor of unity and cohesion for the Arab community.

With the advent of Islam, the Arabic language, as the language of revelation, the Qur'an, and the chosen language of the Islamic world, gained great sanctity among Muslims. Following the spread of Islam in Iran, while influencing the growth and development of the Dari Persian language, it became the language of jurisprudence, religious texts, and many sciences and arts in Iran. Therefore, in Iran, in addition to being the language of the Arab people, Arabic is considered a widespread religious language. Article 16 of the Constitution states the necessity of its universal learning: 'Since the language of the Qur'an and the Islamic sciences and teachings is Arabic, and Persian literature is thoroughly intermixed with it, this language must be taught after the primary level until the end of the secondary level in all classes and in all fields' (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018: 18).

The Arabic language is the most important factor of the ethnic identity of the Arab people of Iran and a factor of solidarity and unity among them. The Arabs of Iran speak different dialects of Arabic. Khuzestani Arabic is a dialect of the Arabic language and very close to the Mesopotamian Arabic dialect, which is spoken in south-western Iran, especially in the provinces of Khuzestan, Hormozgan, and parts of Bushehr and the southern areas of Ilam province. Although Khuzestani Arabic is considered a dialect of the Arabic language, it has differences in the way words are pronounced compared to the Arabic of Arab-speaking countries. As mentioned, this dialect—which resembles Mesopotamian Arabic—is also spoken in Iraq and parts of Syria. Khorasani Arabic is another dialect spoken by

the Arab people living in different parts of Khorasan. The 'Arabkhaneh' region in the south of Razavi Khorasan and the north of South Khorasan is one of the most important centres where the authenticity of the Arabic language and dialect has been preserved to this day. The Arabic language is the dominant language in this area. One of its characteristics is the existence of numerous examples of authentic Arabic vocabulary in this dialect (Amuzegar, 2008: 38). Gulf Arabic is also a dialect that is spoken among the Khamseh Arabs of Fars and other areas and contains many Persian loanwords.

In the cultural sphere, printing, publishing, and education in the Arabic language are not prohibited in Iran, but any support for these activities is in the service of the Arabic language as the sacred language of Islam and has no relation to the ethnic rights of the Arab minority in Iran. In terms of national media, in Khuzestan province, there is programming in the Arabic language on the state broadcast network. However, in Hormozgan, Khorasan, and Bushehr, there is no programming in Arabic. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the consumption of foreign Arabic productions in these regions is very high. The provincial network of Razavi Khorasan broadcast Arabic news for a while, but at present, it only has programmes in Persian (Fakouhi, 2012).

In terms of religion and sect, most of the Arabs of Iran are followers of the Twelver Shi'i school, but at the same time, they are considered a community with religious and ritual diversity. Among the Arabs of Khorasan province, the Arabs of Taybad and Torbat-e Jam are Sunni (Gheim, 2001: 192). Ghulat Shi'ism was another religious current that was prevalent among the Arabs. The Musha'sha'iyyah, led by Sayyid Muhammad Musha'sha', were among the Ghulat Shi'i Arabs living in Khuzestan who rose up with the slogan that they called themselves the vanguards of the Mahdi and ruled in Khuzestan from 1441 to 1508 (Ranjbar, 2003: 7). About 5,000 of the Arabs are also Mandaeans or Sabaeans (Gheim, 2001: 217).

- ***Economic Conditions***

Khuzestan province, the main settlement of the Arabs in Iran, is a province in the south-west of Iran, located on the coast of the Persian Gulf, and is considered the centre of Iran's oil and gas production. The area of Khuzestan province is 64,057 square kilometres, and with a population of 4,710,506 (2016), it is the

fifth most populous province in Iran. The city of Ahvaz is the centre of Khuzestan province (Khuzestan Province, Comprehensive Provincial Information System).

National industries and facilities, the National Iranian South Oil Company, the National Iranian Drilling Company, the Khuzestan Steel Company, and the Arvandan Oil and Gas Company are based in Khuzestan province. The Abadan Refinery and the Bandar Imam and Mahshahr Petrochemical complexes are other oil-related industries in this province. Khuzestan province has a share of about 16.3 percent in the total value added of the country, which in this respect places this province in second place after Tehran province. However, due to the abundance of capital-intensive industries and the lack of proportional expansion of labour-intensive industries in the province, its unemployment rate is the third highest in the country (What do the economic statistics about Khuzestan say?, 2022).

Khuzestan is the most water-rich province in Iran. Five large rivers originating from the Zagros irrigate the plains of Khuzestan and, directly or indirectly, flow into the Persian Gulf. The Karun, the largest of these rivers, is the largest river in Iran. This river, which originates from the central Zagros mountains, is joined by the Dez river south of Shushtar and then, near the mouth of the Arvand Rud in the Persian Gulf, flows into this river. Khuzestan, benefiting from its rushing rivers and fertile plains, ranks first in the country's agricultural production. The communication position and maritime border of the Arab-inhabited cities of Khuzestan and Hormozgan provinces are another advantage that has led to the prosperity of commerce and international trade. The important ports of these regions are Bandar Abbas and Bandar Imam, which have a major share in the country's maritime transit. Also, the oil-rich nature of the Arab-inhabited areas and the existence of large industries have attracted labour from all over the country to these regions. This situation has to some extent also caused a disruption in the ethnic demography of the region, and various Iranian ethnic groups have settled in these areas to obtain job opportunities.

The precious hydrocarbon reserves of this region, its large-scale freshwater potential, its excellent coastal position and the location of the country's main import terminals on its shores, the extent of its suitable and useful soils for industrial crops, its appropriate population and relatively balanced geographical distribution, its bordering three Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, its good and optimal networks of air, land, rail, and pipeline communication on a national

scale, and the shorter distance of its shores to Tehran compared to other coastal provinces of the north of the Persian Gulf and its flat terrain have turned Khuzestan into the most complete and strategic province of Iran. Within the vast and important expanse of Khuzestan province as well, the geographical territory of the Arab settlement is the most strategic national domain (Karimi Pour & Karimi Pour, 2005: 111-112). However, the major wealth of this province, due to unequal distribution and economic and managerial centralism, flows out of the province, leaving the province in a dire and difficult situation. One of the representatives of this province in the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, referring to this unequal situation and the deep problems of his region, said: 'The most money and credit resources are in my constituency, but the circulation of money is in Tehran.' Khuzestan province has the highest rate of out-migration among all the provinces of Iran. In just a few years before 2018, 400,000 people from Khuzestan, for reasons such as unsafe water, dust storms and unpleasant air, high air temperature and unfavourable climatic conditions, as well as unemployment, poverty, and high prices, left their place of residence and migrated to the northern cities of Iran (Salahshouri, 2018).

Abdolnabi Gheim, one of the Arab writers and activists of Iran, referring to the economic situation of the Arabs of Khuzestan, writes: 'The percentage of Arab students and doctors, university graduates, as well as the number of high-ranking native employees in the public sectors and even the key jobs and positions of the province, in the best case, does not reach the 10 percent threshold of the province's population. Also, the affluent classes, such as large merchants, factory owners, contractors, government officials, doctors, engineers, judges, lawyers, and high-ranking employees, despite their sixty percent population, do not exceed 6 percent at most. This is while the number of large merchants, factory owners, and contractors does not even reach the 2 percent threshold' (Gheim, 2001: 221).

## The Persian People

The Persians, who constitute approximately 50 percent of Iran's population, are the largest ethnic group in the country and are currently recognised as the dominant and prevailing group. The Persian language is the common tongue of this people. Persians reside predominantly in the centre of Iran, and the inhabitants of Iran's major cities are mostly Persian. The cities of Tehran, Isfahan, Semnan,

Alborz, Shiraz, Markazi, parts of Bushehr, Kerman, Yazd, Khorasan, and parts of Qazvin and Hamadan are all Persian-speaking.

The application of the term 'Persian ethnic group' or 'Persian-speaking people' to this segment of Iran's population, whose most fundamental shared cultural and collective characteristic is the Persian mother tongue, is a challenging issue that has become a site of serious contestation in the field of ethnic and national identity research in Iran. The parties to this theoretical dispute have organized themselves around two opposing camps: those who favour the term 'Persian ethnic group' on one side, and those who prefer 'Persian-speakers' or 'Persian-speaking people' on the other. Some researchers believe that, historically, there is no such thing as a Persian ethnic group in Iran. However, the reality is that the concept of a minority, especially ethnic minorities, gains meaning and relevance alongside the concept of a majority. In the real world, one cannot speak of a minority without the existence of a majority. It is said that the majority of Iran's inhabitants are Persian-speakers, about whose specific identity, ethnic, and religious components there is disagreement. At present, these components are reflected in the bestowal of a national/supra-ethnic identity upon Persian-speakers under the general title of 'Iranian' identity. Culturally, too, the cultural elements and customs of Persian-speakers have acquired a national identity and are practised throughout Iran, and perhaps even among Persian-speakers outside Iran. Indeed, they are considered national rituals, such as Nowruz, Sizdah-be-dar, Yalda Night, Chaharshanbe Suri, and so on. Meysam Badamchi, in a critique of the view that denies the existence of Persians as an ethnic group, writes: 'My philosophical and political intuition tells me that saying there is no ethnicity called Persian is equivalent to saying we have no problem with minority identities and non-Persian ethnicities in Iran, and that the situation is ideal or near-ideal. According to this logic, which can be called the 'logic of denial,' by accepting the existence of an ethnic group called Persian, you are creating a 'pseudo-problem' and distracting minds. Another hidden meaning of 'we have no Persians' could be that the inhabitants of Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan, and so on, should not look to neighbouring countries where they might share a common language and should not ethnically/nationally identify with them' (Badamchi, 2021). In contrast, those who believe in a Persian-speaking community and deny calling them a Persian ethnic group consider the concept of a 'Persian ethnic group' an anti-national conspiracy. Ashkan Zare'i, head of the history working group

of the Tariana Association, stating that historically there is no such thing as a Persian ethnic group, presents a discussion on the place of the Persian language in national identity and says: 'Unfortunately, in recent years, satanic efforts are being made to convince society that a specific ethnic group under the title of the Persian ethnic group, which is actually in the minority, has seized the entire country of Iran and, by enslaving the rest of the Iranian ethnic groups—who, according to this group, are called the nations of Iran—has in fact made them miserable and wretched. In simple terms, this satanic group has made a monster out of the Persian ethnic group that has conquered the lands of these nations, and they even consider the name 'Iran' to be a new name imposed by Reza Shah Pahlavi' (Zare'i, 2018). Rasmus Christian Elling, in the first chapter of his book Minorities in Iran: Nationalism and Ethnicity after Khomeini, titled 'The Elusive Majority,' and posing the question 'If non-Persian speakers are the ethnic minorities of Iran, then what is the ethnic majority?', addresses this issue. After examining the claims of each side, he lends more credence to the view that considers the Persians an ethnic group (Elling, 2013: 22-28). Hamid Ahmadi, Ehsan Hooshmand, and Eskandar Amanolahi are among the Iran-centric scholars who believe that in Iran, the Persian language and Fars province exist, but a Persian ethnic group does not (Amanolahi, 2005).

The exclusive elevation of the Persian ethnic identity to the status of Iranian national identity has led to a specific definition of non-Persian ethnic identities that is entirely influenced by power relations and an unbalanced communicative relationship. The particular perception of late Iranian nationalism regarding Persian-speakers and the denial of an ethnic identity for them specifically leads to the fabrication of an exclusive national identity from their ethnic characteristics. In this way, Iranian national identity is reduced to Persian identity, and the official language, official religion, official sect, official culture, and, in short, the official and legitimate identity are extracted from it. As a result of such a process, the distinct identity of at least half of the inhabitants of this land (Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Baloch, Turkmens, and other ethnic groups) is largely denied by disregarding their place in the formation of Iranian national identity, and the acceptance of Persian identity under the banner of Iranian national identity is made to seem self-evident and natural.

***• Historical and Ethnic Genealogy***

The Persian people are one of the recognised Aryan peoples who have played a prominent role in the political transformations of ancient Iranian history. The word Pārsa is an Old Persian word that referred to the Persian people and the lands under their rule. This word entered Middle Persian in the form of Pārs and was adopted in the same form into New Persian. In dictionaries, the word Fārs (the Arabised form) is given meanings such as: horse rider, brave and warrior, owner of a horse, and the equivalent of Pars in the sense of one of the ancient Aryan peoples and the land of Pars. The Dehkhoda dictionary, in an ethnological sense, defines the word Fārs as: 'One who has the Persian language. One who is from the people of Iran. In contrast to Turk, Arab, and so on.' In the Achaemenid inscriptions, Pārsa is the name of one of the Iranian tribes residing in southern Iran, whose seat was also called Pars. From this people, two great pre-Islamic dynasties rose to imperial power: one, the Achaemenids, and the other, the Sasanians. Its Arabised form is Fārs (Vajehyab Dictionary, entry for Fārs). Greek sources divide the Persian tribes into ten clans, comprising the city-dwellers with the names: Pasargadae, Maraphii, Maspii, Panthialaei, Derusiaei, and Germanii; and the nomads with the names Dahae, Mardi, Dropici, and Sagartii (Hedayati, 2005: 211). This people, in the ancient era, by establishing the two empires of the Achaemenids and Sasanians and taking control of the political leadership and governance of Iran, defined their central position in this land. In the Sasanian period, with the systematisation of the political and cultural-religious pillars of the ruling power, their identity components, with the centrality of the Zoroastrian religion, the Pahlavi language, and the territory of Iranshahr, took on more distinct forms. In the first nine centuries of the Islamic period, the position of these people was generally more limited in the political sphere and had a more cultural manifestation. The major part of what is known as the scientific and literary heritage of Persian and the culture and art of Iran is the achievement of the cultural life of this group and its elites. One of the prominent roles of the elites of this group in the political arena of the Islamic era was their administrative and bureaucratic services to the Islamic caliphate apparatus and the non-Iranian rulers of the land of Iran. With the rise of the Safavids and the officialisation of Shi'ism, this group returned to the centre of politics and the country's leadership. In the modern era of Iranian history, with complete dominance over the country's political and governmental system, in the arena

of constructing a national identity, they succeeded in presenting and realising a version of national identity in accordance with their own identity components and elements. Therefore, what is known today as 'national' is mostly from the historical, political, cultural, religious, civilisational, and artistic belongings of this ethnic group. In general, regarding the historical genealogy of these people, it can be said: the dominant narrative of Iranian historiography conspicuously narrates the history of these people, or at least these people are present in the text and at the centre of what it narrates. [1]

- ***Geographical Distribution***

The spatial-geographical structure of the Iranian nation is formed from two interconnected parts: central and peripheral. The central part, which occupies a larger space of Iran's geography compared to its periphery, and among whose components there is a relative bond and homogeneity, corresponds to the basin of the Iranian plateau and its marginal highlands, namely the Zagros and Alborz. There is also a connection between the physical and topographic homogeneity of the space in the central part of Iran and its human homogeneity. The people of this part are cohesive and homogenous in terms of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, and spatial characteristics and constitute the main and major body of the nation. This means that despite the existence of local subcultures in this part, its members are all Muslim by religion, Twelver Shi'i by sect, Persian by language, and Iranian by general culture, and at the same time, they reside in a contiguous space within the plateau and its adjacent highlands. The combination of these multiple and fundamental layers and characteristics in the central part has all contributed to the density and uniformity of the people living in this area (Hafeznia, 2002: 149). The Persian people are geographically neighbours with four other ethnic groups: to the north with the Gilakis, to the west with the Kurds, to the south with the Arabs, and to the east with the Baloch. In other words, the Persians live in the centre of Iran and to some extent in the north-eastern regions. Although other ethnic groups also reside in the centre of Iran, especially Tehran, this residence is considered a form of migration.

1. Given the general review of Iranian history under the heading 'Ethnic Groups and the Historical Identity of Iran' in the preceding material, to avoid prolixity, their rewriting in this section is omitted, as the main part of the narrative of Iran's history is the narrative of this ethnic group and its political, cultural, and social belongings.

In the Dehkhoda dictionary, from a geographical perspective, 'Fars' is defined as follows: 'Fars is a vast region that covers a part of the south and south-west of the country of Iran and has been the dwelling place of the most valiant Aryan tribes called Pars since approximately the eleventh century before Christ, and for this reason, it has been named Pars… The borders and location of this region are limited to Isfahan province in the north, Khuzestan in the north-west, Kerman in the east, and the Persian Gulf in the south and south-west… The words Fars and Pars have also been applied to the entire land of Iran. A form of this word, which in the English language is taken from the Greek original, is used in that language instead of the word 'Iran', and since this form, namely 'Persia', was also used in Iran during the time of Reza Shah Pahlavi, an order was issued to prohibit the use of this word, and it was stipulated that in Iranian books and writings, the word 'Iran' should be used everywhere to name this country' (Vajehyab Dictionary, under the entry Fars).

Regarding the change and evolution of the geographical concept of the word Fars, the Encyclopædia Iranica states: 'Fars first appears in Assyrian sources belonging to the third millennium BCE, recorded as 'Parase', which was originally the Sumerian 'land of horses'. The Iranian tribes living west and south-west of Lake Urmia in the 9th century BCE adopted this name for themselves. The name Parsua (Parsa) was first mentioned in 834 BCE, during the reign of Shalmaneser III, in reference to this people, and after their migration to the south-eastern regions, this name was applied to the areas that were previously called Anshan in Elamite sources between the years 690 and 640 BCE. From that time on, this title took on the concept of an ethnic region, that is, the land of the Persians, and subsequently, the Persians soon founded the vast Achaemenid Empire. Therefore, an endless confusion arose between the limited geographical application of the concept of Pars, meaning the land where the said Iranian tribes had formed the main core of their power, and its more general and wider application as the extensive geography of the political-cultural realm of the Achaemenids. This was deepened by the use of the word Persia by the Greeks to refer to the entire Achaemenid Empire. This title was later continued during the period of Arab domination, by the Muslims using the name 'Fars', which was merely an Arabised version of the original name. The use of this word in its broad sense coincided with the emergence and expansion of the Achaemenid Empire… Thereafter, in the administrative divisions of the Sasanian era and the Islamic Caliphate period

up to the present era (equivalent to Fars province), it has acquired a more limited meaning, although its broad concept never completely disappeared. Therefore, while Arab geographers considered regions like Merv to be part of Fars (De Planhol, 2000), Ibn Khordadbeh speaks of the border between Fars and Sindh. Similarly, Yazd was part of Fars during the Caliphate period and was separated from it during the Mongol period. This understanding remained strong until the time of Hamdallah Mustawfi in 1340 CE (Nuzhat al-Qulub, p. 113, as cited in: De Planhol, 2000). The limited meaning of Fars gradually became smaller and more restricted with the removal of the Persian Gulf coastal strip from this territory. If the limited meaning has been able to preserve and gradually establish itself despite the influence of the wider meaning, it is because it is in fact based on primary natural foundations that were conducive to the definition and expansion of a geographical concept… The natural geographical regions of this evolution reveal an undeniable geographical reality that is built on natural foundations' (De Planhol, 2000). The trend of moving from the broad meaning of the geographical concept of Fars to its more limited meaning was a stable current that continued until the contemporary period. The official change of the country's name from Persia (Fars) to Iran by order of Reza Shah in 1935 (Yarshater, 1989) was a turning point in the conceptual delimitation of this word, which focused the geographical understanding of Fars more than ever on a provincial geographical unit, namely Fars province.

As mentioned in the dictionaries, the word Fars, from a geographical perspective, is generally used in two meanings and concepts, which are: first, the territory of the Pars people in the ancient era, the province of Fars in the Islamic era, and Fars province in the contemporary era; and second, it is an application of the part to the whole, where Pars and Persia are defined as equivalent to the entire land of Iran. The significant point in these dual definitions is their extension to the conceptual and referential scope of Iran and Iranian and the ethnic and national considerations in the modern era, where these historical understandings become discursive components of Iranian nationalism and are used as a basis for redefining the new concept of Iranian and the Iranian nation.

While re-emphasizing the necessity of understanding the subject of the historical geography of Fars in comprehending contemporary national and nationalist discussions, it is necessary to mention that here none of the above concepts is intended to refer to the distribution of the Persian ethnic group.

Rather, the intention is that part of the current geography of the country of Iran whose dominant population is composed of the Persian people. On this basis, the regions belonging to the Persian ethnic group or the Persian people mainly include the central regions and parts of the eastern and southern regions of Iran, which include the provinces of Tehran, Qom, Alborz, Isfahan, Yazd, Markazi, Hamadan, Semnan, Bushehr, and parts of Qazvin, Khuzestan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Golestan, Mazandaran, and others. There are no precise statistics on the population of the Persian ethnic group in Iran, and various sources provide very different statistics, from about 45 percent of the country's population to 75 percent. Dr Hossein Bashiriyeh, referring to the general ethnic population composition of Iran, consisting of 6 ethnic groups, estimates the Persian-speakers at 50 percent of the population of Iran (Bashiriyeh, 2002: 13). The World Factbook, in its 2008 assessment, estimated the population of the Persian ethnic group at 61 percent and Persian-speakers at 53 percent (The World Factbook, 2012, Iran). In one of the reports presented to the US Congress in 2008, on the subject of religious and ethnic minorities in Iran, the population of the Persian ethnic group was estimated at 51 percent (CRS Report for Congress, 2008: 2). A study on the political geography of Iranian ethnic groups, relying on the 1996 census data, claims that the population of Persians in the ethnic composition of the Iranian nation is about 73 to 75 percent (Motalebi, 2014). According to a study commissioned by the Public Culture Council in 2012, Persian-speakers constitute the majority of the population in 13 provinces: Tehran, Alborz, Isfahan, Yazd, Semnan, Qom, Bushehr, Fars, Markazi, Razavi Khorasan, Kerman, Hormozgan, and South Khorasan, and are also a significant minority in 7 provinces: Khuzestan, Qazvin, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Hamadan, Golestan, North Khorasan, and Sistan and Balochestan (Survey of Public Culture Indicators, 2012).

- ***Cultural and Social Characteristics***

The organisation and institution of society and culture in the Persian community of Iran has been a function of the general transformations of this institution throughout history. The society of the Persians in the ancient era consisted of sedentary and nomadic tribes who, upon entering the arena of governance in the Achaemenid era, saw the grounds and inclination for urban life increase among them. This livelihood characteristic was further strengthened in the Sasanian

period with the Persians' return to power. Therefore, sedentarism and urban life were prominent features of Iranian society in the late ancient era. With the beginning of the Islamic period, for more than a thousand years until the beginning of the modern era of Iranian history, Persian communities in Iran, like other communities, had livelihoods reliant on nomadic, peasant, and urban ways of life. The cultural axis of the Persian ethnic group is the Persian language. This language, which has also been used among other ethnic groups, is an index that, given its pivotal role in the formation of the culture of the land of Iran and the production of a globally recognised literary canon, has in a way provided the ground for the cultural and social superiority of the Persian ethnic group (Persian-speakers). The officialisation of Shi'ism in Safavid Iran is another component that, despite being shared with some other ethnic groups, specifically gives a distinct religious aspect to this ethnic group and becomes one of the foundations of the historical identity of this people. With the beginning of the modern era, this people, who held the helm of Iran's politics, economy, and culture, and whose habitat was mainly the large cities of Iran, became the architects of modern Iran. Therefore, their collective identity was presented as the Iranian identity, and the identity structure of modern Iran was built on that basis. This characteristic became more prominent with the rise of the Pahlavi state and, based on a set of policies, became the model for the state project of cultural homogenisation.

In sum, cultural elements such as Persian and its dialects and accents, festivals such as Yalda Night and the solar calendar, Iranian art (Persian literature and poetry, Iranian architecture, and Iranian cuisine), the local cultures of Iranian ethnic groups, and Persian-language music can be counted as the heritage of these people. In a comprehensive definition of the Persian ethnic group, it can be said: The Persian ethnic group or the Persian people in Iran are a people of Iranian descent with the native Persian language, who throughout history have enjoyed a common cultural order and extensive political, social, and cultural influence (Frye, 2012).

Persian, or Parsi, is one of the Western Iranian languages from the Iranian subgroup of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages, spoken in the countries of Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan. Persian is a pluricentric language and is the official language of Iran, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. The Persian language is descended from the older Middle Persian (or Pahlavi), which itself originated

from Old Persian. These two languages arose from the ancient region of Pars (the present-day provinces of Fars, Bushehr, and southern Yazd in southern Iran). Old Persian was the official language of the Achaemenid Empire, and its descendant, Middle Persian, became the official and religious language of the Sasanian Empire, during which period it spread widely in other Iranian lands. So much so that in Khorasan it replaced the Parthian and Bactrian languages, and large parts of the Khwarazmian-speaking and Sogdian-speaking peoples in Khwarazm and Transoxiana also became Persian-speaking. A dialect of Middle Persian that over time became known as Dari Persian took hold as the standard written dialect in Khorasan after Islam and spread throughout Iran. Other dialects of Old Persian and Middle Persian, such as Mazandarani in Tabaristan, Gilaki in north-eastern Jibal, Balochi in Makran south of Sistan, Azari in Azerbaijan and the Caucasus, Luri in Lorestan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, and Khuzi in Khuzestan, took hold, which along with Dari are close to each other (Persian, Wikipedia).

Dari Persian, throughout history, has been the cultural and prestigious language of numerous empires in West, Central, and South Asia. This language has had great influences on its neighbouring languages, including other Iranian languages, Turkic languages (especially Uzbek and Azerbaijani), Armenian, Georgian, and Indo-Aryan languages (especially Urdu). Persian has also influenced and been influenced by Arabic. Persian is from the south-western group of the western branch of the Iranian languages, which itself is a subgroup of the Indo-Iranian family of Indo-European languages. The Tat of the Caucasus is considered genealogically the closest language to Persian (or a dialect of it). After that, the other languages of the south-western group, namely Luri, Achomi, Bashagardi, and the dialects of Fars province, are the closest to Persian. The degree of lexical similarity of the dialects of the Luri language to Persian is 80% in Northern Luri (85% with the Khorramabadi accent), 76% in Bakhtiari, and 75% in Southern Luri (80% with the Bushehri dialect of Persian) (Ethnologue, Iranian Persian). In the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, regarding the official status of the Persian language, it is stated: 'The official and common language and script of the people of Iran is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, official texts, and textbooks must be in this language and script' (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran: 18). Therefore, the Persian language, in addition to being the mother tongue of the Persian ethnic group/people, is the official language of

the country and, in a sense, is considered the language of all the inhabitants of the country of Iran. Of course, it should be noted that the official status of the Persian language is a legal principle that has been in effect without interruption or change from the Constitutional era to the present period.

The nature of the Persian language and its belonging to an ethnic culture and literature or calling it national and supra-ethnic and even supra-national, is one of the very serious and controversial issues that has created long-standing and deep disputes between opposing views about it. Dr Hagh-Shenas says about the function and historical and identity role of the Persian language in Iran: 'The Persian language, as we consider it, is not the language of any of the people who are distinguished from other Iranian ethnic groups—that is, from Turks, Turkmens, Gils, Deylamites, Kurds, Lurs, Baloch, Arabs, and others—by the label 'Persian ethnic group'. Rather, it is a language that belongs to the culture of Iran and to its history and, like that culture and history itself, is common among all Iranian ethnic groups… Alongside this common cultural language, all Iranian ethnic groups—whether Persian or not—also have their own ethnic languages… On the other hand, the Persian people, alongside the type of Persian that is the subject of our discussion, use another type that in sum has the status of their ethnic languages, and these ethnic languages, although they are of the same kind and type as the Persian language, are by no means one with it. It is not thought that any Bushehri, any Shirazi, any Lari, any Isfahani, any Yazdi, or any Mashhadi, in speaking with their own people, would use a language that is the subject of our discussion under the name of the Persian language… The result is that the Persian language is neither an ethnic reality nor a geographical one, but a cultural and historical reality, and this means that all Iranian ethnic groups, through this language, come together in the space of a single culture and with the backing of a single history and destiny and create a single nation. The cultural and historical unity that is reflected in the mirror of the Persian language is to such an extent that it is not at all clear what the share of each of these Iranian ethnic groups is in laying its foundation. Nor is it clear from which of the Iranian ethnic groups the creators of this history and culture originally arose; were they Turks who lived in Shiraz, or Persians in Kurdistan, or Kurds in Khorasan? And it is this cultural-historical nature of the Persian language that has caused this language never to have geographical boundaries, but always, like a vast volume of water, to take the shape of the bed in which it has flowed' (Hagh-Shenas,

2003: 185-188). Shahrokh Meskoob also considers 'Iranian-ness,' that is, Iranian identity and national sentiment, to be based on the two pillars of language and history (Meskoob, 1989: 40), by which he means the Persian language. Katayoun Mazdapour, in the same vein, believes: 'The Persian language is not a sign and proof of the dominance of an ethnic group with the fabricated title of the Persian people over other ethnic groups living in this vast expanse of the earth. Rather, it should only be considered a tool for communication among peoples who have used and use the Persian lingua franca for a long time to communicate with each other. The glorious Persian literature is the great gift of the ages and centuries to Persian speakers and also to the human world. For several reasons, which are the result of its written nature and its political, official, and governmental applications, the Persian language has remained more stable, and it is in the passage of ages and centuries that it has experienced slowness and tardiness in linguistic changes and transformations. It is in this process that Persian from long ago until now has changed less, and its stability can be better seen' (Mazdapour, 2020: 19). This is while critics of the dominance of the Persian language, which relies on the official instruments of power, believe that under the hegemony of the Persian language in Iran, a linguistic apartheid and discrimination is in progress, and every year on Mother Language Day, protests are held by other ethnic groups of Iran against this matter.

The name Tajik, under an ethnic title meaning someone who speaks Persian, included all Persian-speakers of Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan until the Safavid period. However, the emergence of the Shi'i sect and the occurrence of religious differences between the Persian-speakers of Iran and those outside the current borders of Iran caused the name Tajik to gradually fade for the Persian-speakers within the borders of Iran. Each Iranian ethnicity—Lur, Turk, Arab, Baloch, Gilani—according to their own understanding, called the Persian-speaker of Iran by a different name. The Turks of Azerbaijan and the Gilaks called them Iraqi! The Balochs called them Qajar! The Turkmens called them Qizilbash! The Kurds called them Ajam! The Lurs generally called them Tajik and Lenjoni (Alimoradi Bevar-Alima, 2017).

The expansion of urbanisation and the development of the Persian language, which became the compulsory state and public language during the Pahlavi era, and the retreat of the ethnic languages of other regions, had caused the identity of the Persian ethnic element in Iran not to be clear and specific. This is because

most urban Persian-speakers were in fact the same Lurs, Turks, and Gilaks who had abandoned and forgotten their ethnic language and were speaking the other state language, Persian. The circle of those who abandoned their mother tongue and became Persian-speakers became much wider with the creation of the nation-state project, the expansion of Iranian nationalism, and the officialisation of the Persian language and its compulsory teaching in the Pahlavi period. So much so that the Persian-speaking community of the Iranian plateau, which was a small minority in the Qajar period, now appears in the official statistics as the most populous ethnic element in Iran. In Pahlavi-era Iran, the statesmen of the central government, with subtle contrivances, instead of making a direct effort to destroy and eliminate the ethnic groups, prepared the ground for downplaying and making ethnic issues seem unimportant (except for the Persian ethnic group). In the Pahlavi period, Iranian-ness was summarised in the Persian ethnic element, and for this reason, so much emphasis and prominence was given to the Persian language and Persian identity! This was done without explicitly and openly referring to an ethnic group called Persian, so as not to provoke the sensitivity of the other non-Persian-speaking ethnic groups of Iran, who constituted the majority of Iran's population (Alimoradi Bevar-Alima, 2017).

The religion and sect of the Persian people follow the general course of religious-sectarian evolution in Iran. According to this, the Zoroastrian religion was the main religion during the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian empires. In 651 CE, during the Rashidun Caliphate, Iran was conquered, and Islam spread as the main religion. The Sunni sect was the dominant Islamic sect before the Mongol invasion of Iran. During the Ilkhanate and Timurid periods, Sunnism was weakened and Shi'ism was strengthened, and finally, with the emergence of the Safavids in Iran, Shi'ism became the dominant and official sect (Shaked, 2014), and from then until today, the dominant sect of the Persians in Iran is Twelver Shi'ism. According to Article 12 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the official religion of the country is Islam and the Twelver Shi'i sect (Constitution of the Islamic Republic, p. 17). Among the Persians, there are minorities of Bábís, Bahá'ís, and non-Imami Shi'i sects, and in some peripheral regions, there are also followers of Sunnism. Most Shi'i Persians reside in the central regions of Iran, and apart from a few counties (Gerash, Mohr, and Khonj in Fars province), the rest of the Persian-speaking followers of Sunnism reside in the eastern border strip of the country, in the north of Sistan and Balochestan

province and South Khorasan province and part of Razavi Khorasan. Sunni Persian-speakers, in addition to Iran, also live in the countries of Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

From the perspective of cultural and social policies in the last hundred years, the political systems of Iran, both Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic, under the titles of national cultural and social policy, have centrally promoted the language, culture, customs, and elements of the cultural and social life of the Persian ethnic group in the country. In the dominant political discourse of contemporary Iran, this has been established as a self-evident and indisputable matter. Therefore, all organizations, institutions, ministries, and other pillars of the state, such as the IRIB (state broadcaster), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the Islamic Propaganda Organization, the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, etc., are the executors of cultural, social, and religious policies that are primarily considered the life indicators of this ethnic group.

- ***Economic Conditions***

A look at the economic indicators and the distribution of national wealth and financial opportunities in Iran clearly shows a centralised pattern based on the accumulation of wealth in the predominantly Persian-inhabited central regions and the stewardship of the Persians over the economic and financial affairs of Iran. The Iran Open Data website, in a report titled 'Iran's Economy: A Deep Geographical Gap in the Distribution of Wealth,' relying on data from the Statistical Centre of Iran (2019), has analysed the geographical situation of Iran's economy. According to it, the distribution of wealth and economic opportunities follows a centre-periphery pattern that is relatively consistent with the Persian-inhabited central regions and the ethnic peripheral regions. The average annual income of urban households, per capita provincial credits, and the province's share of the gross domestic product are among the analytical indicators of this report. This discriminatory situation is also seen in other educational, welfare, service, and other fields. A general look at the economic situation, job opportunities, welfare facilities, and living conditions in the cities of Tehran, Isfahan, Yazd, Hamadan, Mashhad, and Shiraz, and comparing it with the cities of Ilam, Zahedan, Sanandaj, Khorramshahr, and Ahvaz, clearly illustrates this difference.

In fact, the major part of heavy industries such as steel, automotive, and petrochemical companies are located in the central and Persian-inhabited provinces. The highest share of the industrial sector is in the central provinces, with the largest shares belonging to the provinces of Isfahan (41.4 percent), Alborz (44 percent), Tehran (37.3 percent), Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari (39.6 percent), Qom (43.4 percent), Markazi (40.3 percent), and Yazd (47.8 percent) (Iran's Economy: A Deep Geographical Gap in the Distribution of Wealth, 2021).

This is while the central regions of Iran do not play a significant role in the production of national wealth, and the major reserves and income of the country's oil and petrochemical industries belong to the provinces of Khuzestan and Ilam, which are among the poorest provinces in the country. In the field of agriculture and animal husbandry as well, the major part of the country's agricultural and livestock production is produced in the peripheral, mostly non-Persian-inhabited, regions. However, the largest portion of the country's produced wealth, especially heavy industries, mines, customs, etc., flows to the central provinces with a Persian majority.

## Ethnicity and Ethnic Movements in Contemporary Iran

Ethnicity, in the sense of a collective awareness, perception, attachment, and commitment to an ethnic group and its identity (Connor, 1978 & Geertz, 1996), is a concept that denotes the dimension of ethnic self-consciousness. Unlike the concepts of 'ethnic group' and 'ethnic identity', which also have pre-modern connotations, ethnicity is considered among modern concepts and, like nationality, is confined to the sphere of the modern era. In the pre-modern period, belonging to an ethnic group was, for its members, primarily a natural destiny accompanied by acceptance, in which the individual formed an ordinary and unconscious relationship with its objective and subjective elements. In the modern era, however, an ethnic group and belonging to it are not merely a predetermined, accepted, and neutral historical fact, but are considered a matter stemming from consciousness and a purposeful stance towards it.

Ethnicity, in the sense of an awareness of one's ethnic situation and interests and, where necessary, taking action to achieve them, emerged in most societies concurrently with the processes of modernisation and the remaking of identity, especially the emergence and formation of nationality and nationalist thought.

It is, in a way, a twin to it, and the contemporary history of Iran is no exception to this characteristic. Iranian society, with its extensive ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic, and social diversity, entered the modern period of its history. After acknowledging the necessity of a fundamental and comprehensive transformation in the Iranian lifeworld, one of the areas of crucial importance in constructing a new society in accordance with the model of modern nations was the sphere of collective identity. In the various and distinct projects of political, social, and cultural modernisation in contemporary Iran—from the Constitutional Revolution to the first and second Pahlavi eras and the subsequent period of the Islamic Republic of Iran—this was placed on the agenda of the ruling political systems. Under different identity discourses, a diverse range of macro-projects of national and societal identity were enacted. One of their most influential and significant dimensions was the manner of engagement with the ethnic groups and ethnic identity of Iranian society, which is referred to as 'ethnic policy.' For this reason, ethnic policies have played an unparalleled role in shaping the political, cultural, economic, and social position of ethnic groups in contemporary Iran and are considered the most influential variable in the emergence and formation of ethnic issues, movements, and discourses. As was reviewed and explained in the survey of the transformations of ethnic policy and the evolution of nationalist discourses in contemporary Iran, identity and ethnic policies in modern Iran—which were mainly operationalised in the form of macro-projects of top-down identity-building with the agency of governments—were authoritarian and one-sided programmes. They were implemented with the least attention to the context of the communities and the ethnic realities governing them, through undemocratic and prescriptive methods. However, contrary to the perception of policymakers and decision-makers, the orientation of these policies was not limited to a one-way, top-down relationship. Rather, regardless of the degree of acceptance and success of these policies, their intended and unintended, overt and covert feedback and consequences among the ethnic groups as the target society led to the emergence and formation of forms of ethnic awareness, positions, and demands. This shaped an important chapter in the history, fraught with conflict and struggle, of the emergence and formation of a new Iranian identity, which can be re-examined under the heading 'Ethnicity and Ethnic Movements in Contemporary Iran.'

Familiarity with nationalist ideas in the final decades of the Qajar era was not

a phenomenon solely confined to the central elites and nationalist intellectuals. Rather, these ideas, in another dimension, fostered awareness among some ethnic leaders and elites—a matter of which clear signs became evident in the cultural and social arenas of that very period. Apart from the intellectual and political developments within Iran, the developments in neighbouring countries with similar ethnic populations, especially the Ottoman Empire, were effective in the emergence of the first forms of ethnic collective action.

Although ethnic issues and demands have a stable and continuous nature in the contemporary history of Iran, their emergence and actualisation have always been a function of the situation and the degree of stability and power of the country's central authority. The periods of revolutions and profound shifts in the change of political power, which have always been accompanied by the fragility and instability of transitional periods of power, have provided a space for the revival and expression of ethnic movements and demands. The Constitutional Revolution, the coup of February 1921, the transfer of power from the Qajars to the Pahlavis, the early years of the accession of Pahlavi II, the 1979 Revolution, and the periods of widespread discontent and protest movements are among the most significant of these junctures. On this basis, it can be concluded that since ethnic issues have not been officially recognised in contemporary Iran and have always been marginalised by the central power with a strategy of suppression and effacement of the issue, they emerge as soon as the slightest opportunity arises. Given the exclusionary and coercive policy of the ruling establishment, this emergence often takes a radical form. In what follows, these developments will be examined with reference to the turning points in the contemporary history of Iran in the emergence of ethnic movements and campaigns.

## Ethnic Rebellions and Uprisings from the Constitutional Revolution to the End of the Pahlavi I Monarchy

The political awakening in Qajar Iran and its achievements, including the Constitutional Revolution and the constitutional government, opened a new horizon in the sphere of politics and political understanding of Iranian society, especially among the spectrum of elites and intellectuals. Therefore, alongside the national awakening and the effort to establish a modern nation-state, a kind of ethnic awakening and an endeavour to move beyond the old tribal identity and to redefine one's collective identity under an ethnic identity began to mature

and circulate among the elites and leaders of the ethnic groups. The emergence of Iranian nationalist theories in the decades leading up to the Constitutional Revolution could not have been without effect on the appearance of signs of similar tendencies among some of the chiefs and elites of the clans, tribes, and ethnic groups (Shirazi, 2017: 296). In addition to the political developments within the country, nationalist movements and ethnic nationalism in neighbouring countries and the region were another factor in strengthening these tendencies. Nevertheless, for various reasons, including the nascent nature of these tendencies and their failure to enter the stage of political organisation, this matter had a more socio-cultural character. Given the relatively comprehensive and overarching ideals of the Constitutional Revolution, it could naturally seldom be in conflict with it. However, with the emergence of a crisis in the pillars of constitutionalism and the failure of the constitutional movement to establish a modern state and society, a widespread disorder occurred in Iran, in the midst of which a vast array of political movements was created. One of its prominent manifestations was ethnic movements and movements attributed to ethnic groups.

- ***The Rebellion of Simko (Simitqu)***

The most famous and longest ethnic movement of the final years of the Qajar era was the rebellion of Ismail Agha Shakak, known as Simko (Simitqu), which lasted from 1918 to 1930. Ismail Agha, who became the chief of the Shakak tribe around the time of the Constitutional Revolution after the murder of his father and brother, the previous chiefs of the tribe, at the hands of Qajar government forces, was able to strengthen his political position and status by entering the post-constitutional conflicts in Iran and supporting the anti-constitutional front. By expanding his relations with the Russians and Ottomans and securing their support, and given that significant parts of the north-western regions of Iran were under his domain, he became a powerful actor in the post-constitutional era of Iran (van Bruinessen, 2004: 380-381). His acquaintance and connection with Kurdish political and intellectual figures, including Abd al-Razzaq Badr Khan and Sheikh Said, the grandson of Sheikh Ubeydullah, were other turning points in Ismail Agha's life that had a significant impact on strengthening his Kurdish inclinations (Brunssen, 1999: 107). With the beginning of the First World War and the rupture of global and regional political structures and the emergence of new equations, a new opportunity arose for Simko to pursue his ambitions and

goals as the ruler of the strategic region between Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia. During the First World War and the subsequent years, Simko was the most famous figure on the Iran-Ottoman border (Brunssen, 1999: 87).

The October Revolution in Russia (1917) was a turning point in Simko's fate because, with the Bolsheviks coming to power, the order for the withdrawal and return of Russian soldiers was issued, and this provided a new opportunity for Simko, who had been under severe pressure from the Russians during the war years. Another achievement of this situation for Simko was acquiring some equipment and weapons from the departing Russian military (Aqasi, 1971: 386). With the end of the First World War and the withdrawal of the Russian, Christian, and especially Ottoman forces, who had advanced deep into Azerbaijan in the latter part of the war, Simko became the undisputed ruler of the region and consolidated his power west of Lake Urmia (Elphinston, 1946: 97). By 1919, Simko had managed to gather a force of twenty thousand Kurds around him and establish an autonomous government with its centre in Urmia. In addition to local forces, Simko also benefited from hundreds of mercenary soldiers who entered Iranian soil from the Ottoman Empire (Bruinessen, 2006: 18-21). Thus, the ground was prepared for the furtherance of his political objectives. As Kasravi writes: 'Ismail Agha saw the mobilization of his cause and took advantage of the opportunity and gathered strength; for the turmoil of Iran's affairs, the weakness of the government, the abundance of war materiel, and the obedience and martial prowess of the Kurds led him to great ambitions' (Kasravi, 2005: 829). Thus, Simko rebelled in two periods, from 1918 to 1922 and in 1926.

The first phase of the rebellion, which occurred in the final years of the Qajar dynasty, saw Simko's forces, as a result of a series of hit-and-run battles, capture the Lakestan region and the cities of Salmas, Urmia, Mahabad, Khoy, Miandoab, Piranshahr, Baneh, and Sardasht (Kasravi, 2005: 851-852, 857). In the midst of this phase, peace negotiations took place between government forces and Ismail Agha, in which, according to McDowall, the government was even prepared to grant Simko autonomy (McDowall, 1991). This phase finally came to an end in 1922 in the battle of Shekaryari near Salmas, with the victory of government forces over Simko's forces and the capture of the Chahriq fortress. Simko fled to Turkey with a group of his companions (Cronin, 2000: 353).

The second phase of the rebellion began with Simko's pardon by Reza Khan and his return in 1925. After returning to Iran, Simko once again resumed his

political and military activities and, after allying with Kurdish tribes such as the Herki and Begzadeh, rebelled again (Bruinessen, 2006: 21). The rebellion began in October 1926 with Simko's siege of the city of Salmas. A short time later, Iranian military forces dispatched from Urmia and Khoy came to the city's aid. In the ensuing battle, some of the Kurdish rebels betrayed Simko, and the rebellion was defeated (Entessar, 2010: 17). Simko fled to British-mandated Iraq. After Simko took refuge in Iraq, the army chiefs, by enticing him with the offer of the governorship of Oshnavieh (Bruinessen, 2006: 21), invited him to peace negotiations. After his entry into Iran on 30 June 1930, in a pre-planned scenario near Oshnavieh, he was ambushed by army forces and killed by them (Entessar, 2010: 17).

Numerous, and often conflicting, views have been expressed regarding the origin and foundations of Simko's movement. Some reduce his movement to a tribal incident with predatory aims, while others believe that Simko's rebellion was a full-fledged ethno-national liberation movement. In this regard, Simko wrote in a letter to Zafar al-Dawla, the governor of Tabriz, in 1922: 'We know very well that some of the nations of the world, who are not even a quarter of the Kurds, have achieved their desire, that is, independence. Look at the Germans, how they have created this issue among themselves. In truth, if the great Kurdish nation in Iran does not achieve its desires, death is better for it than life. In the age in which we live, whether the Iranian government wants it or not, we demand to achieve our right, that is, independence. This is the desire of every Kurdish-speaking person and is the source of a new life for our people' (Koçera, 1998: 65). Therefore, the political fate of Simko and his rebellion can be seen, from a developmental perspective, as a movement from Kurdish tribalism towards ethnic nationalism and the idea of establishing an independent government.

- ***The Khiyabani Uprising***

Sheikh Mohammad Khiyabani, a renowned constitutionalist from Azerbaijan, a representative in the second session of the National Consultative Assembly, and a comrade-in-arms of Sattar Khan and Baqer Khan, in the critical atmosphere of the final years of the Qajar era, in protest against the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 (Cox-Vossug ed-Dowleh), formed the Democrat Party of Azerbaijan and, by organising 800 fighters, launched an uprising. After disarming the government units in Tabriz and the joining of the Tabriz gendarmerie forces with

the forces under his command, they expanded their movement. After the capture of other cities in Azerbaijan such as Urmia, Khoy, Ardabil, Maragheh, Salmas, and Zanjan by the Democrats, while declaring autonomy, they changed the name of Azerbaijan to Azadistan (Land of Freedom) (Madani, 1990: 86; Lenczowski, 1977: 103). After 6 months, in September 1920, this movement was suppressed by the Cossack forces and some gendarmerie elements, planned and managed by Mokhber-ol Saltaneh Hedayat, and Khiyabani was also killed after being wounded in the conflict. Two years after this incident, a group of Khiyabani's followers, led by a gendarmerie officer named Lahouti, rose up again against the ruling tyranny and explicitly demanded the resignation of Reza Khan from the command of the armed forces. This movement was also immediately and severely suppressed, and all its leaders fled to Russia, while the other agents were executed or imprisoned (Madani, 1990: 87-88).

The views and analyses concerning the factors and context of the Khiyabani uprising can be divided into several general categories. Some assess it as a movement aimed at restoring constitutionalism and its values (Kasravi, 1978: 856) and consider it more of a cultural movement than an armed and separatist uprising. Hossein Makki believes: 'Khiyabani, in these five months, rather than striking the pose of a leader and commander of an armed uprising, had the demeanour of an intellectual leader, an ideologue, and a revolutionary thinker. Every day, with passionate speeches on social, political, and intellectual issues, he tried to bring about a cultural revolution and political and social self-awareness in the minds of the people' (Makki, 1977: 35-36). Another group, highlighting the prominent role of Azerbaijan in the Constitutional Revolution, considers his uprising a protest against the critical situation in Azerbaijan and the unfulfilled rights and demands of the people of that land. Katouzian says in this regard: 'The Khiyabani rebellion is rooted in the denial of the legal rights of the people of Azerbaijan and other places' (Katouzian, 1993: 194-195). Another group of researchers does not overlook the ethnic tinge of this uprising and believes that, in any case, this movement also had an ethnic character. Nikki Keddie notes in this regard that this movement was a reformist movement that also expressed some nascent nationalist sentiments of the Turkic-speaking people of Azerbaijan, who considered themselves oppressed in the face of the Persian-speaking central movement. Some have also considered it a separatist movement. The main pretext for most politicians and researchers who have ventured into the separatist

aspects of the movement is the issue of changing the name of Azerbaijan to Azadistan. Among those who have profited from this pretext are Mokhber-ol Saltaneh Hedayat, Moshir al-Dawla, Abdollah Mostowfi, and Bastani Parizi, each of whom has in some way confirmed this matter (Maqsoudi, 2001: 248).

### • *The Rebellion of Sheikh Khaz'al*

Sheikh Khaz'al (Khaz'al al-Ka'bi) was the governor of Khorramshahr (Mohammerah) and the chief of the Banu Ka'b tribe in Khuzestan. During the interregnum at the end of the Qajar period (early 20th century), he organised one of the most significant ethno-tribal rebellions with the aim of achieving the independence of Khuzestan and forming a free Arabistan. In 1897, in place of his brother Sheikh Maz'al, whom he had murdered, Khaz'al was appointed by Mozaffar ad-Din Shah with the rank of Amir Tuman and the title Mo'ezz os-Saltaneh as the governor of Mohammerah and its border guard (Erfanian, 2011: 488-491). During his rule, Sheikh Khaz'al made a great effort to expand his power and influence and was increasingly successful in this endeavour. Extensive internal relations with the central government and numerous tribes and clans, widespread regional connections with neighbouring countries and governments, and a close bond with the British—which had gained strategic importance after the discovery of oil in Iran and the signing of the D'Arcy Concession—were effective factors in the continuous power-building of Sheikh Khaz'al. The granting of state lands (khāleseh), the administration of customs, the collection of taxes, as well as the close relationship of the governors and appointees and even the stipendiary status of most government officials from the Sheikh's table, made him the plenipotentiary representative of the Qajar shahs in the region. During this period, the powers delegated to him by the central government were to such an extent that some have referred to it as 'the independence of provincial administration' (Ansari, 1998: 106-108).

Over more than a quarter of a century, Sheikh Khaz'al, by expanding the territory under his rule in southern Khuzestan and then the entire province, achieved such wealth, fame, power, and independence of thought and action that its renown echoed not only in the political centre of the country but also in the countries of the region (Maqsoudi, 2001: 253). He ruled over more than two-thirds of the territory of Khuzestan and had styled himself the Emir of Arabistan. Kasravi describes Khaz'al's power and magnificence as follows:

'After the time of Shah Ismail Safavi, no one in Khuzestan had attained this glory and power' (Kasravi, 2002: 226). Taqizadeh also, in describing Khaz'al's territory, writes: 'His territory was two hundred to three hundred kilometres in extent and reached near Khorramabad on one side and all the coasts of the Gulf on the other' (Taqizadeh, 1993: 346). In such circumstances, with the formation of the Union of Southern Tribes led by Sheikh Khaz'al and an alliance with Gholamreza Khan, the Vali of Poshtkuh, Morteza Qoli Khan Bakhtiari, Amir Mojahed, and Haj Shahab al-Dawla from the leaders of the Bakhtiari tribes, and a large number of Arab tribes such as Banu Tamim, Al-Yusuf, al-Darisi, Majbum, al-Rawiyah, Bayt 'Umar, Bayt Faraj, Bayt Karam, al-Bawiyah, and Azkan, the rebellion began in 1922 under British protection and reached its peak in 1924 (Makki, 1978: 162, 165, 167, 300). Sheikh Khaz'al writes about the necessity of gaining British support: 'For my own preservation and that of the properties I possess, since I am desperate of the government, I have no choice but to strengthen my relations with the British' (Sheikh-ol-Eslami, 1990: 36). Thus, a series of continuous agreements with the British during the years 1902, 1907, 1910, 1914, and the years of the First World War reiterated their support for Sheikh Khaz'al against the central government and any other threat (Erfanian, 2011: 488-491).

Following Reza Khan's 1921 coup and his rise to power, Sheikh Khaz'al opposed him. The struggle between Reza Khan and the Sheikh became public when Dr. Arthur Millspaugh, the American advisor, demanded the overdue taxes of Khuzestan. Sheikh Khaz'al became very angry upon seeing Millspaugh's letter and stated that he was not indebted to the Iranian government and did not recognise Reza Khan and Millspaugh at all. After this action, Sheikh Khaz'al, with the aim of restoring Ahmad Shah, deposing Reza Khan, and most importantly, the secession of Khuzestan in southern Iran, organised and led the 'Sa'adat (Felicity) Uprising.' In the summer of 1924, the committee sent telegrams to Isfahan and some other cities stating that Sardar Sepah's uprising was against the constitution and in opposition to the constitutional Shah, and so on. A telegram was also sent to the Majles indicating opposition to Sardar Sepah, the necessity of his deposition, and support for Ahmad Shah (Afshar Sistani, 1994: 272-274). In the face of the deepening crisis, Reza Khan, as Prime Minister, Commander-in-Chief, and Minister of War, with the support of public opinion, the press, and the National Consultative Assembly, led a military expedition of 60,000 troops

to Khuzestan. Khaz'al, who had realised that Britain was unwilling to intervene in the developing situation, foresaw his defeat as certain (Sheikh-ol-Eslami, 1990: 7). When Sardar Sepah's army had reached Shiraz, he sent a telegram to him expressing his submission and allegiance to Reza Khan's wishes. Reza Khan, in his reply, demanded unconditional surrender, as he writes in a brief response: 'Mr. Sardar Aqdas, I saw your telegram in Shiraz. I accept your apology, remorse, and regret in the case of absolute submission' (Proceedings of the 82nd session of the fifth Majles, 1924). Therefore, on 4 December 1924, Reza Khan entered Mohammerah without a fight, and General Fazlollah Zahedi, who was in command of the government forces against Khaz'al, was appointed military governor and governor-general of the province. According to the negotiations between the parties, it was agreed that Sheikh Khaz'al would remain in Khuzestan while retaining his property. However, he was later asked to go to Tehran with his family with a guarantee for the safety of his life and property. Upon his refusal to comply with this order, he and his son Abdolmajid were arrested in April 1925 and sent to Tehran. The chapter of Sheikh Khaz'al's life finally closed in June 1936 (Shahnavaz, 2013). According to some sources, several police officers murdered him (Makki, 1983: 300).

In examining the causes of the outbreak and conclusion of Khaz'al's rebellion in Khuzestan, various and sometimes contradictory viewpoints can be identified. Some researchers, such as Hossein Makki and Shumyatsky, have viewed it from the perspective of conspiracy theory and have attributed it to a British conspiracy in Iran. Ivanov assesses the mediation and agreements of the British with Reza Khan and Khaz'al as the cause of the Sheikh's surrender. Homa Katouzian, rejecting analyses based on conspiracy and considering them misleading, has deemed a true understanding of such events possible only in the light of a true understanding of internal factors and tendencies (Maqsoudi, 2001: 257-258).

- ***The Independence Movement of Doust Mohammad Khan Baloch***

In the troubled atmosphere of the final decade of the Qajars, and while not yet a year had passed since Reza Khan's coup of February 1921, in Balochestan, Doust Mohammad Khan Barakzai, one of the khans of the region, came to rule Pahra (Iranshahr) in 1921, after the death of his uncle, Sardar Bahram Khan Barakzai. After consolidating his power, while Reza Khan was implementing the plan to overthrow the tribes and clans in other areas, Doust Mohammad Khan gradually

annexed all the regions and areas of Balochestan to his domain and, by refusing to pay taxes to the central government, nurtured the ambition of independence for Balochestan (Spooner, 1988). Therefore, Doust Mohammad Khan, with a force of 5,000 riflemen, was Reza Shah's greatest rival in Balochestan (Ahmadi, 2003: 225-226). With the preparations for the central government's attack to suppress Doust Mohammad Khan underway and his awareness of this, he tried to encourage and persuade the Baloch tribes and clans to unite and resist the central government's forces by warning of the danger of disarmament, the obligation to pay taxes, and even their women being taken as slaves (SAKMA: 20:240002878, cited in Naderianfar et al., 2019: 235).

In 1925, while Reza Khan was in the final days of his premiership and preparing for his coronation, he ordered the Khorasan army to increase its forces to enhance security in Khorasan and establish several new units and branches. This army gradually built garrisons in Balochestan and recruited Baloch chiefs and their clan members into the army forces (SAKMA: 7:293001570/6, cited in Naderianfar et al., 2019: 238-239). In 1925, Doust Mohammad Khan openly confronted the government by attacking Khash and Mirjaveh. This matter caught Reza Khan's attention, and he even warned him by telegram, to which Doust Mohammad Khan also submitted. However, this move was enough for Reza Shah to take his threat seriously. Therefore, in 1927, he appointed Brigadier Jahanbani as the commander of the Eastern Army, who then submitted a comprehensive report on the situation in Balochestan. After receiving the report and assessing the needs, the operation was postponed to 1928 (Afshar Sistani, 1991: 106). The government initially tried to force him to submit through negotiation, but due to Doust Mohammad Khan's harsh conditions, the government refused to accept them, and the implementation of a military operation was put on the agenda. Finally, in the summer of 1928, the forces under the command of Amanollah Jahanbani entered Balochestan and, during the battles of Gasht, Darak, and Darin-Chah, succeeded in defeating Doust Mohammad Khan with the support of the air force (Jahanbani, 1957: 61). Thus, another of the ethno-tribal power centres and a claimant of, if not independence, at least autonomy, collapsed. As Brigadier Jahanbani himself points out: one of the reasons for the army's victory in the war with Doust Mohammad Khan was the government's success in creating a rift between the Baloch sardars and khans (Jahanbani, 1957: 55). Zand-Moqaddam writes on this matter: 'The major part of the war with Doust

Mohammad Khan, which mostly took place in Saravan, was led by the Baloch' (Zand-Moqaddam, 2003: 353-305). After surrendering, Doust Mohammad Khan was forced to accept exile and life in Tehran, and was finally executed in 1930 for the crime of killing a government guard (Jahanbani, 1957: 4-5).

The prevalence of intermittent disorder in Balochestan continued until the end of Reza Shah's reign. Several factors played a role in this, including the corruption of Persian officials and the inability of the Baloch to understand why Persian officials should interfere in their affairs. Two major examples were the rebellion of Jomeh Khan Esmailzehi in Sarhadd from 1934 to 1938, and another, the rebellion of a number of tribes in Kuhak in 1938, demanding a reduction in customs duties on livestock, in which 74 people were executed by firing squad on the orders of General Alborz (Spooner, 1988).

Hamid Ahmadi believes: 'Doust Mohammad Khan was an example of a traditional Baloch sardar who wanted to have political power in the tribal areas and at the same time maintain good relations with the central government. In fact, it was Reza Shah who did not tolerate Doust Mohammad Khan and his local rule' (Ahmadi, 2003: 117). However, the reality of the matter may be beyond this one-dimensional interpretation. That Reza Shah did not accept any form of tribal and clan power is an indisputable matter, and he had firmly resolved years before to eradicate the foundation of the tribal livelihood. But what is open to criticism is the lack of inclination of Doust Mohammad Khan and other khans towards independence or self-governance and their heartfelt acceptance of subordination to the centre and the central government. The leaders and people of that remote land had no desire to accept being tribute-payers and subjects of the government in Tehran. Regardless of ethnic affiliation, any local ruler, even with the smallest territory, would want to enjoy independence as far as circumstances permit. What can be said about Doust Mohammad Khan Barakzai and other tribal leaders of his calibre is that, given the lapse in the exercise of the central government's sovereignty at the end of the Qajar era, even if the idea of independence had crossed Doust Mohammad Khan's mind, considering the regional conditions, the society of Balochestan, and the political-military arrangement of the khans and sardars, who were often in a state of constant conflict, it was no more than a wish.

During the aforementioned period, Iran was the scene of numerous other ethnic and tribal uprisings and rebellions in Kurdistan, Lorestan, the south, and other

ethnic geographies, which often occurred with the aim of gaining autonomy or military and financial advantages. All of them, in the equation of the complete and unconditional elimination of local power centres by the authoritarian Pahlavi I state, were erased from the national and local political scene without achieving the slightest gain.

With the gradual consolidation of the foundations of the Pahlavi I state's power and the elimination, suppression, and imprisonment of claimants to power, whether traditional tribal forces or modern political parties and movements, the Pahlavi I state, despite implementing the harshest and most discriminatory ethnic policies, entered a period of uncontested and rival-free rule that lasted until the occupation of Iran in September 1941 by the Allies and the transfer of the monarchy.

## Ethnic Movements and Campaigns in the Pahlavi II Era

The transfer of the Pahlavi monarchy to the young and inexperienced Mohammad Reza Shah in September 1941 occurred while Iran was passing through one of its most turbulent historical periods. The occupation of Iran by Allied forces, the collapse of the army as the main agent of order and security in the Reza Shah era, the weakening of the central government's bureaucracy in administering the country, the repeal of some of the political and social laws and restrictions of the Pahlavi I era, and the release of political prisoners, which included a large number of leaders of parties, ethnic groups, and tribes, all gave rise to an open political and social atmosphere. The establishment of political parties such as the Tudeh, National, and Democrat parties, freedom of the press, and the publication of journals and newspapers, as well as the resumption of a wide range of movements and political currents that had been silenced, rendered inactive, and isolated in the atmosphere of repression and suppression of the Reza Shah era, were the tangible effects of this new period.

In the open and volatile atmosphere of the early 1940s, ethnic groups were among the prominent political and social groups that, after the dire experience of Reza Shah's reign, strove to take advantage of this opportunity to secure their rights and achieve their ethnic demands. The presence of British forces in the southern regions and Soviet Union forces in the northern, western, and southern regions was a powerful element in directing political and military movements, especially ethnic movements, in these areas. In such an atmosphere, in the

mid-1940s, the most important movements in the contemporary history of Iran occurred in the north-western and western regions among the two ethnic groups of Azeri Turks and Kurds, with the cooperation and support of the Soviet Union.

### • *The Democrat Party and the Republic of Azerbaijan*

In the contemporary history of Iran, from the Russo-Persian wars to the Constitutional Revolution and then the Khiyabani Uprising, Azerbaijan, with Tabriz as its centre, was the impassioned and pioneering hub of historical transformations in Iran. With the beginning of the Pahlavi I era, it not only failed to achieve its deserved status but also faced discriminatory policies that created a climate of discontent among the people and elites of this land. For example, in the early 1940s, the criticism was raised that Tehran, with one-third the population of Azerbaijan, received 20 times the budget share of this region (Foran, 1998: 408). This situation led to the formation of a critical approach among the Azeri elites, which was also supported by the general public. In such an atmosphere, on 3 September 1945, Seyyed Jafar Pishevari, himself a discontented political figure and a critic of the policies in Tehran, issued a statement announcing the establishment of the Democrat Party of Azerbaijan with the objectives of internal freedom and civil autonomy for Azerbaijan within the framework of preserving Iran's independence, and a set of civil and economic demands including the teaching of the Azeri language in the schools of Azerbaijan (Jami, 1983: 284-287). The leaders of the Democrat Party, after receiving military, financial, and propaganda support from the Soviet Union and equipping their forces with weapons, gradually organised a rebellion—albeit a bloodless one—in Azerbaijan. After a short period, most of the cities and regions of Tabriz, Urmia, Ardabil, Zanjan, Khorramdarreh, Salmas, Marand, Mianeh, and their surroundings joined it (Abrahamian, 2013: 492-493). Although the role of the Soviet Union and Stalin's direct order to establish the government of Azerbaijan is a clear fact, in understanding this movement, one must also refer to its internal factors and environmental preliminaries.

The power of the party and the autonomous government of Azerbaijan was at its peak in late 1945 and early 1946. In addition to the support of 50,000 workers who were former members of the Central United Council, according to the newspaper Azerbaijan, the Democrat Party had 75,000 members, of whom 56,000 were peasants, 6,000 were intellectuals, 3,000 were artisans and shopkeepers, 2,000

were merchants, 500 were landowners, and 100 were clergy (Foran, 1998: 409-410). The formation of the People's Army of Azerbaijan with over one million weapons, an intelligence and police apparatus, and a court in the military-security field (Jami, 1983: 355-359); the establishment of an Azeri-language radio station, the publication of more than 16 periodical journals, and education in the mother tongue in the cultural field (Foran, 1998: 411-410); and the implementation of land reforms, reduction of landlord's share, an 8-hour workday and a one-day weekly holiday, nationalisation of banks, opening of state-owned stores, opening of clinics, asphalting of streets, and so on in the economic-social dimension were some of the foundational activities and achievements of the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Ivanov, 1977: 109-110). The autonomous government of Azerbaijan, despite the grand objectives and comprehensive programmes it had prepared, became a short-lived state that was soon made a bargaining chip in the relations between Iran and the Soviet Union. With the trip of the then Prime Minister of Iran, Ahmad Qavam al-Saltaneh, to Moscow in early 1946, and the signing of the Qavam-Sadchikov Agreement for the withdrawal of the Red Army from Iran in exchange for the concession to establish a joint oil company, the Soviet Union withdrew its support from the Azerbaijan government (Fateh, n.d.: 372) and even ordered the Pishevari government that the armed forces of Azerbaijan should not resist the central government. Consequently, for the Pishevari government, which had been in power for only a year, there was no choice but to surrender to the central power (Jami, 1983: 465). Therefore, Pishevari and some other leaders of the Azerbaijan government fled to the Soviet Union, and his government collapsed without any resistance. Nevertheless, after conquering Tabriz, the army forces committed numerous atrocities in this city and some other cities and brought about profound tragedies. While Fardoust reports the summary execution of 2,000 to 3,000 people (Fardoust, 1992: 151), sources affiliated with the Democrat Party of Azerbaijan have estimated the said massacre in Tabriz at 20,000 people and a total of 50,000 people (Dadashzadeh, 1978: 100, cited in Maqsoudi, 2001: 269).

The general policy of the Soviet Union, which at that time was the foreign supporter and instigator of the republics of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, followed a short-term tactic of balance and demanding its share against Britain. Their position regarding these two republics was to use them as a lever of pressure on the central government. The Soviet leaders believed that they should have the

same influence and advantages in northern Iran that the British had in the south. Following this line of thought, Stalin believed that if the southern oil was in the hands of Britain, the northern oil should also belong to the Soviet Union. Thus, the general policy of the Soviet Union at that time was to turn northern Iran into its sphere of influence. The Soviet Union entered into negotiations with Iran to obtain this concession but was unsuccessful, and the granting of any concession to that country by Iran was completely rejected. In such circumstances, the Soviet Union decided to use its pressure levers (Khame'i, 1983: 228-227). The most important instrument of the Soviet Union for exerting pressure was undoubtedly the Red Army forces stationed in Iran, but according to the Tripartite Treaty of Alliance (29 January 1942), the Allied forces were obliged to withdraw from Iran a maximum of 6 months after the end of the war. These conditions pushed the Soviet leaders towards other measures, which was the support of internal autonomy movements in Iran in the northern, north-western, and western regions (Khame'i, 1983: 51-52). Azerbaijan with its centre in Tabriz and Kurdistan with its centre in Mahabad, at that historical juncture, were the two main centres of ethnic campaigns and demands and the site of the formation of political parties and movements. Therefore, they provided two unique opportunities for the Soviet Union to, under the guise of supporting them, exert its pressure policy on the central government in the most decisive way possible. Thus, support for the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Kurdistan was put on the agenda of the Soviet government. Ultimately, following the promise of the northern oil concession in negotiations with Ahmad Qavam, they completely cut off their support and cooperation with these two movements.

- ***The Democrat Party and the Autonomous Republic of Kurdistan***

The political activities in Kurdistan after the end of the Pahlavi I era began specifically with the establishment of the semi-clandestine organisation 'Komelley Jiyanewey Kurd' (Society for the Revival of Kurdistan), or KJK, on 16 August 1942, based on the four pillars of Islam, Kurdishness, civility, and pacifism, and Qazi Muhammad was chosen as its leader (Nishtiman, 1943, No. 5). The Soviet Union's relationship with the Kurds under the leadership of Qazi Muhammad became more serious at this time, and after a meeting between the two sides, the Soviet Union promised military, financial, educational, and other support to the Kurds. The new conditions and the necessity of having a larger and more

public organisation prepared the ground for the dissolution of the Society for the Revival of Kurdistan, and in its place, on 16 August 1946, the Democrat Party of Kurdistan was founded with the aim of autonomy for Kurdistan (Mustafa Amin, 2007: 94-93). 159 days after its establishment, on 22 January 1946, the Democrat Party of Kurdistan, with the support of the Soviet Socialist Republic, declared the formation of the Autonomous Republic of Kurdistan in Mahabad, and Qazi Muhammad was elected as the president of this state (McDowall, 2000: 241)—a state that was eventually forced to dissolve and surrender to the central government of Iran 11 months later.

The process of the dissolution of the Republic of Kurdistan followed the same pattern as the collapse of the Republic of Azerbaijan. One of the articles of the agreement between the Soviet Union and the Qavam government was the non-support of the two newly established republics of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. Therefore, after the withdrawal of the Red forces from Iran, on 15 December 1946, the Russian representative left Mahabad, and on 16 December, Qazi Muhammad, along with a number of other leaders of the Republic of Kurdistan, surrendered to the Iranian army (Mahdiniya, 1987: 523).

Although the Republic of Kurdistan lasted for less than a year and its experience of governance quickly passed into history, this government, in that short period of a few months, undertook numerous infrastructural reforms and actions in cultural, social, legal, educational, and administrative fields, which is considered a creditable record for this nascent experience. The establishment of the Taraqqi (Progress) Company to regulate economic relations with Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union, the establishment of a Kurdish educational system and the provision of its necessities and books, the creation of a publishing and printing house, the publication of Kurdish newspapers and journals such as the newspaper Kurdistan, the weekly magazine Helaleh (for women), the literary monthly Hawar, the magazine Gelawej, the monthly Ajir, the children's magazine Grugali Mindalan (Children's Chatter), and the monthly Nishtiman; the establishment of a theatre hall, legislation and the printing of decrees on financial, administrative, municipal, judicial, and armed forces affairs, the reduction of the landlord's share, the creation of a culture of organisation, a national flag and anthem, and the formation of an army and a security-police organisation were among the achievements of the Republic of Kurdistan (Barzuyi, 1999: 330-344). Nevertheless, the most important aspect of the Republic of Kurdistan's influence,

despite its short life and limited territory, relates to its role in the dynamism of Kurdish movements and the formation of Kurdish national identity, especially in Iran.

The transition from the 1940s and the gradual process of consolidating the foundations of central power and the monarchy of Pahlavi II in Iran, especially after the coup of August 1953, led to the prohibition of all ethnic activities and movements. Ethnic political currents, for more than three decades, until the preparations for the 1979 Revolution, were forced to adopt a stance of political passivity and isolation. Therefore, after the autonomy-seeking movements of Kurdistan and Azerbaijan in the mid-1940s, no significant ethnic movement in the form of an uprising or campaign occurred in Iran.

The anti-Arab components of the Pahlavi-era nationalism and the 'othering' of the manifestations of Arab civilisation and culture were prominent features of the Pahlavi II discourse. This caused the Arabs of Iran during this period to be subjected to more disregard than other ethnic groups and even to be forced into silence and acceptance of the conditions through various forms of oppressive security-military, cultural, and economic-political encounters. The lack of opportunity and ability for protest and collective action in the aforementioned situation meant that this period did not witness any ethnic movement in the Arab regions.

## Ethnic Movements and Campaigns in the Era of the Islamic Republic

The revolution of February 1979 was the product of a coalition of the majority of the Iranian people. Just as people from every class, stratum, ethnicity, and religion in all corners of the country participated in it, the day after the revolution was also met with a very diverse and wide range of requests from each of the groups, classes, cities, and ethnic groups. If the most important characteristic of such coalitions is the speed in gaining political power and disrupting the old political order, its second characteristic is the emergence of a great many and innumerable problems and difficulties in the initial stages of consolidating and stabilising the new system, which pits the former allies against each other (Maqsoudi, 2001: 294). From this perspective, one of the fundamental challenges of the early revolution was the ethnic uprisings and movements in most regions of Iran, which were being articulated and expanded in an unprecedented manner in the revolutionary atmosphere of 1978-1979 and were an influential variable

in the course of the revolutionary transformations and the future politics of the country. The ethnic movements at this juncture took the form of a diverse range of political, military, armed actions, popular mobilization, and so on, which will be examined separately below.

• ***Kurdistan on the Morrow of the Revolution***

The Kurds in the west and north-west of the country (the Kurdish regions) were the first and, at the same time, the most important ethnic forces in the aftermath of the revolution to send their ethnic demands to Tehran. The demands of the people of Kurdistan were mainly represented by two secular parties: the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, led by Dr. Abdolrahman Ghasemlou, and the Komala Party, led by Sheikh Ezzeddin Hosseini. In the meantime, the Maktab-e Quran, led by Kak Ahmad Moftizadeh, also represented the political Islamic current of Kurdistan, who were mostly followers of the Sunni Shafi'i school. Given the importance of the Kurdistan region and the flood of their demands, one week after the victory of the revolution, on 19 February 1979, representatives of the provisional government, by travelling to Kurdistan, attended a gathering of one hundred thousand people in the city of Mahabad. While meeting with Dr. Abdolrahman Ghasemlou and Sheikh Ezzeddin Hosseini, they received the demands and wishes of the people and the political leaders of Kurdistan. The majority of these demands were issued in the form of an 8-article resolution addressed to the central government and were supported by the majority of demonstrators in the cities of Kurdistan, including Sanandaj, Saqqez, Bukan, Paveh, Piranshahr, Baneh, Marivan, and Sardasht. The creation of a free society, the elimination of national oppression, the provision of the right to self-determination in a federative form within the framework of the country of Iran, the rejection of any form of separatism, and the elimination of economic oppression were among the most important articles of this resolution (Kayhan newspaper, 1979, No. 10643: 8 & Kayhan newspaper, 1979, No. 10644: 4). The tense atmosphere of Kurdistan and the insufficient authority of the provisional government's delegation to reach a reliable agreement caused the Kurds and the political leadership of Kurdistan to view the negotiations with scepticism. As a result, the political and security atmosphere took a more radical turn. In this vein, on 25 November 1979, a joint autonomy plan from the Kurdish representative delegation, on behalf of the Komala Party (the Revolutionary Organization of

the Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan), the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, and the Organization of Iranian People's Fedai Guerrillas, was submitted to the special commission for handling the affairs of Kurdistan. At its core were the official recognition of autonomy in the Kurdish regions of the west of the country under a single unit, the administration of all affairs of this unit by the Kurds, and the official status of the Kurdish language in education and correspondence (Let us support the representative delegation of the Kurdish people even more, December 2006). The expansion of demands by the Kurdish forces, which were considered very radical by the central government, and the unstable position of the provisional government, coupled with the increasing influence and power of the radical Shi'i Islamist revolutionary forces at the head of the ruling system, who were mainly known under the banner of the Islamic Republican Party, meant that the possibility of reaching an understanding practically moved towards impossibility.

The non-participation of the majority of Kurds in the referendum on changing the system and its boycott by the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, the opposition of the Kurds to some articles of the Constitution, including the official status of the Shi'i sect and the principle of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (velāyat-e faqih), and the closing of the doors to dialogue and negotiation led to the ignition of the fire of civil war (Chaliand, 1993: 211). The seizure of the army garrison in Mahabad by the Democrat forces on 22 February 1979, and the attempt to seize the Sanandaj garrison during Nowruz of 1979, which is known as the 24-day war, led to severe and bloody clashes that further fanned the flames of civil war. Thus, the hostilities entered the point of no return of military confrontation. The will of the regime, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, to the necessity of adopting the harshest positions against any movement that was outside the ideals of the revolution and opposed to the principles of the newly founded Islamic Republic system according to their interpretation, ultimately caused Ayatollah Khomeini, by issuing a fatwa of jihad on 19 August 1979, to order the suppression of Kurdistan (Khomeini, 1999, Vol. 9: 285). Thus, the Kurdish issue in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution became the most security-sensitive and acute ethnic issue of the Islamic Republic of Iran era.

The rebellions and military conflicts of the first decade of the revolution resulted in more than 10,000 casualties, of whom about 1,200 were Kurdish political prisoners who were executed (Ward, 2009: 232-31). In general, it can

be said that the fire of war that was kindled after the revolution, despite the passage of decades, is still burning, and any critical situation still leads to radical protests and movements.

- ***Turkmen Sahra and the Ethnic Leftist Movement***

The Turkmen Sahra region in the north-east of Iran, with a population of Turkmen people who are mostly Sunni Hanafi, was another of the regions that, immediately after the victory of the revolution, was beset by disputes and armed conflicts with the central government. The first confrontation in this region occurred over the change of the name of Bandar Shah to Bandar Turkmen or Bandar Islam, while less than a month had passed since the victory of the revolution. On 5 March 1979, an armed conflict over the name change of Bandar Shah broke out between the forces of the Revolution Committee and the supporters of the People's Fedai Guerrillas in Bandar Turkmen. The Cultural and Political Centre of the Turkmen People (Central Headquarters of the Turkmen Sahra Councils), a newly established Marxist organisation of the Turkmen people whose central office was located in Gonbad-e Kavus, in protest against the issue of changing the name of Bandar Shah, closed the schools and, by holding a 30,000-strong march in Gonbad-e Kavus and the cities of Aq Qala, Bandar Shah (Turkmen), and others on 10 March 1979, issued a resolution demanding the creation of a people's army, the administration of the garrison by a revolutionary council, the formation of people's courts, the cancellation of farmers' debts, the distribution of the Pahlavi family's lands among the farmers, free education, cultural and religious freedom, and the teaching of the Turkmen language, among other things (Ettela'at newspaper, 1979, No. 15860: 8). The disregard for the demands of the Turkmen people and the attempt to subjugate them by the central government and the revolutionary forces caused a series of limited clashes that often led to a temporary cessation of hostilities. Then, in the negotiations between the government and the protesters, despite reaching an initial agreement and after the declaration of a ceasefire and the official announcement by the government that the demands of the Turkmens would be considered in the new constitution, several of the negotiators were arrested by Turkmen forces. Again, with the non-participation of the Turkmens in the referendum for the selection of the Islamic Republic system, the confrontations intensified (Kayhan newspaper, 1979, No. 10671: 1). On 31 March 1979, negotiations between Ayatollah Taleqani and the

government's dispatched delegation with the representatives of the Turkmens reached a conclusion, and the parties signed a ceasefire, but the clashes still continued. Two days later, 70 members of the People's Fedai Guerrillas were arrested in a clash with the Revolutionary Guards. The unrest in Turkmen Sahra continued until February 1980. The war between the Revolutionary Guards and the Fedaiyan-e Khalq began. As the clashes intensified, the army effectively entered the war on 11 February 1980. On 12 February 1980, the last strongholds of the guerrillas fell, and the headquarters of the Turkmen people was captured by the forces of the revolution, and the army took over the security and order of the Turkmen Sahra region. After these clashes, calm gradually returned to the region, and the influence of leftist forces in the area diminished (The Islamic Revolution and the Turkmen Sahra Incident, 2013).

- ***Azerbaijan and the Muslim People's Republic Party***

The Muslim People's Republic Party was one of the political parties formed in March 1979 around the personality of Seyyed Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari. This party was initially established to continue the ideals of the Islamic Revolution; however, it had a different view on the course of affairs in the Islamic Republic than Ayatollah Khomeini. This party called for a 'yes' vote in the referendum on the Islamic Republic but opposed the inclusion of the principle of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (velāyat-e faqih) in the constitution during its ratification. These oppositions eventually led to a widespread confrontation between this party and the newly established government after the Islamic Revolution. In fact, it can be said that the Muslim People's Republic Party was formed in competition with the Islamic Republican Party, which was formed by the followers and companions of Khomeini (Bashiriyeh, 2005: 28), and it advocated for a kind of liberal political Islam (Hosseinizadeh, 2007: 319). During its 10 months of organisational activity, the Muslim People's Republic Party, through recruitment, giving speeches, publishing the weekly Khalq-e Mosalman, and holding discussion sessions, sought to explain its positions and gradually revealed its opposition to the general policies of the system. These oppositions, which began with public and peaceful announcements and ended in the last days of the party's political life with coercive actions and even an attempt to control the second fighter base of Tabriz, can be outlined in the following dimensions: 1. Opposition to the method of holding the referendum

on changing the system in April 1979. 2. Opposition to the formation of the Assembly of Experts for the Constitution and emphasis on the necessity of forming a 500-member constituent assembly, which they considered a guarantor of the drafting of a popular constitution. 3. Opposition to some articles of the constitution that violated the sovereignty of the nation, the lack of clarity in the text of the constitution, and boycotting the elections (Maqsoudi, 2001: 234-235). Although this movement did not have ethnic origins and demands, its location in Azerbaijan and the leadership of Ayatollah Shariatmadari turned it into a centrifugal movement. This party was finally suppressed and declared dissolved in March 1980, after the party's supporters in Tabriz succeeded in seizing the radio and television building of Tabriz, with a message from Ruhollah Khomeini to Shariatmadari to leave the party and the execution of ten of its supporters by the Revolutionary Court of Tabriz (Calm returns to Tabriz, 1980: 1-2).

- ***Balochestan and Religious and Ethnic Demands***

Balochestan, like Kurdistan and Turkmen Sahra, was another of the ethnic regions that, although it entered the atmosphere of the 1979 Revolution later than other regions, due to the ethnic and religious nature of the people of that land, witnessed the emergence of a range of ethnic, religious, and class demands that gave rise to a series of movements. In fact, the open political space after the revolution allowed many Baloch to attain important positions, although this achievement was short-lived, and within one or two years, the Baloch were eliminated from the administrative and political system (Shahbakhsh, 1994: 56). This atmosphere also led to the emergence of several political organisations and movements and the publication of a collection of Balochi and Persian language publications. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, three different groups were active in Balochestan. First, the sardars and khans; second, the religious leaders or mawlawis; and third, the leftist movement groups (Maqsoudi, 2001: 346). Among these, the relationship of the sardars and khans with the revolution was hostile, and the relationship of the leftists and the mawlawis was more moderate (Hossein Bor & Irandegani, 2015: 221).

Most of the Baloch sardars and khans who were involved in political activity against the new regime in the early days of the revolution were the same influential intermediary sardars and khans of the Shah's era. The increase in the power and influence of the revolutionaries had endangered their authority,

and the revolutionary government was not willing to grant them the slightest concession. The sardars and khans, in response, set about reorganizing their previous formations and establishing new organisations, some of which were: the Balochestan Liberation Front, the People's Front for the Liberation of Baloch, the Baloch Peshmerga group, and the Mujahideen Movement of Balochestan (JAMBA). Their main activity was limited armed clashes with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Ahmadi, 2001). These groups ultimately, due to the weakness of their social base and the anti-aristocratic discourse of the early revolution, were not able to achieve any tangible and lasting achievement.

The Ettehad-ol-Moslemin (Union of Muslims) party, led by Mawlawi Abdolaziz, the Sunni Friday prayer leader of Zahedan, as a religious party, represented the religious and popular current of the Baloch and was more an expression of the demands of the Sunnis of Iran than the ethnic and political tendencies of the Baloch (Shabani, 2006: 66). This party generally leaned towards and supported the Islamic Republic, and despite some differences of opinion with the centre, it refrained from adopting an opposing stance against the central government. This party played an important role in establishing and consolidating the Islamic Republic in Balochestan and actively encouraged the people to vote for the Islamic Republic in the referendum on determining the regime on 1 April 1979 (Fowzi, 2005).

The leftist groups were among the emerging currents of Baloch society, whose growth and presence in Balochestan mainly took place after the revolution, and the majority of their members and leadership cadre were composed of educated, non-religious, and urban Baloch elites. These groups were influenced by the leftist groups based in Tehran. The strategy of these groups was to achieve internal autonomy within the framework of a unified Iran, and they mostly believed in peaceful and civil struggle. Of course, some groups, such as the Peykar Organization and the Fedaiyan-e Khalq Guerrillas, supported armed operations against the government (Hossein Bor & Irandegani, 2015: 184). The leftist currents in Balochestan, despite the supportive discourse they had for the deprived people of Baloch, did not find much favour due to the religious and traditional fabric of Balochestan. In contrast, the religious groups were met with greater and more widespread reception and were able to emerge as the main representatives of the Baloch people.

### • *Khuzestan and the Demand for the Autonomy of the Arab People*

Khuzestan, the beating heart of Iran's economy, unlike some other ethnic regions that were sometimes on the margins of the revolutionary current, was a strategic region that was at the centre of the transformations of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Given the active presence of oil industry workers in the demonstrations and strikes of the late Pahlavi period, they played a significant role in crippling the economy of the Pahlavi state and preparing the ground for the victory of the revolution. Naturally, with the victory of the revolution, they stood at the forefront of those demanding ethnic rights and presented a set of legal and political demands and guarantees to the central government in Tehran, at the head of which were autonomy and cultural and linguistic rights.

Concurrent with the victory of the revolution, a collection of religious and non-religious organizations and groups were active in Khuzestan. The non-religious organizations were mainly formed around the Arab ethnic group and represented the demands of this ethnic group. Groups such as the Union of Khuzestan Arabs, the Arab Nationalist Movement, the Khuzestan Liberation Front, the Fedaiyan-e Khalq, and the Socialist Workers' Party were among the organizations and formations that, from the first months after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, focused their activities in this region and openly propagated and spread their goals and beliefs. These groups raised common demands and goals such as the autonomy of Khuzestan and the independence of the Arab people and often had a radical method of struggle, such as bombing oil pipelines. With the start of the imposed war in the second half of 1980, due to the created conditions, the level of activity of these groups decreased, or they resorted to secrecy and clandestine activities (Maqsoudi, 2001: 357-358).

The religious forces also included some religious personalities and groups who, despite following the Shi'i sect and having religious unity with the Islamic Republic system, entered the front of the struggles of the Arab people due to their Arab inclinations and in sympathy and solidarity with Arab ethnic demands, and even assumed a leadership role. Ayatollah Sheikh Mohammad Taher Al-Shubayr al-Khaqani, one of the Twelver Shi'i marjas, was a prominent and influential figure who even at one point stood in the position of leadership of the demands of the Arabs of Khuzestan and took charge of it.

After the victory of the revolution, a political delegation, with the support of

Ayatollah Mohammad Taher Al-Shubayr al-Khaqani, the religious authority and spiritual leader of the Arab nation, went to Tehran. The demands of the thirty-member Arab delegation were summarized in several economic, cultural, and political points, the collection of which can be called a form of autonomy. The members of this delegation, upon their return to Mohammerah, while holding several meetings with political and social activists, informed the people of the report of the failure of the negotiations with the country's officials. After this event, successive demonstrations swept the cities of Naseriyeh (Ahvaz), Mohammerah (Khorramshahr), and other cities. The intensity and pressure of the Arab people on the Islamic Republic regime was more evident in Mohammerah (Khorramshahr). In the meantime, Ahmad Madani, a member of the National Front of Iran, who was the military governor of the province and the commander of the army's navy, ordered the forces under his command to besiege Mohammerah (Khorramshahr). By besieging the city and attracting other forces from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, he attacked Mohammerah (Khorramshahr). According to the accounts of eyewitnesses, some of whom are currently outside the country, more than hundreds of Arab people were killed in this horrific incident, thousands were injured, and many others took refuge in Iraq. This tragic incident, which is known among the Arab nation as the Majzarat al-'Arbi'ā' al-Aswad, or the Black Wednesday Massacre, occurred on Wednesday, 30 May 1979 (Hamza, 2012).

The Iraqi government and the ruling Ba'ath Party were among the foreign forces that, with an emphasis on the Arab element, interfered in the internal affairs of Khuzestan and, through logistical and financial means, encouraged the Arab organizations and forces of Khuzestan to fight against the central government and demand ethnic rights. The 'Khuzestan Liberation Front' or 'Jabhat al-Tahrir Arabistan' was one of the organizations that had a close relationship with Iraq and the Ba'ath Party. However, in the end, the interference of Iraq also did not lead to a significant change in the ethnic conditions of the Arabs, and with the start of the Iran-Iraq War, the ethnic issues of Khuzestan were marginalized. Given the possibility of severe accusations of separatism and treason against the country in response to ethnic demands, most of the organizations that were inside Iran refrained from it.

In general, the Iran-Iraq War, on the one hand, marginalized ethnic issues and reduced their importance, such that any talk of ethnic topics was postponed until

after the war. On the other hand, it defined a new red line and serious danger zone for ethnic demands, such that fuelling these discussions or any attempt to raise them was considered a form of siding with the enemy and complicity with them to harm the country and betray the national interest. This perception caused the ethnic atmosphere and activities to become intensely polarized, and individuals, groups, and organizations either ceased their activities or took a position in the subversive opposition and adopted an armed approach.

*Chapter Three*

# Research Findings

## Introduction

This chapter presents and explains the findings from interviews with individuals belonging to the ethnic groups under study, focusing on their views regarding the concepts and categories of identity and ethnicity, organised into seven main themes. The interviews were structured to include the perspectives of both elites and the general public. The chapter will discuss their demands, which are primarily aimed at achieving social justice and equality, and will consider the role that governments can play in fulfilling these aspirations. It will also be argued that efforts to address economic, political, cultural, linguistic, and other inequalities can contribute to the formation of national unity, consensus, and cohesion, thereby helping to achieve a sustainable peace. Conversely, ignoring these demands can push all ethnic groups, and the country as a whole, into a state of crisis and collapse. Based on these findings, seven themes were developed, each comprising multiple categories, which will be explained in the following sections.

## The Relationship Between Religious and National Identity: Interaction or Opposition?

Identity, at both the individual and collective levels, has a prismatic and multidimensional nature, which, in a structured combination, shapes the identity profile of individuals and communities. Religious-sectarian and ethno-national identities are two primary dimensions of macro-identity in most societies. Depending on the complexity and scope of these societies and the historical vicissitudes they have experienced, these dimensions have manifested in various forms of cohesion, balance, interaction, overlap, and consolidation, or conversely, in discord, conflict, mutual weakening, and reduction. This phenomenon is more convoluted and acquires a twofold importance in societies like Iran, where religious-sectarian and ethno-national identities are plural, multiple, sometimes contradictory, and have varying relationships with the foundations of power. It is for this reason that the elements of religion and sect have played a fundamental role in the ultimate outcome of ethnic and national relations in Iran, and any reading of the ethnic and national question in Iran requires the inclusion of the index of religion and sect in mapping its equations. This is because if the ruling religio-political values are aligned with the religious values of an ethnic group, the political or religious ideology prescribes values that make the ethnic group's own values appear more important to its members, allowing that group to define its goals and direction more clearly (Driedger, 2006).

This section examines the position of these concepts and the issue of their interaction or opposition. First, under the heading 'National and Religious Institutions,' the beliefs and inclinations of the ethnic groups interviewed regarding these two concepts are discussed. Under 'National Identity,' the question of whether Iranian ethnic groups primarily define their identity within the concept of the nation and being Iranian is explored. The heading 'An Iranian or Islamic Identity Strategy' examines the dominant reading in the Pahlavi and Islamic Republic governments. The next heading, 'The Cost of Ideological Objectives,' discusses the potential costs of prioritising one of these inclinations and marginalising the other. Then, in 'Symbols and the Representation of Ethnic Identity,' the role of local and ethnic symbols in redefining the ethnic identity of the researched groups is examined. Finally, the role of 'National and Religious Symbols as an Agent of Cohesion' from the perspective of the ruling establishment is analysed, along with the impact that official symbols, such as the national

anthem or the country's flag, can have in countering localist tendencies and their potential role in national cohesion and consensus.

In the social atmosphere following the 1979 Revolution, with the rise of the theocratic government of the Islamic Republic, the relationship between religious identity and national identity, and their interaction or opposition, came to the forefront of identity debates in society. Accordingly, some viewed these two dimensions of identity as being in opposition to each other, while others spoke of their interaction. Apart from the debate over interaction or opposition, another issue is their precedence, with some giving priority to national identity and others to religious identity. Of course, there are also those who, due to the different nature of each of these two concepts, believe in a synergy and a dialectical link between them. Furthermore, another group has moved beyond this dichotomy, positing for themselves a new identity based on the individual characteristics and social status of citizens in modern life, transcending both religious and national identity.

***Yahya Shariatnia, lawyer and legal advisor, Tehran***
*Although these practises have a common name, they are not national traditions, and each individual performs in their manner. Along with religious practises, these have evolved over time. Prior to attending college, I attended a religious seminary where I had good access to resources and learned that most of the religious knowledge we have was produced and funded by individuals. I have passed through all these.*

***A 50-year-old salesman, Mashhad***
*Religion, in my opinion, is only theology. All religions are the same in theology. For example, we should not oppress the oppressed and we should not empower the oppressor. The Prophet himself had both Ali and Umar in his army. People's religion does not matter, theology is important and all people are the same. this is important.*

Among the other views expressed by the research participants, particularly the elites, are humanistic, cosmopolitan approaches. These cosmopolitan tendencies often exist alongside nationalist inclinations but with a focus on the interests

of humanity in the world. This approach is also present in their view of ethnic groups. This means that some individuals, possessing a modernist intellectual background, take a supra-ethnic and supra-national view of societal issues and human relations, and organise their individual and social actions accordingly.

Contrary to the exclusionary perspectives of nationalism and ethnicism, these attitudes do not see the transcendence of nation and ethnicity as a prerequisite for realising the cosmopolitan ideal. Instead, they believe the two are complementary, with humanity and human dignity as the connecting link. Craig Calhoun, on the necessity and reason for the persistence of nationalism in the age of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, says: if globalisation, with its entire financial arsenal and utopian promises, has not only failed to weaken nationalism but has actually increased the sense of belonging to the nation-state and the importance of having inalienable rights within this structure, it is because all individuals, at a more or less heavy cost, have come to the realisation that human rights as a universal value are mainly guaranteed when they are institutionalised as civil rights in a country (Calhoun, 2016: 10).

***Payam Dorfeshan, a lawyer and a civil activist, Tehran***
*We must accept nationalism. Nationalism is an influential and important parameter. Besides, I have always tried to act cosmopolitan. We must accept nationalism and not forget the common interests of all human beings. This is an issue that many global superpowers are unaware of.*

***Rasoul Nami, carpet designer, Tabriz***
*Territories and geographical boundaries are not determinants of humanity. I would like to meet every human being from every ethnic group with love and affection.*

In these discourses, human subjects act as independent, choosing agents—individuals who achieve their goals and purposes through voluntary actions, not based on purely identitarian, ethnic, national, or religious structures.

## National and Religious Institutions

The research findings of this study show that the component of religion has

also created its own inclinations and divisions in the cultural, political, social, and managerial spheres. This is particularly true in a society where the majority of individuals are religious and, more importantly, where the government is theocratic and has supra-national and global ambitions. This very fact makes the influence of religion on other spheres more pronounced, to the extent that it was necessary to consider all its aspects in the various stages of the research.

> ***Mohammad Ali Daneshgar, theater director, Semnan***
> *If I was born into a Christian family, I would have been a Christian and religion has an inherited property . . . . I reject this religion because there is no thought in it. While religion is acquired and must be formed within the individual.*
> *In this domain, parallel to the growth of individualism, new modes of religious inclination are noticeably visible, such that many individuals have their own particular interpretations of religion, whether selective, intellectual, traditionalist, and so on.*

> ***Mohsen Goodarzi, sociologist, researcher and university lecturer, Tehran***
> *There is a collective reaction to the attempt to reform areas of social life through individual efforts to help others and and other ways. Solidarity activists do not yet have enough power.*

> ***Jabbar Rahmani, faculty member of Research Institute for Social and Cultural Studies***
> *In the domain of religion, new cognitive systems have always sparked change. I focus on making religion more logical and cross-cultural in my experiences with it. Although religion is a personal choice, once made, we are obligated to abide by its principles.*

Rational religiosity and the application of rationality in the Kantian sense to the sphere of religion, as one of the epistemological consequences of the modern subject's encounter with religion and the religio-sectarian thing, is a

concept emphasised by some elites, who consider it a fundamental step towards overcoming dogmatism and expanding a culture of tolerance and forbearance. Rationality in Kant's thought, which is referred to as 'self-founding rationality' or 'free-thinking,' is a rationality that demands rational proof for every claim and considers itself competent to judge in general matters (Warnock, 1993; Qureshi, 2007: 66-69). Kant's focus, on the one hand, carries an anthropological approach that deems critique necessary for social co-existence, and on the other hand, carries an epistemological view on the possibility or impossibility of the 'capacity of human reason.' The use of 'critique' in opposition to 'dogmatism' is a sign of freedom, agency, and choice for humans in a society free from domination.

Mostafa Malekian is among the new thinkers who, by offering new readings of religion and religious belief, believes in the compatibility of rationality and religiosity and considers it necessary for a modern life and for presence in a free world full of diverse inclinations and beliefs. Malekian, moving beyond traditional, submission-based religiosity, which he considers contrary to reason and rationality, emphasizes spiritual or spirituality-oriented religiosity. He not only does not see it in conflict with rationality but considers it a requirement of rationality. He believes that there is a close relationship between religion and rationality, and that by rationally defending religion, one can explain the expectations of contemporary humans from religion (Malekian, 2002: 265-279).

***Leila Shafaei, Lawyer, Tabriz***
*Iranian society is made up of many different identities, all of which are respected. To accomplish their shared objectives, it is crucial that they act in conjunction.*

Whilst nationalists refer to secular laws enacted by individuals, Islamists model themselves on Islamic teachings and laws of divine origin. Over time, the relationship between nationalism and Islamism has changed, and both of these concepts, as political ideologies, have come into a form of conflict and opposition with each other. However, if we look at Islam from the perspective of an institution, we see that nationalism and its values do not conflict with belief in Islam. But the opposition begins where Islam sees its mission, as a universal religion, based on the discourse of unity and does not accept nationalism as a factor that creates division and separation among Muslim nations (Shahramnia et al., 2014: 198).

***Meysam Sefidkhosh, lecturer in philosophy at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran***
*I consider religion as a type of rituals and ceremonies. Belief in the infinite can emerge out of this ritual, and it is very profound and humane, and I respect it. Sometimes, however, religion turns to be a carrier of conflict.*

However, a number of Islamic thinkers, by attributing both positive and negative aspects to nationalism, see no opposition, conflict, or contradiction between Islamic thought and positive nationalism. Muslim nationalists, who include intellectual religious and national figures such as Muhammad Iqbal Lahori, Mehdi Bazargan, and Ali Shariati, perceive the culture and history of each country as a context that Islam, upon entering, both influences and is influenced by. Although Muslim nationalists emphasize the universal values of Islam, they are of the opinion that the link between nationality and Islam is not only not incompatible, but can create common fronts against the common enemies of religion and nationality (Ahmadi, 2009: 154).

***Mozafar Ahmady Dastgerdi, managing director of Sahand Gearbox Company, Isfahan***
*I respect religion, but in general I do not believe in anything that does not fit with reason. Every time we made religion ideological, we damaged it . . . , like Safavids, and now we are promoting the same.*

***Mohammad Jamaluddin Vaji, religious researcher and sociologist from Pasveh, Piranshahr (West Azerbaijan):***
*In fact, it is extremism that causes problems. Religion and nationalism, if not taken to extremes, are not at odds with each other, and asking which one comes first is a mistaken question. Nationalism means having your heart devoted to your homeland and nation, while religion means living a moral and committed life. These two domains are interdependent and complementary. However, extremism pushes nationalism toward fascism and religion toward totalitarianism. Nationalism, through radical secularism, overlaps with a denial of religion, while religion itself can turn into a form of extremist internationalist ideology that distances itself from nationalism and patriotism.*

In some existing views regarding ideological boundaries, the combination of religious ideology and political demarcations inspired by nationality is considered incorrect and detrimental to both domains. Religion, in its traditional reading, aims at the development of moral values and does not recognise politics as a standard. Unlike fundamentalist currents, it does not seek to achieve governance at any cost and therefore does not enter into tension with the 'other'. Nationalism, too, when it retreats into a cocoon and constructs an 'other' out of different ethnicities, weakens its own potential for coexistence.

After the 1979 Revolution, sections of the clergy and ulama became more and more widely organised and structured, and took control of the government. With the proposition of the idea of velayat-e faqih (the Guardianship of the Jurist) and its approval as one of the principles of the new constitution, the state organisation took on a distinctly religious character (Bashiriyeh, 2006: 141-145). With the establishment of the Islamic Republic regime in Iran, nationality and the idea of nationalism were, from a discursive and legal perspective, completely overshadowed by religious identity. The ruling religious ideology, using certain religious-sectarian components, presented a new reading of nationality and even ethnicity. While acknowledging the historical roots of religiosity and monotheism among Iranians, it presented Iranian identity as resting on two pillars, the religious-sectarian and the national. However, citing certain religious propositions and the supra-national and supra-ethnic teachings of Islam, it diminished the importance and status of nationality, approaching it from a standpoint of expediency and utility. This was done, on the one hand, to use it to promote the regime's ideology and consolidate its own foundations of power, and on the other hand, by deeming national and ethnic identity secondary and subordinate, to primarily negate national and ethnic rights, demands, and positions. This ideological approach based on discrimination was not limited to the encounter with national and ethnic identity but later also encompassed the identity of religious and sectarian groups distinct from the state's official sect. According to the explicit articles of the constitution, the official religion of the country is Islam and the official sect is Twelver Shi'ism, and this principle is eternally unchangeable. The foundations of the Islamic Republic are built on faith in monotheism, revelation, resurrection, justice, the imamate, and the absolute guardianship of the jurist (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 14).

***Bakhtiari man, 42, Ahvaz***
*The idea that politics pervades everything is not a good one. For instance, neither the traditions of Arabs nor Persians nor Turks nor any other ethnic group are in any way political. Politicization has wrecked them.*

In sum, it can be said that political tendencies within the country have always been either national or religious. When power has taken on a national hue, the space for religion to exercise political power has been limited. In the era of the Islamic Republic, too, we witness restrictions and narrow-mindedness regarding the prominence of nationalists. Of course, at certain junctures in history, such as the example of Mossadegh and Ayatollah Kashani in the case of the movement to nationalise the oil industry, we see a fragile interaction between them, which also occurred in the presence of a common enemy. The more the need for consensus on smaller matters increased, the more prominently the differences emerged. [1]In the history of Iran, and especially in the last hundred years when nationalist tendencies have gained importance, the elites of this discourse have had less religious concern and have tried more to align their nationalist tendencies with Western modernity and to distance themselves from religion, which always brings to mind a tendency towards tradition and the historical past.

***Mozafar Ahmady Dastgerdi, managing director of Sahand Gearbox Company, Isfahan***
*I have always felt that I am first an Iranian and then a Muslim. Although I have a lot of respect for both.*

On the other hand, until about fifty years ago, the religious clergy had not much entered into the discourse of territory and the perspective of religious imamate, and their main activities were to counter the modernist views of the nationalists. But with the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution and the dominance of the perspective of religious imamate in a national framework, they gained power, and after gaining power, they took more steps in the development of religious

1. For further reading on this matter, see: Homa Katouzian (1379), Mossadegh and the Struggle for Power (translated by Ahmad Tadayyon), Tehran: Rasa; Ervand Abrahamian (1378), Iran Between Two Revolutions (translated by Golmohammadi), Tehran: Ney.

ideas, and the concept of nationalism lost its former power. The results obtained from interviews with the ethnic groups in the present research also show a public inclination towards one of the two fronts, national or religious, and what is termed 'national-religious' is not found among the respondents, except in a few cases. In addition, a supra-national/supra-religious perspective was also present among some of the interviewees.

***Shahin Sepanta, cultural activist, Isfahan***
*Iranian customs are divided into two categories: national and religious. A fan, promoter, and defender of the national category, I have been working in the field for about twenty years, and I am about to have a book published entitled 'Iranian Feasts….' As for religious customs, it is not the case that I am against them; after all, part of our society is religious, which is respected and cannot be opposed if we believe in freedom of thought and democracy, although I am not a promoter thereof.*



*Image 3-1. Interview with Shahin Sepanta*

The religious regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in the past four decades, with its supra-national and supra-ethnic claims to the leadership of the world's oppressed and Muslims and the leadership of the Shi'i world, has, in a confrontational and incompatible encounter, always sought to diminish the importance and status of national identity and to use it instrumentally. However, the outcome of this ideological policy in the public sphere not only did not lead to national de-identification but, in a reverse fashion, limited and weakened the historical and widespread role and function of the institution of religion in the social sphere of Iran. A look at the orientation of public opinion in Iran towards national and religious phenomena, such as events, occasions, and cultural and political figures, clearly shows this issue.

In today's Iranian society, the inclination towards national and ethnic identity, in various forms of civic nationalism from liberal to extreme and exclusionary nationalism, has been strengthened more than ever. Even many individual and collective actions with a national and ethnic character have acquired the meaning of a kind of struggle against the cultural and political discourse of the regime and the establishment. The behaviour of the general public in national customs such as Nowruz and Chaharshanbe Suri celebrations, and their slogans in protests, attest to this tendency. Similarly, on the anniversary of the birth of Cyrus the Great, the roads leading to the city of Shiraz and Pasargadae are filled with young people. Dr Mohammad Javad Gholamreza-Kashi believes that a new type of nationalism is emerging on the political and social horizon of Iran, which seeks to build a nation arising from the realities of Iran's pluralistic society by moving beyond nostalgia for the past and following the principles of civic life (Gholamreza-Kashi, 1401). Some sociological studies in Iran in the final decades of the 14th century SH (late 20th/early 21st century CE) report a growing increase in religious aversion among most strata of Iranian society and believe that the process of de-religionisation and the promotion of secular principles in Iranian society has taken a rapid course. Saeed Hajjarian, a reformist political strategist, says in this regard: 'Atheism is becoming a widespread project… this issue is due to the ideologisation of religion by the ruling system on the one hand, and the transformations of society on the other… Of course, I see this issue as more political than theological' (Hajjarian, 1402: 6). Dr Sedigheh Vasmaghi, a university professor and Islamic scholar, also believes that the tendency towards religious aversion has become widespread among Iranians. In a critique

of the religious government regarding the state of religion and religiosity in today's Iranian society, she adds: 'In the sphere of religion, wherever a religious government is formed, it displays a face of religion that is an aggressive face, trying to make itself dominant and supreme in all areas and aspects of people's lives, even with violence. This has caused all those who have an angle with the country's policies to also develop an ideological angle. This face of religion that has been displayed has had many effects and consequences. Wherever religion is mixed with political power, the result is the same' (Vasmaghi, 1401). Abbas Abdi, a journalist and social issues analyst, also writes in a note entitled 'The Position of Religion': 'Statistics and observations of declining attendance at mosques, fasting, and evidence of less payment of khums and sahm are direct signs of this claim' (Abdi, 1401). Dr Maqsoud Farasatkhah speaks of a transformation and diversity in the pattern of religiosity and a tendency towards pluralism in this field, from anti-religiosity, to non-religiosity, to nominal religiosity (such as occasional participation in some ceremonies without commitment to religious duties), commodified and instrumental religiosity (for example, for political and social purposes), and fragmented religiosity (Farasatkhah, 2015). Ali Akbar Salehi, a conservative political figure and holder of high positions in the government, in a speech, criticises the religious and sectarian policy of the regime and says: 'We were not able to introduce religion to the youth as befits the status of religion, and therefore, religion in the minds of our youth is 'religious aversion''. He then adds: 'The Islamic Revolution… has not been successful in the cultural field in proportion to other fields. We are losing our youth' (Salehi, 1402).

***Javad Hesari, journalist and sociopolitical activist, Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan Province)***

*Religious orientations are not in conflict with national issues. In case of an opposition, however, religious issues are more vulnerable than those concerning ethnicity and identity.*

***Abdolsalam Bozorgzadeh, radio and television producer from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***
*After the establishment of the post-revolutionary belief system, national cohesion should have decreased — but instead, it has grown stronger. Why is that? It's the law of action and reaction, as Newton put it. Whenever you neglect something and it falls into a state of marginalization or oppression, that very condition unites and empowers the marginalized and the minority.*

It seems that the democratic solution to the national question in a multinational country is more compatible with cultural autonomy.

## The Role and Dimensions of National Identity

From the twentieth century onwards, what is understood by the term 'nation' is based on the element of 'citizenship' in a country. Thus, the 'nation' is a totality and encompasses all members and citizens of a country, regardless of their ethnic, linguistic, racial, religious, or other characteristics.

***A 36-year-old man from Taleqan, living in Karaj:***
*We are all fellow countrymen. Other ethnic and religious groups are our compatriots too. I have many Armenian and Sunni friends, and I don't feel any sense of strangeness with them. The Sunnis are Muslims, after all, and just like us.*

***Ghotbeddin Sadeghi, writer, screenwriter, and theater director from Kurdistan:***
*When I moved from Sanandaj to Tehran, I realized how Kurdish I was; and when I moved from Tehran to France, I realized how Iranian I was! The farther I went, the more aware I became of my roots.*

National identity is a fluid concept, and any reflection on its role and dimensions requires an empirical examination of its specific instances within the context of the society in question. This becomes even more complex when the society has a plurality of ethnic and religious identities. The historical Iranian identity, as

the identitarian outcome of the collective life of the ethnic groups and peoples who have lived in this geographical expanse for many centuries, and the identity constructed as Iranian nationality in contemporary nation-building projects, represent two different and distinct readings of Iranian identity. These are the source of a wide range of challenges, discursive conflicts, and misunderstandings in the comprehension of Iranianness and being Iranian. Within the span of these two different readings, a wide range of ethnic discourses have found room to emerge, some of whose discursive components are included among the views and opinions of the interviewees in this research. The first spectrum is a view that, while acknowledging the plurality of ethnic identities, their specificity, and the necessity of safeguarding the cultural and civil rights of ethnic groups, considers them part of the macro-system of the Iranian nation in its historical sense. In this narrative, the nation signifies a cultural and political bond that integrates the political community, where all members of such a society share a common homeland and historical culture (Smith, 1991: 14-15).

> ***A 40-year-old woman, homemaker from Zabol (Sistan and Baluchestan):***
> *We love every aspect of our culture and live by it — for example, the fact that we have a very ancient culture, and the traditions we observe… Without these, we would, in fact, have no meaning.*

Social, historical, and cultural factors are of great importance in determining the ethnic and national 'identity' of each individual and social group, and historical consciousness and shared memory and past can play a fundamental role in defining ethnicity. It can be inferred from the findings of this research that the ethnic groups studied, apart from their separate cultural and ethnic fabrics, define themselves within a shared cultural fabric with other ethnic groups and in the form of the concept of the nation within the framework of national (Iranian) identity. In other words, the belief in social cohesion and living within the macro-collective identity of Iran is acceptable to most ethnic actors and citizens, subject to certain conditions. The fundamental axis of these conditions is the acceptance of the collective identity of ethnic groups and the restoration of the legal rights of their ethno-centric collective identity.

***Peymaneh Roshanzadeh, obstetrician-gynaecologist and writer from Semnan:***
*I believe that everyone belongs to their own faith and their own place, and yet all are Iranian — and that is what matters. The umbrella that should cover Iran is "Iranian-ness," and everyone is free in their own religion. We cannot claim that we are superior…*

***Aziz Nemati, poet and linguist from Urmia (West Azerbaijan):***
*We Iranians' language has a single root, apart from Arabic. They all stem from Pahlavi, from Avestan Pahlavi. Some trace back to Parthian Pahlavi, others to Ancient or Avestan Pahlavi.*



*Image 3-2 Interview with Aziz Nemati*

Considering that collective identity has both an affirmative and a negative aspect, it must be said that in defining the identity of an ethnic group and demarcating its boundaries, it is necessary to consider the cultural-social commonalities and distinctions of these aspects and other necessary identitarian elements. Accordingly, as was previously mentioned in the discussion of national and ethnic identity, ethnic characteristics consist of language, religion, and other factors such as biology (race), history, culture, and common geography. For each

ethnic group, one or more of these characteristics can play an important and fundamental role, while some of these factors may have no importance at all. In modern sociology and political science, there are three types of ethnicism: 'rule-based ethnicism,' 'ethno-laudatory ethnicism,' and 'ethnocentrism.' By looking at the degree of inclination towards these three types of ethnic aspects, one can determine its distance from and proximity to national identity.

Rule-based ethnicism, in addition to the elements of race, culture, civilisation, religion, history, and cultural and religious principles that form the structure of an ethnic group, also accepts the constituent elements of other ethnic groups as a principle and does not reject them. In this type of ethnicism, ethnic identity proceeds in line with national identity (Fardbaboli, 2019). As stated, the dominant approach of ethnic groups falls within this framework.

> ***Nazila Jalilzadeh, researcher in philosophy, mysticism, and religions from Tabriz:***
> *I refer to Socrates' saying, "I am a citizen of the world." Azerbaijani culture is rooted in me, but I have a universal perspective on this matter.*

In ethno-laudatory ethnicism, the people living in a society find their own culture, language, lineage, race, and religion very valuable, but they look at the lineage, religions, and culture of other ethnic groups with a passive view. In this category, ethnic identity does not proceed in line with national identity, but rather adopts a position of silence (Fardbaboli, 2018). The concrete manifestation of this type of behaviour is mainly seen with regard to some of the Arab people, whom most ethnic groups consider separate from the national fabric of the country.

> ***Masoud Zali Zadeh, researcher and writer from Ahvaz (Khuzestan):***
> *One of the characteristics of the Bakhtiaris is the emphasis on national identity. During the years I taught in Bakhtiari-inhabited areas, the Shahnameh played a significant role among them. Most of the elderly men had parts of the Shahnameh memorised. I saw that the students also felt a sense of solidarity when discussing the Shahnameh and Ferdowsi.*

Social cohesion and solidarity are among the basic needs and the secret to the

continuity and survival of a society. According to Durkheim's theory of social cohesion, whenever social norms lose their validity and power in regulating and shaping the behaviour of individuals in society, the expectations and desires of individuals will also lose their rules and will tend towards unattainable wishes. In such an anomic situation and condition, the probability of the failure of individuals' plans becomes more severe, and consequently, the possibility of increased frustration will be intensified. It is predicted that in this anomic context, with the increase of general frustration, public dissatisfaction will also increase in society, and the sense of belonging to the collective identity in society will decrease (Durkheim, 1989: 42). Parsons also believes that the more social norms and rules are accepted, the greater the solidarity among individuals will be. In his view, rights, laws, and legal institutions are responsible for creating solidarity and cohesion among members. The other side of this issue occurs when social integration decreases with the sense of social belonging in society (Tavassoli, 1997: 250). The instances of these classical theories regarding inter-ethnic and centre-periphery relations (ethnicities-capital) in Iran are noteworthy.

***Abdulqader Swari, researcher from Khuzestan:***
*When I was at the University of Tehran, my non-Iranian Arab friends, with whom I had a close friendship, would call me "Arab" and the others "Iranian"... It meant that we were part of someone else's identity.*

***Mohammad Ali Daneshgar, theatre director from Semnan:***
*The authenticity of every Iranian is defined by their customs and traditions. We also had festivals, unfortunately, many of which have been erased, such as Mehragan and the two-thousand-year-old ancient celebrations.*

It must be said that in a country like Iran, which has a great deal of ethnic and religious diversity, the absence of common norms and ethnic discrimination lead to the tarnishing of national solidarity and cohesion. Such a situation gives rise to the phenomenon of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is a type of cultural perception according to which the members of an ethnic group consider the values, norms, and way of life of their own group to be superior to other ethnic groups and judge other ethnic groups based on stereotypical views. For this reason, in multi-ethnic

societies, ethnocentrism is a cultural barrier to the formation and expansion of inter-ethnic relations. Ethnocentrism, on the one hand, causes the weakening of symbiotic social, cultural, and economic relations and, on the other hand, causes the intensification of conflictual relations among ethnic groups. Ethnocentrism also prevents the formation of a diversity of collective (ethnic) identity in the network of inter-ethnic relations (Yousefi and Asgharpour-Masouleh, 2009: 125).

> ***A 25-year-old Baloch man from Zahedan:***
> *When I was younger, I was much more passionate, it seemed. Later, when I got into business and met other ethnic groups and formed friendships with them, I changed. Now, my own ethnic group, the Baloch, is very valuable to me. But it's not that I think others are not good, or that we are superior.*

Diagrams bellow show the extent of inter-ethnic communication. Accordingly, 53.9 percent of the elites stated that they had a great deal of communication with other ethnic groups, and 28.9 percent stated that they had less communication. Among the general public, there was less inter-ethnic communication, with 55.4 percent stating that they have no inter-ethnic communication and 37.3 percent having little inter-ethnic communication.

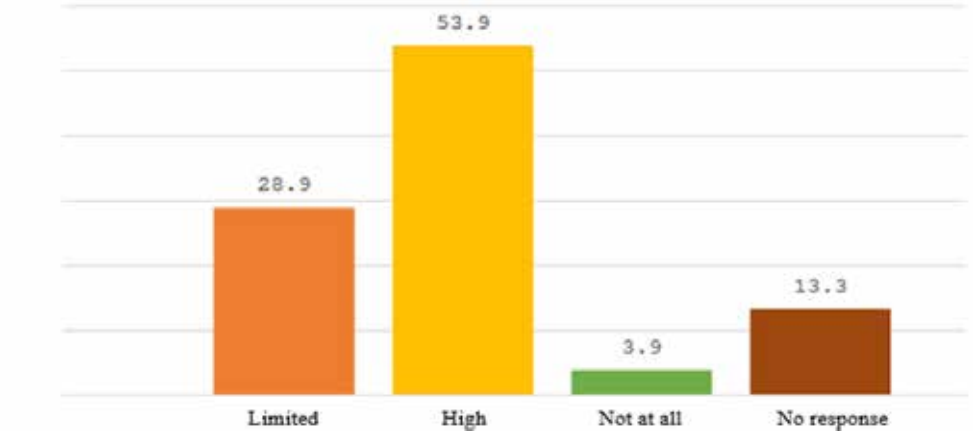



*Diagram 3-1. ethnic relationships according to elites*

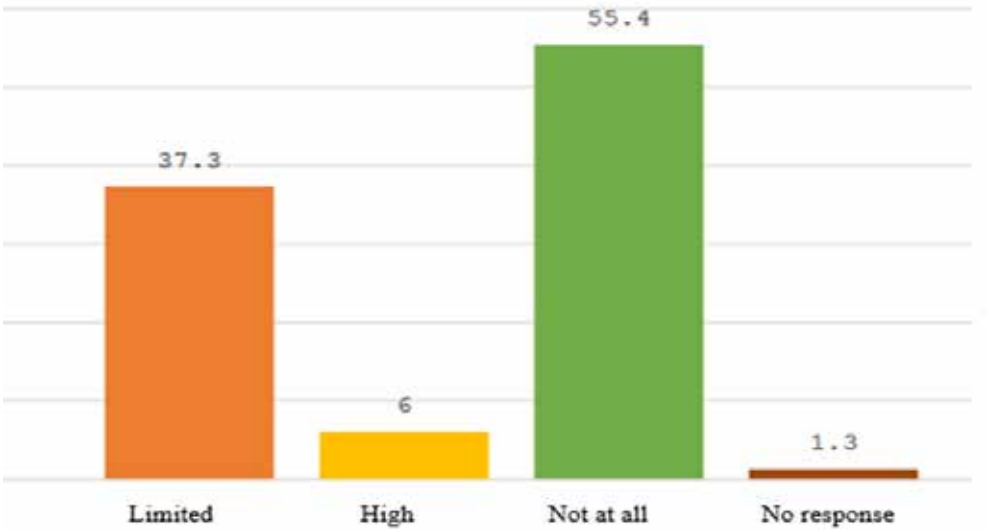



*Diagram 4-2. ethnic relationships according to general public*

## An Iranian or Islamic Identity Strategy

Are you an Iranian Muslim, or a Muslim Iranian? This is a familiar question within the discourse on identity in Iranian society, one that is sometimes met with the even more distinct answers of simply 'Iranian' or 'Muslim,' without an additional qualifier. This question eloquently reveals a persistent identity challenge in Iran's contemporary history: the precedence of the national and religious elements of Iranian identity. The experience of constructing a national identity in modern Iran, from the perspective of the relationship between its national and religious dimensions, has passed through three main narratives. The first narrative, which also has historical precedence, emerged with the experience of the Constitutional Revolution and was manifested in its constitution. According to this narrative, Iranian identity is the outcome of a combination and fusion of national and religious elements as its two main pillars, upon which the whole of identity is founded. In this narrative, the greater part of the religious dimension of Iranian identity was composed of Islam and the Shi'i sect, but it simultaneously acknowledged the role and importance of other religions and sects, a reality which the Constitutional constitution partly reflected. In this narrative, the precedence

of national and religious elements was fundamentally meaningless, as identity was considered a single, indivisible matter. This narrative did not endure for long as a model for identity politics and became more of a narrative in the civil and intellectual spheres. The second narrative, the product of the identity politics of the Pahlavi era, whilst acknowledging the religious-sectarian foundations of the collective identity of Iranians, sought as far as possible to deviate from this dimension in its nation-building project. It attempted to found the structure of Iranian identity, with a selective approach, solely on a reductionist reading of Iranianness with undertones of archaism, monarchy, and the centrality of the Persian language. The third narrative, which is the official reading of the Islamic Republic regime, is in fact a narrative in opposition to that of the Pahlavi era. Whilst acknowledging national elements, in a selective and limited approach, it gives priority and authenticity to religious elements, based on an ideological reading of Twelver Shi'i Islam with an interpretation founded on the absolute guardianship of the jurist (velayat-e motlaqe-ye faqih). This period of discourse is known as the era of the dominance of Islamic traditionalism. [1]

Although during the Islamic Republic era, emphasis has always been placed on an Iranian-Islamic identity and culture as the macro-level identitarian and cultural strategy, in practice, the national and non-religious components have always played an ancillary role. Their value has been, and continues to be, measured more from the perspective of the role they have played in the formation and completion of the religious dimension. A look at the ideological policies of the Islamic Republic regime, which disregard national interests in domestic and foreign affairs, clearly illustrates this truth. These cultural identity policies have taken on institutional forms in a comprehensive and all-encompassing manner and are reproduced and promoted at multiple educational, pedagogical, media, and propagandistic levels. In such a situation, other intellectual currents were marginalised as sub-identities, and the current of jurisprudential Shi'i Islam was placed at the apex of power. The findings of the present research also indicate the ascendancy of the Islamic strategy over the national strategy throughout these years, and the regret of the respondents over the neglect of the national dimension. From the perspective of the proponents of velayat, nationalism is a type of materialist school of thought based on polytheistic elements and has

1. In Chapter Two, from pages 100 to 135, the changes in the discourse of national identity in contemporary Iran have been discussed and analysed in detail.

always been a rival to Islamist ideas founded on the unity of the Islamic ummah. In contrast, they have emphasised guardianship and imamate, adherence to moral and traditional values, political elitism, and cultural control. Ultimately, the dominance of this discourse in the country has caused all spheres of the economy, politics, culture, and society to undergo a fundamental transformation, and this has laid the groundwork for a crisis of legitimacy and the inefficiency of the institutions of the ruling structure and the state.

***A 25-year-old man from Robat Karim, living in Tehran:***
*I'm not very religious. I maintain a balance — I'm neither overly strict about religion nor overly detached from it. In any case, I show respect. Everyone's faith and religiosity is their own business. It's not right for me to interfere in someone else's religion. Of course, I haven't interacted much with the rest of the world, so I don't know how different they are from us, but I respect them.*

***Ashkan Zare'i, cultural and heritage activist and writer, Khuzestan***
*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. The cultural ego death or alienation observed after the Revolution is a consequence of the improper teachings on Islamic identity and the lack of teachings on Iranian identity.*



*Image 3-3. Interview with Ashkan Zarei*

***Karim Bakhsh Kordi Tamandani, political and social activist from Iranshahr (Sistan and Baluchestan):***
*Unfortunately, national customs and traditions have become less prominent after the Islamic Republic due to the prevailing religious atmosphere. Here, most of our clerics have opposed national customs and believe that these are not Baloch traditions. Every country and government should prioritise its national interests above all else, and we feel that our national interests are not being considered. Instead, we are often pursuing specific religious or ideological agendas, and if our national interests were properly taken into account, we would not have so much tension with the world.*

During the first Pahlavi era, in the discourse of Reza Shah's modernisation, the Islamic strategy did not have a significant place. After him, all the efforts of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi were directed towards giving importance to the history and past of Iran in the form of the 2,500-year celebrations and paying attention to the tombs of historical figures, such as Cyrus, and other ancient monuments. On the other hand, after 1979 and the rise to power of the religious

clergy, the situation was reversed, and the Islamic discourse gained importance. Therefore, in both the pre-revolutionary and post-Islamic Revolution periods, and despite all the efforts of the reformist government and the discussions of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his sympathisers about the 'Iranian school of thought,' one of the two strategies, Iranian or Islamic, has been dominant as an ideological matter, and other ideologies have been set aside.

***Fateme (Kazhal) Hawas Beygi, university lecturer and cultural activist, Ilam***

*Since the reign of Reza Shah, particularly since 1966, our cultural policies have never been in line with the people's concerns and needs. They have been based, instead, on the ideals and ideology of the systems.*



*Image 3-4. Interview with Fatemeh (Kazhal) Havas-Beigi*

***Basem Hamadi, researcher of Arab rituals and folk music, university lecturer from Ahvaz (Khuzestan):***
*We absolutely do not have Chaharshanbe Suri; it is not part of our culture. We don't observe the Haft-Sin table, yet we consider it a national festival. We don't observe Sizdah Bedar, but we go outside along with the people. However, we respect Nowruz as the New Year and a national holiday. Our most important festival is Eid al-Fitr, followed by Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Ghadir. During Muharram, especially in recent years, there is a special fervour, and people compete with each other in mourning rituals, which is highly respected among the community.*

Accordingly, in religious thought, the Islamic society is seen as a single ummah, and territorial heritage is of secondary importance. Historical and customary affairs, including culture, folklore, art, and sometimes even language, at both the national and ethnic levels, do not have much significance.

Contrary to such state policies, the heart of society shows something else, and the findings of the present research indicate that the relationship between Iranianness and religion takes on different forms among the various ethnic groups of Iran. In other words, one cannot say with certainty which of these two discourses has priority among ethnic groups such as the Persians, Kurds, and Azeris. Each has its own particular supporters, and their people are scattered between these two schools of thought, such that for those who are in the national school, religion is not their concern, and the religious do not have much of an ethnic or national concern and think more within the framework of the concept of the Islamic ummah. Meanwhile, regarding the Arab and especially the Baloch ethnic groups, it can be said that in those regions, the main priority lies with Islamic strategies. Between these two spectrums, there are also groups for whom Iranian religion and nationality do not have much importance, and who tend towards cosmopolitanism.

***Mozafar Ahmady Dastgerdi, managing director of Sahand Gearbox Company, Isfahan***
*I have always felt that I am first an Iranian and then a Muslim. Although I have a lot of respect for both.*

## The Cost of Ideological Objectives

Ideology is one of the common and widely used concepts in the social and political sciences, which has acquired various meanings and connotations in different schools of thought, including Marxist, liberal, neo-Marxist, and postmodern. In some of these views, the term has a positive connotation, while in others it is considered negative. Regardless of the conceptual debates surrounding the term ideology, in this work, ideology is used in the sense understood by liberalism. In liberal discourse, an ideology is a rigid and dogmatic system of thought that denies and suppresses any reading and understanding other than its own, and is closed and unyielding in the face of criticism and opposition. Ideology in this sense forms the basis of totalitarian political systems (Hakim Shafa'i, 1400).

Shi'i political Islamism, which emerged around the same time as the Constitutional movement and, in its intellectual and doctrinal struggles in the decades before the 1979 Revolution, sought to establish its discursive foundations, nurtured the ideologisation of religion from its inception as a fundamental indicator and an essential precondition for establishing an institution of power within its discourse. Contrary to many interpretations and narratives that consider the Shi'i ideology of the Islamic Republic regime to be the result of a natural progression of political and social events after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, a re-reading of the intellectual foundations of the Islamic Republic regime and the idea of the absolute guardianship of the jurist clearly reveals its ideological fabric.

The content and discussions of the book Velayat-e Faqih: Islamic Government, authored by Ayatollah Khomeini and published in 1969, and some of his discourses in the 1960s, were specific steps on the path of Shi'i ideology-building. This was a legacy for which Navvab Safavi and the Fada'iyan-e Islam were the militant organisational structure and field operatives.[1] The issue of

1. For more information, see: Zeynali, Arezoo (1395), 'Two Great Men and One Strategy; Islamic Ideology as a Common Feature of the Movement of Imam Khomeini and Martyr Navvab Safavi,' Special issue for the anniversary of the martyrdom of the Fada'iyan-e Islam, Monday, 27 Dey 1395, 30th year, No. 8312, Quds Online Media, Link: https://media.qudsonline.ir/d/2017/01/15/0/675276.pdf & Ali Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, says about Navvab Safavi: 'As for which personalities influenced me, I must say there were many. The one who had a great influence on me in my youth was, first and foremost, the late 'Navvab Safavi'. At the time he came to Mashhad, I was about fifteen years old. I was intensely influenced by his personality, and after he left Mashhad, a few months later, they martyred him in

establishing and expanding an ideological discourse centred on the religion and sect of Shi'ism was not limited to the political clergy and was widely pursued by most revolutionary forces who believed in Islamism. Ali Shariati was one of the most prominent academic figures and political activists in the pre-revolutionary struggles, who introduced the transformation of tradition into ideology and giving it precedence over culture as his most important intellectual achievement (Haghighat, 2009). Therefore, the 1979 Revolution was the establishment of the official institution of political power for the ideological discourse of the Shi'i religion, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, which in its first steps, formulated and approved a legal regime appropriate to its goals and aspirations in the framework of the Iranian constitution. Nearly five decades of governance by the Islamic Republic system in Iran, with all the ups and downs it has experienced and the discursive challenges that have emerged in opposition to this ideological approach, has been the era of the dominance of this ideological discourse and the expansion and promotion of its foundations and pillars. It is a discourse that has dealt with all non-self identities and currents in a coercive and negative manner, with a dogmatic view and a discriminatory and exclusionary approach, both in the national and religious dimensions. It has brought about detrimental consequences in the spheres of social cohesion, a comprehensive national identity, the provision of national interests, and political and cultural growth and development.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran recognises the ruling system in Iran as an Islamic system, the basis of which is 'Islamic principles and criteria' with the stipulation of the Twelver Shi'i sect. This characteristic has caused the political apparatus of Iran and its official relations to be different from countries where the institutions of politics and religion are separated. Although the constitution of the Islamic Republic has allowed followers of the Zoroastrian [1], Christian, and Jewish religions to perform their religious rites and even have representatives in the parliament, the socio-political reality is that the followers

a very bad way. This deepened his influence on us even more.' Khamenei, Ali (1377), 'Statements in a meeting with a group of youth; Martyr Navvab Safavi,' Link: https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=1511#38484

1. The difference between the Zoroastrian religion and other religions that are considered minorities in Iran is that Zoroastrianism is an Iranian religion. Zoroaster founded Mazdayasna, and his book is called the Avesta.

of these religions do not have much practical permission to speak about or propagate their religion in society, and the circle of performing their religious acts is limited to the framework of their places of worship. This is while the followers of various groups believe that this view of them is not fair, as they all consider themselves Iranian and have shown this loyalty in the past.

***Amir Nabavi, university lecturer and political science researcher from Tehran:***
*An ideological approach in all areas of society results in inefficiency and the marginalisation of elites.*

The findings of this research indicate the existence of an ideological view, the result of which is the improper utilisation of elites, their removal from the heart of society, and their marginalisation.

Apart from these religious minorities, the Sunni religious minority, as a result of the official status of the Shi'i sect, has always reacted to instances of the ruling establishment's ideological policies that have led to restrictions against them. In this regard, they protest against issues such as the systematic exclusion from the position of leadership and candidacy for the presidency, the prohibition of appointment to ministries, governorships, and high-level management posts according to unwritten laws, the lack of freedom in announcing and holding the festivals of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, not having a mosque in Tehran, restrictions on the travel of religious leaders outside the province and the country, the detention of young people, and other matters.

***Jalal Jalalizade, religious activist, lecturer at the University of Tehran and former member of the parliament, Sanandaj***
*Unfortunately, the Kurd complain about discrimination, as government is in the hands of a particular religion, which is meant to be applied to all customs, ceremonies, assemblies, institutions, and government organizations. This religious gap has wasted many of the Sunni's economic, social, and cultural talents, and I think it is the hugest barrier to Iran's development, particularly to the Sunni Kurd's growth and progress.*

The situation of the Baha'i community in Iran is worse than that of all religious and sectarian minorities. Government officials refer to the Baha'is as 'followers

of the misguided sect,' and have begun to deal with them since the early years of the revolution. What concerns the representatives of religious minorities in the parliament and their co-religionists is the non-recognition of the Baha'i faith in the constitution, despite having a population of tens of thousands in Iran, which leads to systematic discrimination and injustices, as well as illegal or extra-legal discrimination against these minorities. The 2022 US State Department report on religious freedom in Iran reports an increase in pressure and discrimination against religious minorities and notes that members of the Baha'i community in Iran are arrested and sent to prison without any reason or evidence, on the pretext of espionage and disturbing religious sentiments, and are generally deprived of the right to life. In an article published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in January, it is stated that the leader of the revolution, in undated fatwas published on his official website, has called 'Baha'is infidels' and 'enemies of the Shi'i religion' and has advised his followers to 'avoid any kind of association with this misguided sect.' The leader of the Islamic Republic has also emphasised that 'all believers must confront the tricks and deviations [of Baha'ism] and prevent the deviation of others' (Report on International Religious Freedom, Iran 2022, 2022).

In the ideological government of the Islamic Republic, where the Shi'i sect is recognised as the official sect, the followers of other Islamic groups, namely the Sunni community, feel severely discriminated against. According to the interviews conducted, many of them, and especially their youth, cannot find suitable employment in administrative positions based on their academic knowledge and specialisation. The Dervish community, which follows the Shi'i sect, also feels a sense of inequality, an example of which can be seen in the protests of 2018 in Tehran, which resulted in the deaths of a number of security forces and Dervishes. According to the findings, these types of ideological policies have caused elites in various economic, social, and cultural fields to be alienated and has provided the ground for their underdevelopment.

In Iran, religious and sectarian minorities consider the official recognition of the Ja'fari Shi'i sect as discrimination against them. This religious distance and discrimination in different forms sometimes leads to the formation of violent behaviours. While the Islamic Republic system claims that Tehran is the Umm al-Qura (mother of all cities) of the Islamic world (Feirahi, 2003: 26) and engages in promotional initiatives such as the World Forum for Proximity of

Islamic Schools of Thought, nearly five decades after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Sunnis of Tehran, with a population of over one million (More than one million Sunnis live in Tehran, 2013)[1] , are still deprived of a grand mosque, and public prayer houses also mostly face restrictions and strictness in holding congregational prayers and religious ceremonies for Sunni citizens. This problem exists in many other large cities such as Mashhad. Jalal Jalalizadeh, a Sunni religious and political activist and former representative of the people of Kurdistan in the Iranian parliament, says about this restriction: 'Tehran is the only capital in the world where Sunnis do not have a mosque, and their prayer houses are closed down' (Ghazi, 2016).

> ***Mawlana Abdulhamid Esmaeil Zehi, Sunni Friday Prayer Leader in Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***
> *Discrimination and inequality in Iran have created this very gap and distance. Instead of meritocracy in positions and responsibilities, we see existing religious discrimination, where one religion is preferred over another. Today, if you go to a hospital to open a file, they ask you about your religion; for employment or to open a judiciary file, the same happens — and this creates a sense of distance and exclusion.*

Diagrams bellow show the religious gap and discrimination in Iran from the perspective of the elite and public interviewees. 83.6 percent of the elites and 60.3 percent of the public believe that there is a religious gap and discrimination in Iranian society. Therefore, from the perspective of the public, and even more so from the perspective of the elites, Iranian ethnic groups are discriminated against from the perspective of religion and sect, and there is a deep gap between the sects.

1. As this demographic report is over a decade old, and given the increase in migration to the capital, the current Sunni population of Tehran can be estimated at over one and a half million.

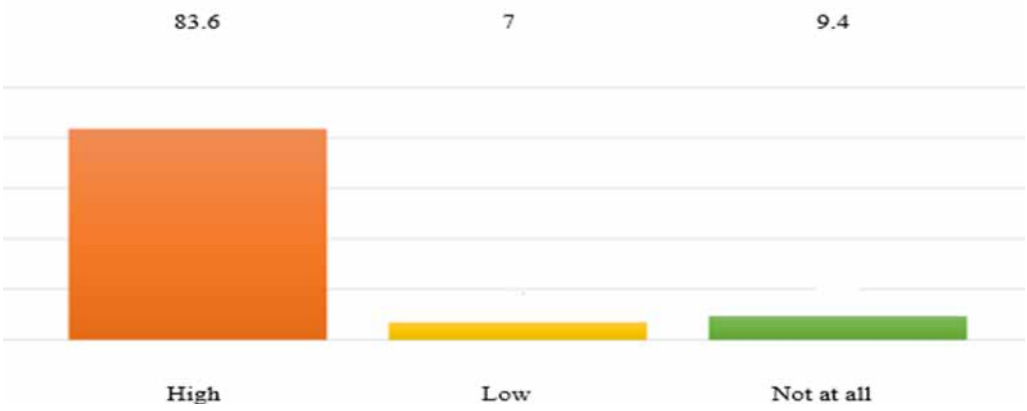



*Diagram 3-3. Religious gaps and discrimination according to elites*

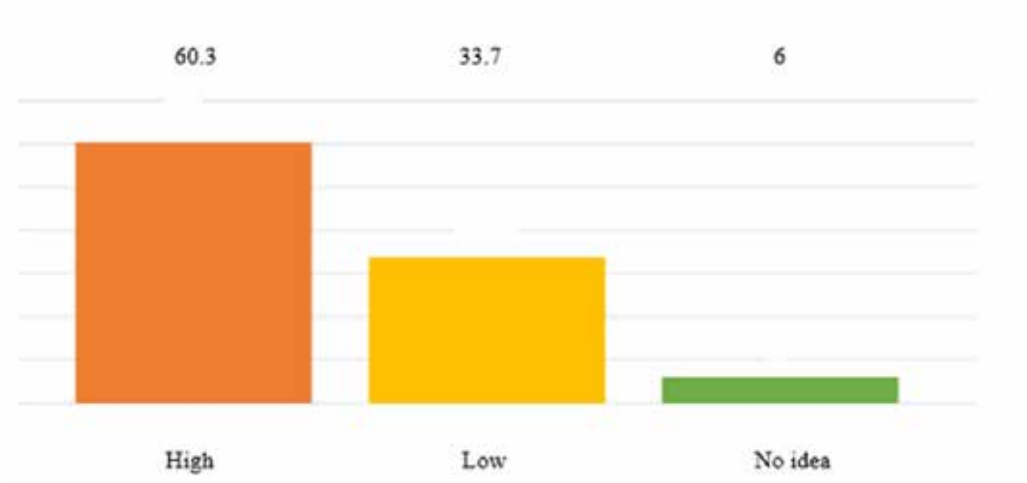



*Diagram 3-4. religious gaps and discrimination according to general public*

Another issue that has become problematic, especially in recent years, is the issue of women's hijab, which according to the law, no woman can enter a public environment without hijab and without observing a minimum of Islamic norms. According to the note to Article 102 of the Islamic Penal Code, 'Women who appear in public thoroughfares and in public view without the religious hijab will be sentenced to a ta'zir punishment of up to 74 lashes' (Islamic Penal Code, 1983, Article 102). The issue of mandatory hijab restrictions even applies to foreign tourists, who are also forced to use a headscarf and long clothing as soon as they enter Iranian soil. This type of ideological view will certainly harm the country's tourism industry and will also be problematic from an economic point

of view (Mandatory Hijab; A Blow to the Back of Tourism with the Sealing of Business Units, 1402).

The Islamic Consultative Assembly, over its four-decade life, has had decisive approvals to 'guarantee' the implementation of various laws. An example of this is the approval of the Islamic Penal Code and the note to Article 638 of this law, which was sent to the parliament in 1983 in the form of a bill from the judiciary, and the legislature also approved this note to 'guarantee the implementation of the law' and 'show its seriousness in the matter of dress.' Of course, this approval was amended twice more in the 1990s and 2010s. The note to this article emphasizes: 'Women who appear in public thoroughfares and in public view without the religious hijab will be sentenced to imprisonment from ten days to two months or a cash fine from fifty thousand to five hundred thousand rials.'

***Javad Tariri, lawyer, writer and political activist, Khuzestan***

*A Muslim woman may be forced to wear hijab, but why should foreign tourists? This cannot be explained in terms of jurisprudence, which shows that they believe in jurisprudence as long as it is to their advantage. Why are we harming the tourism industry? The field of religion is highly polarized and atmoized.*

The preservation of the Islamic hijab in today's Iranian society has faced opposition, especially from women, and numerous movements and campaigns have been formed in opposition to the mandatory hijab. Consequently, legal restrictions have also been implemented in public places and even institutions such as schools and universities to maintain the mandatory dress code. The beliefs of modernity and feminism, the internet and social networks, and the grounds of secularism are among the many factors that have challenged the Islamic dress code, and religious-cultural promoters and activists have not been able to justify and explain the model of Islamic dress for the young generation and today's society. In past decades, resistance to the hijab has flowed in an individual form, the most important manifestation of which can be found in the activism of the women who became known as the Girls of Revolution Street.

In relation to ethnic groups, it seems that the least restriction imposed against them relates to this very issue of dress. In almost all regions where ethnic groups reside, the use of local and traditional clothing exists for both women and men.

The existence of such ideological objectives jeopardises the legitimacy and security of the ruling establishment. The case of the Gonabadi Dervishes in Tehran, the occasional terrorist operations in the Balochestan region, or cases such as the assassination of congregational imams in Kurdistan, the attack on the Islamic Consultative Assembly in 2017, and public protests are manifestations of the accumulation of a vast volume of discrimination and strictness towards identity groups that are not aligned with the official reading of the regime, and religious and sectarian minorities.

## Symbols and the Representation of Ethnic Identity

Symbols are material and non-material systems that make it possible to substitute one thing for another and define or bring to mind the relationship between two things, making substitution between them possible. Symbols are conventional and acquire meaning in the context of time. In a general classification, symbols can be divided into two types: natural and cultural. Natural symbols originate from the depths of the unconscious human psyche and express a wide and extensive range of images and meanings. The meanings of these motifs can be observed and traced to some extent in the discoveries of engraved images left from the most distant points of history in ancient monuments and in primitive societies. Cultural symbols are also symbols that are used to express the realities and truths of human life and are still used in many religions (Fouladi et al., 2015: 137-140).

***Meysam Sefidkhosh, lecturer in philosophy at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran***

*I have mixed feelings about customs and traditions; I love them because they carry the emotions and culture of my society, and I try to participate in them whenever I can. Their geographical location doesn't matter. They hold a deep appeal for me and allow me to experience a certain feeling and way of thinking. At the same time, however, part of my mind engages in critique during these ceremonies.*

Collective symbols are used to specify instances that are considered translations of the manifestations of a particular collective, expressing the historical dimensions of the values and beliefs of a group as a whole. National,

religious, and political symbols are among the collective symbols (Fromm, 1995: 15). National and ethnic symbols play a prominent role in depicting the image of national and ethnic identity and have the function of distinguishing the manifestations of national and ethnic life. The role that these symbols can have is that when, in the governmental process, action is taken against a particular thought, individuals, by resorting to these symbols, try to preserve and maintain their attitude and, by displaying them, express their survival. These symbols can be a specific type of dress or music and other such things. Of course, the ruling ideology also tries to identify these symbols and, in some cases, to take practical action against them.

***Biba Rahsepar, education and research specialist at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, Sistan and Baluchestan:***

*Customs and traditions are like roots that connect us to the ground, making us stronger and lifting our spirits. They are like the lullabies passed down from my grandmother, imprinted in my subconscious… or even the clothes we wear, which take a lot of effort to make, yet for us they are a kind of meditation. I enjoy all of this and hold it in great respect.*

Based on what has been said, throughout history, the symbol has become so intertwined with popular culture that in many cases, to understand a culture, there is no choice but to understand its symbols. A good and skilled ethnologist must definitely be an experienced symbolist. Various ethnic groups and communities, aware of this fact, try to express their identity through specific ethnic symbols and, in some cases, to express their protest in this way. One of the manifestations of this is the use of native and local clothing during special ceremonies or on special international and regional days, when different ethnic groups try to show themselves as separate from the majority and to resist homogenisation policies. The celebration of Nowruz in the cities and villages of Kurdistan in the last decade is one of the clear manifestations of ethnic symbols that has acquired a meaning beyond the revival of historical tradition and folklore customs and has in a way become a translation of the ethnic discourse. On the other hand, the ruling establishment also strongly confronts these symbols. Although, in the meantime, the followers of these groups believe that the use of these colours

is not with a specific intention and purpose, and in this regard, they condemn the actions of the establishment, this symbolisation is related to a very distant historical past and has been formed outside the control of modern peoples.

> ***Ayoub Marvanipour, filmmaker from Khuzestan:***
> *Some types of clothing cause trouble. For example, the red keffiyeh belongs to separatists. Nowadays, people usually wear the blue keffiyeh, or our own black-and-white one, or the green one worn by Sayyids, but the red one gets you into trouble.*

Local calendars and the use of specific numbers and months in these calendars, as well as in literature and conversation, are other instances of showing the symbol as a specific and special identity. In fact, special occasions and their expression as one of the ways of expressing specific identities (and in this discussion, ethnic identities) have a cultural function.

> ***Aziz Nemati, poet and linguist, Urmia, West Azerbaijan***
> *We view everything through a political lens. When we wrote "yellow" in Sarv magazine, they said, "You mean such-and-such." I said "red," and they said, "You mean this other thing." I asked, "So what should I write?" Taking everything personally, these sensitivities and suspicions make people feel bad.*

The human right to 'the enjoyment of clothing' is emphasised in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states: 'The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions' (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966). Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also states it as follows: 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services,

and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control' (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).

***Seyyed Abdulsalam Mahmoudian, cleric and religious activist, Sardasht, West Azerbaijan***

*Discussing a national or ethnic topic on Fridays is a major red line, and I myself was interrogated for it — simply because during Friday prayers I said, for example, the year 2717 in the Kurdish calendar. They asked, "Why are you using Kurdish history?"*

## National and Religious Symbols as an Agent of Cohesion

The tricolour flag of green, white, and red is one of the official symbols of the country of Iran. Although these three colours have undergone changes over time, their overall form has been preserved. The national anthem is another official symbol, and all countries respect such emblems; any disrespect towards them is considered an affront to the nation itself. Consequently, these official symbols are another factor that can bring different ethnic groups together under a single banner and act as an agent of their cohesion. However, in the Islamic Republic regime, the appropriation of these symbols in favour of the ruling ideology and their instrumental misuse to promote its own message and objectives has caused large sections of society, especially members of ethnic groups, to feel a sense of alienation and conflict towards them. They may show indifference or, in some cases, even rise in symbolic opposition to them, because they believe that these symbols and elements do not represent their interests and aspirations.

***Bagher Sadrinia, faculty member and university lecturer, Tabriz, East Azerbaijan***

*The old costumes must be restored to their former state. Like Charshanbe Soori [the fire feast at the last Wednesday of the year], which has been transformed, or like Ashura, where extremist behaviours have damaged the originality of religion. But the original customs are part of national identity and national unity.*

***Hossein Mohammadzadeh, University Lecturer, Sanandaj, Kurdistan***

*Every country has its own language, flag and symbol, and very naturally, the citizen of a country interacts with it under the laws of that country.*

***Abdul Hamid Irannejad, retired teacher, cultural activist and researcher, Sistan and Balochestan***

*My relationship with them [the Fars people] is as an Iranian, we share one language and one culture, and we are living under on flag, and I know all of them as compatriots and I respect their beliefs.*

*My relationship with them [Persians] is as an Iranian, who are our language and our culture, and we are known under the banner of a flag, and I know all of them as compatriots and I respect their beliefs.*



*Image 3-5. Interview with Abdolhamid Iran-Nejad*

Another element commonly used as a symbol in countries is that of personalities, both mythical and real—heroes who serve as role models and whose memory brings pride to the people of that country. These figures move through history and are not confined to a specific period. The Prophet of Islam is one such personality. The infallible Imams, particularly Imam Ali and Imam Hussein, are among the greatest of these figures for the Shi'i religious community; although they are not Iranian, their followers recognise them as symbols of greatness and magnanimity. Alongside these figures are Iranian personalities, some of whom have mythical characteristics, such as the heroes of the Shahnameh, and others who can be found in various periods of Iranian history.

Holding commemorations and conducting ceremonies and ritual occasions throughout the year, such as national festivals (like the ancient festival of Nowruz), religious and sectarian festivals (like the birthday of the Prophet and Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha), and other national and religious ceremonies that are respected within the geographical territory of Iran, can provide a basis for familiarity and connection between ethnic groups.

> ***Gholamreza Jafari, environmental activist, Naqadeh, West Azerbaijan***
>
> *National and religious-national festivals are deeply ingrained in the people. Over the past four decades, there were attempts to downplay or exaggerate some of them, but they failed. They tried to eliminate Nowruz, but they could not.*

The identity-forming function of some historical and cultural symbols, such as belonging to a language family, the culture of Nowruz, and ancient festivals, is so significant that in addition to their unifying role and the creation of internal cohesion, they transcend the official borders of countries to create supra-national and supra-ethnic cultural geographies. The cultural geography of Nowruz, or the Nowruz cultural sphere, is one example of such a symbol. The geography of the Nowruz celebration refers to countries and regions that celebrate Nowruz; today, in addition to Iran, the Nowruz festival is held in Iraqi Kurdistan, India, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Albania, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Syria, Georgia, Pakistan, and North Macedonia (Samarqandi, 2014). The United Nations General Assembly, on 23 February 2010, by adopting a resolution, designated 21 March as the

'International Day of Nowruz' under the framework of Article 49 of the UN Charter and under the title of Culture of Peace (Iran awaits the request of China and Mongolia for the world registration of Nowruz, 2018).

> ***Mansour Rahmani, Kurdish Literature Activist, Sanandaj, Kurdistan***
> *Some of the festivals, such as Nowruz and Chaharshanbe Soori, are shared by the Iranian cultural geography, which includes Balochis, Kurds, Persians, and Azeris. These are unquestionably the heritages of all these ethnicities, as are other occasions such as Eid al-Fitr, which have entered the field of cultural Iran in a historical occasion and are doubtlessly a common heritage of all Iranian ethnicities.*

As stated, symbols and rituals can help to strengthen national identity. The origin of this lies in the fact that much of traditional human behaviour (based on habit) is emotional, and these symbols and rituals can influence two dimensions of human behaviour. On the one hand, they establish a tradition that persists through history and flows into subsequent generations. On the other hand, each of the rituals and encounters with these symbols arouses a sense of patriotism and stirs the emotions. Therefore, symbols and rituals are necessary as part of the constituent elements of national solidarity.

Iran is a country whose people have various ethnic and religious inclinations. Accordingly, the symbols discussed have different interpretations from the perspective of different ethnic and religious groups. Naturally, the Sunni community of Iran—which in the present research includes the provinces of Kurdistan and Balochestan, parts of the provinces of Khuzestan (the Arabs living in this province), West Azarbaijan, Kermanshah, Hormozgan, Fars, Razavi and South Khorasan, Golestan, and Gilan—cannot align with many of the religious symbols that pertain to Shi'i thought, and symbols such as Ghadir Khumm or the fifteenth of Sha'ban are in conflict with their intellectual and ideological framework. On the other hand, among those who have religious belief and commitment, ancient ceremonies such as Nowruz or Chaharshanbe Suri and other national ceremonies have no place. In this regard, the followers of this group point to a hadith from the Prophet in which it is recommended to replace the festivals of Nowruz and Mehregan with the two Eids of Fitr and Adha (Nouri,

1408 AH: 153-154)[1] . Followers of this view consider the roots of ceremonies such as Nowruz, Chaharshanbe Suri, and Sizdah-be-dar to be related to the Zoroastrian religion and therefore invalid. Based on the interviews conducted, it can be said that these views exist more among the inhabitants of the Balochestan region, the Arabic-speakers of Khuzestan, and also the Islamists of Kurdistan. In other words, in the Sunni-following Kurdish regions, where religious thought does not prevail over ethnic thought, such a view only exists among specific individuals. Due to this precedence of ethnic identity over religious identity and considering the political history of this region, the degree of alignment of the people of the Kurdish regions with national and revolutionary symbols is less than that of the people of other ethnic groups.

As has been indicated, the increasing level of divergence between the ruling establishment and the general public, especially ethnic and religious groups, will have a negative impact on the historical role and function of many national and public symbols that have acquired an official character, such as the country's flag, the national anthem, and even religious symbols. This is because the ideological appropriation of these symbols by the regime and their use in pursuit of its own purposes and objectives, which are in conflict with national and public interests, will cause the people to express their symbolic opposition to the regime through disregard for and even opposition to the appropriated national and religious symbols. Disrespect for the national anthem or even the flag, and in some cases, for pro-establishment national heroes, are among these instances. On the other hand, the general public, in a symbolic action, transforms some neutral and non-political cultural symbols into tools for opposing the regime through new interpretations and meaning-making. The transformation of the religious colour green, which is a symbol of Sayyid lineage in Islamic culture, into a symbol of struggle against the regime during the Green Movement of 2009, is a clear example of these acts of resistance. Among ethnic cultures, the Nowruz celebration ceremonies in Kurdistan have taken on a completely political and combative character.

1. I have replaced two days for you with two other days; Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha in place of the festivals of Nowruz and Mehregan.

## Inter-Ethnic Cultural Boundaries

Most sociological theories and views on the concept of ethnicity[1] emphasise the significance of cultural and traditional aspects in the construction of ethnic identity, and believe that an ethnic group, before any other category, is a cultural phenomenon. As Sheila L. Croucher defines an ethnic group as 'a number of people with a common ancestor and culture who share common cultural orientations such as language, culture, kinship patterns, and common physical appearance' (Croucher, 2004). In analysing inter-ethnic cultural boundaries, culture is considered in the sense of its constituent elements and components, which include the products and achievements of humanity throughout history. In the words of Edward Burnett Tylor, it is 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Ashuri, 1979: 39). On this basis, culture and historical traditions are among the important factors that differentiate ethnic groups from one another, creating boundaries between them. Each ethnic group gathers around these elements and creates a link between itself and its past. Language, customs, beliefs, dress, music, adornment, and so on are among the things through which individuals try to give a concrete expression to their identity and distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups, by inclining towards and even showing prejudice for them.

> ***Gholamreza Jafari, environmental activist, Naqadeh, West Azerbaijan***
> *Culture can be defined as things that a person lives, works, and gets married by. The culture of each ethnic group is valuable to them. Most of it is acquired from ancestors, and the rest is obtained from historical texts and studies.*

The theme of inter-ethnic cultural boundaries includes the following titles and concepts: Under the title 'Ethnic Identity, Tradition, and Modernity,' an attempt will be made to examine, on the one hand, the degree of prejudice of the ethnic groups studied and the role that historical traditions may have in this redefinition, and on the other hand, the effects of modernity on ethnic identity and the mental orientation of the members of ethnic groups. The issue of 'mother tongue' and the

1. For further reading, see: this book, Chapter One, under the concept of “Ethnicity”

degree of prejudice towards it is another matter that distinguishes the boundary between ethnic groups. The 'concept of the ummah' is another item that can be a factor in distinguishing individuals from one another. This concept is an Islamic term which, based on Quranic verses, gives identity to the entire Islamic community, regardless of any language, race, colour, or other components. In the present research, the extent to which the ethnic groups studied are prejudiced about this term is examined. In other words, the degree of precedence of this concept over the concepts of ethnicity and nationality is viewed from the language of the people of the society under study. In many parts of Iran, such as the west and northwest of the country with a Turk-Kurd population mix, or in the southwest of the country with an Arab-Persian-Lur population mix, and also in the east of the country with a Baloch and Sistani population mix, we are faced with ethnic groups that live alongside each other and have an intertwined cultural fabric. The issue of 'cultural authenticity' has caused each of these groups to consider itself the original native of this region and the other an immigrant, and on this basis, to claim territorial authenticity. Under the title 'Ethnic Geography and Territorial Identity,' this issue is studied and examined from the perspective of the ethnic groups in question. Finally, the last issue relates to the current political borders in the four corners of the country, which have created a distance between ethnic groups that were previously alongside each other. In the last part of this section, the current relationship between these ethnic groups and the role of political borders is re-examined.

## Ethnic Identity, Tradition, and Modernity

In traditional, pre-modern societies, ascribed characteristics were considered the main factors of identity formation and creation. Components such as race, ethnicity, religion, lineage, and other elements were things that gave meaning to the entirety of an individual’s life and granted them an understanding of their place in the world—things that show that at that time, it was solely tradition that determined ethnicity. Identity in traditional society was a pre-existing matter prescribed by tradition, and individuals had little agency or influence over it. But modernity, by problematising identity, has transformed it into a permanent matter that must be produced, reproduced, and possibly changed through daily life. Therefore, in modernity, identity has become a constructed matter (Hedayat, 2013).

***Man, 36-year-old, from Taleghan, Karaj***
*Regarding traditions, the past does not dictate anything to me. For instance, I have personally chosen to respect my parents, and this has nothing to do with traditions. I also choose my clothing the way I like. We are not very familiar with other ethnic groups, but we are all human, and there is no difference between us.*

***Amir Shahed, an expert on the history of post-Islamic Iran, Isfahan***
*I am not a product of my family. I was not raised in Tehran. I was not even raised in Iran. Iran no longer exists as an independent entity; it is now part of the whole Earth. We no longer have walls or borders… My thoughts are also Iranian. I have been raised in a society without borders. With the click of a button, I connect to a university in Sweden, and I cannot say that this university has not played a role in my life, or that my grandfather has not influenced me. I do not believe in the concept of "ethnicity." Ethnicity has a classical definition — a common ancestor, shared behaviours, language, clothing, and religion — but none of these exist in any tangible form anywhere in Iran today.*

In modernity, identity has become a problem, a goal, and a project. Today's world is a place where, with the blurring of political and economic borders, communications have expanded, the interaction of cultures has increased, and communities and organisations have been taken beyond national borders through new combinations of time and space.

***Mohammad Ali Daneshgar, theater director, Semnan***
*If I was born into a Christian family, I would have been a Christian and religion has an inherited property . . . . I reject this religion because there is no thought in it. While religion is acquired and must be formed within the individual.*

In this world, identity is not a complete and intrinsic category, but is always a social product, fluid and in the process of formation. Identity is a category

related to meaning, and since meaning is not the nature and essence of things but a conventional relationship, it can therefore be said that identity is also always a convention and an innovation, always shared to some extent and questioned to some extent (Jenkins, 1381: 6). What becomes important in this relationship is, now that humans have become autonomous in the redefinition of ethnicity and are constantly in the process of changing and becoming it, to what extent do they emphasize traditional characteristics in defining it? According to the findings, Persian-speakers, in defining the basis of their identity, mainly have a global and supra-local perspective and believe that in today's world, one cannot find one's identity based on traditional characteristics.

***Akbar Yadegari, painter, writer and theatre director, Semnan***
*What difference does it make? Humans live within a vast whole called the world, and whatever happens affects the entire world. Consequently, I should not separate myself as an identity from anywhere else.*

***Rahim Mousavi, retired theater director, Semnan***
*We do not wear our fathers' clothes, nor do we have their occupations, and these factors create a distance from that culture… We cannot claim to live in a modern society while our thinking is not modern. My clothing, occupation, ways of marrying, and, most importantly, the evolution of our language all show that we are not like our fathers. Globalisation has also had an impact; things like the internet have entered our lives.*

There is the widespread belief that modernism was an all-out attack on the symbolic aspects of traditions and customs, religion, ethnic and local cultural characteristics, and so on, which defined the identity of the pre-modern subject. On the other hand, some, like Robertson, believe that in the arena of globalisation, we are witnessing the strengthening of local identities alongside global growth. He refers to this order as the 'glocal' order (Kiani, 1380: 29). In such a world, movements and ethnicities that until yesterday had no opportunity to express themselves are now asserting themselves with extraordinary speed. These identities rediscover their hidden history and narrate it from the end to the beginning. They have understood that they have a history and can recount

it, because they have never had the opportunity to narrate their own history. Marginalised identities, in an effort to find their roots, seek to gain a position through their hidden history to express themselves. Hall, by stating that this desire and demand for roots and gaining a position is the very concept of 'ethnicity,' considers it a necessary position or space that makes it possible for people to speak. This is an important stage in the emergence and growth of all local and marginalised movements that, for the last twenty years, since the rediscovery of their ethnicities, have presented a different image (Hall, 1383: 257). The processes that are currently underway in this regard, through the reconstruction of time and space, the permeabilisation of borders, and the development of social networks, have led to the weakening of traditional sources of identity formation. In such conditions, local identities face identity damage, and since 'identity is the source of meaning and experience for people' (Castells, 2011), people cannot remain in a damaging condition for a long time. Therefore, the reconstruction of identity is an inevitable matter. In this regard, theorists such as Khondker (2005: 11) and Roudometof (2003: 37; 2005: 113) believe that, in fact, glocalisation is directed towards the possibility of coexistence and the dialectic of global and local elements that has been provided through these processes. On this basis, today one can speak of multidimensional identities instead of a single, coherent identity. According to Robertson, the forces of integration and homogenisation are complementary to the forces of differentiation and separation (Robertson & Lechner, 1985: 103-105). Thus, it can be inferred that today we cannot speak of a single modernity; rather, we are witnessing the formation of glocal modernities that emphasize different and indigenised models for achieving development.

> ***A 30-year-old woman, graphic designer from Tehran:***
> *You see, both traditions and cultures have an influence, as well as the things I personally prefer based on my own ideas and ideals. In fact, I believe this is what a modern human is today: influenced by traditions, yet also guided by individual and global values.*

In Iran over the last hundred years, and especially during the first and second Pahlavi periods, great efforts were made in the discourse of nationalism and the denial of the traditions of ethnic groups in order to homogenise societies. Reza Shah, in the framework of the model of standardisation, forced the people

of many of these communities to discard their traditional and local dress and made them wear European clothes. In recent decades, this coherent and unified narrative was set aside, and different ethnic groups, while accepting the basis of national identity, gravitated towards their own customs and traditions. On the other hand, different ethnic groups became acquainted with the lifestyles of the peoples of the world. In the field of food, they have become familiar with and use many Western foods. In the field of clothing, they behave according to many manifestations of Western culture, wearing ties and bow ties, spending their leisure time with Western games such as billiards, and listening to pop, rock, and jazz music. But alongside all these things, they also have a special regard for their own authentic and native lifestyle and believe that these are internalised and they cannot easily set them aside. In fact, they act in a hybrid manner, according to ethnic, national, and global manifestations. Some of the findings of the present research also confirm this matter.

> ***Katayoun Riahi, actress from Tehran:***
> *I observe about 40 percent of the customs as my ancestors did; however, my personal beliefs inevitably influence them.*

> ***Mullah Ahmad Bahrami, religious-social activist and former parliament member from Javanrud (Kermanshah Province)***
> *I think that any nation wishes in principle to preserve all its ethnic customs, continue this way of life, and introduce itself to other nations. Why is it that Benazir Bhutto, the Prime Minister of a country with 190 million people comes to Tehran in Pakistani clothes, and there is no problem? Why is it that Ashraf Ghani wears clothes like those of ordinary people in his country? Why is it that Iranian rulers wear the same clothes as they have had, living in their seminary rooms with no responsibility while retaining those clothes? Why shouldn't I retain my ethnic clothes and customs, of which I am proud as my national identity?!*

According to this data, some are still inclined to preserve their native and local customs and traditions in the new era alongside the manifestations of modernity, from which escape is impossible. Others believe that in the new era and in the process of globalisation, one can no longer emphasize these native manifestations

in order to redefine one's identity.

In a general summary of this section, it can be said: tradition and modernity have produced different forms of attitude and action among the ethnic groups of Iran, which are generally divided into two spectrums: Persian-speakers and other ethnic groups. The Persian-speakers studied mainly define their identitarian 'we' outside the local and traditional realm, and consequently, the same cultural-ethnic characteristics that are true for other ethnic groups cannot be applied to them and define them within the framework of a specific ethnic group. In most of the material in this section, instead of addressing them with the term 'ethnic group,' the concept of 'Persian-speakers' will be used for them. Unlike the Persian-speakers, the circle of the identitarian 'we' of those who belong to the Kurd, Turk, Baloch, and Arab ethnic groups is more closed. For the people of these groups, while accepting a number of manifestations of the new era, traditional customs and rituals are of the first priority. It is on the basis of this preservation of traditional and historical thoughts that a boundary and distance has been created between them and other ethnic groups of the country, such that they can be distinguished and differentiated from one another. In the shadow of the opportunities and living conditions of the modern era, ethnic groups have attained new forms of collective consciousness and identity transformation. This has not led to ethnic de-identification; on the contrary, it has reproduced the passive and customary forms of traditional ethnic identity, transforming them into new, active, self-aware, and demand-oriented identities.

## The Role of the Mother Tongue

In the public sphere and in common understanding, language is recognised as a structured system of signs and symbols that facilitates communication and the exchange of messages among the speakers of a linguistic community (Najafi, 1350). This definition, which primarily emphasises the communicative function of language, relies on a traditional understanding that views language in its instrumental capacity. In reality, however, language possesses a nature and functions so diverse and profound that, according to many sociologists of language and cultural theorists, it is regarded as the fundamental element and the principal pillar of a society's culture. In effect, language represents a 'collective order'—particularly a 'semantic order'—and an intersubjective, historical world. It embodies a universe of consciousness, cognition, culture, belonging, emotion,

action, experience, construction, structure, and power. Language is at once the repository of a group's or a nation's consciousness and values, and their method of justification and mode of reasoning. It is in and through language that human groups define and determine truth and 'regimes of truth,' giving meaning to their world, life, and relationships, or, conversely, deconstructing and transforming them, perpetuating their world through ruptures and continuities. Therefore, language is a 'structured reservoir' in which the consciousness, thought, feelings, collective action, experiences, and events of a group, an ethnic community, or a nation are accumulated (Mohammadi, 1398). Such a profound and meaning-giving function, in both its individual and collective dimensions, is predominantly carried out in the language with which an individual begins the process of speech, thought, and socialisation—that which is referred to as the 'mother tongue,' 'native language,' or 'first language' (Bloomfield, 1984). It is here that Marx's observation that 'language is a social product and the key to thought' finds its validation. Despite the specific and semantic differences that may exist in various societies between the concepts of 'mother tongue,' 'native language,' and 'first language,' in the ethnological literature of Iran, what is generally known as the mother tongue refers to the ethnic language and its dialects. This includes the collection of languages such as Arabic, Balochi, Azeri Turkish, Kurdish, and others, which possess profound and meaning-giving functions for ethnic culture and identity.

Consequently, the mother tongue, or as stated, the ethnic language, assumes a pivotal role and importance in the scope of ethnic debates and demands. Beyond its conventional communicative and social functions, it acquires a central position in political conflicts and ethnic policies, often becoming the central signifier of ethnic resistance discourses. This is to the extent that some consider the life of an ethnic group to be dependent on the preservation of its language. Echoing Heidegger's expression, 'Language is the house of being' (Heidegger, 2013), they count the preservation of ethnic existence as contingent upon the preservation and protection of the existence of the ethnic language, which comes to hold an importance on par with ethnic identity itself.

***Mohammad Jamaleddin Waji, religious researcher and sociologist from Poso, Piranshahr (West Azerbaijan):*** *Identity is something that becomes more prominent the more it is threatened. The sensitivity that minorities showed during Reza Shah's era regarding their local clothing—as one of the symbols of identity under attack—gradually faded in later periods. There is, of course, a difference in the nature of threats: today, they are more global and content-related than regional and superficial. Yet, they still provoke a sense of sensitivity and the desire to preserve distinctions. That is why, for instance, in Iran, Kurds, Turks, and Baluchis are more sensitive about their distinctions than Persian speakers, who do not feel their identity is under threat. Our sensitivity as Kurds toward our distinctions stems from the fact that our identity is exposed to assimilation wherever we live, since, beyond the indirect threat of globalism against subcultures, we also feel the direct threat of the dominant nations over our lands—namely Persians, Turks, and Arabs.*

The contemporary world is a world of extinctions; not only are biological and animal species becoming extinct, but the diverse species of language and culture are also facing extinction, with languages disappearing one after another. In the United States, centuries of genocide, forced migration, persecution, and forced assimilation of indigenous peoples have resulted in only a few of the approximately three hundred distinct native languages remaining, and about fifty of these are now on the verge of extinction, meaning they have fewer than ten speakers.

Today, more than 70 percent of the world's scientific literature is published in English, and the world's five major languages hold a monopoly on over 90 percent of scientific production. Major international languages such as English, French, and Spanish have acquired a richness and complex structure due to their global position, and languages with fewer speakers are unable to compete with them in the worlds of science, communication, and culture. Homogenisation is promoted more than the recognition of diversity (Peyvandi, 1389).

Many of Iran's provinces, in the past, possessed a wide array of diverse languages and dialects, most of which have either disappeared or are on the

verge of vanishing. According to the Atlas of the World's Languages, more than 20 languages in Iran are in danger of complete destruction and extinction. UNESCO has also declared about 25 languages in Iran to be at risk of disappearing. However, based on information from various sources, the number of living languages in Iran is counted at 76, of which about half are considered at risk (Nazarmohammadi, 1400).

> ***Rahim Mousavi, retired theater director, Semnan***
> *You cannot find an under-40 in Semnan who knows Semnan. Most of the languages in this area are extinct.*

Proponents of homogenisation and the neglect of mother-tongue education justify their view by stating that if a child, for example a Turkish-speaker, is educated in schools in Turkish and not Persian, they may not develop an understanding of concepts such as the public interest and the collective good. In this view, standard languages are important elements of hegemonic control (the single voice of the majority). On the other hand, suppressed languages become vessels of resistance and protest. Consequently, it is observed how in the modern world, language, as a cultural category, can become a political matter between a dominant and a subjugated group. The findings of the present research also indicate the politicisation of the mother tongue. This means that ethnic groups attribute their deprivation of education in their mother tongue to the ruling establishment and believe that they will continue to demand this right from the country's political system until it is realised. This is because if this demand and resistance do not take shape, the ground will be prepared for their assimilation into the dominant language.

> ***Aziz Shahrokh, artist from Mahabad (West Azerbaijan):***
> *Every ethnic group should speak its mother tongue. I must be able to read and write in Kurdish. Ethnic communities, alongside the Persian language, should have the right to receive education in their mother tongue—something that is not available in schools.*

***Saadoun Mazuchi, civil and political activist, Mahabad, Western Azerbaijan***
*We do not have the right to education in our mother tongue, but we demand it as a right as this is reflected in the constitution of the country, but it has not been realized and this is related to the will of different administrations that came to power during the history of the Islamic Republic. None of them had a strong enough will to implement this principle of the constitution, and however, this right was not demanded.*

According to the three clauses of the Mother Tongue Charter, prepared and approved by UNESCO, all school pupils should begin their formal education in their mother tongue. All governments are obliged to produce and distribute all necessary resources, materials, and means for the strengthening and teaching of the mother tongue. A sufficient number of teachers must be trained and prepared for teaching in the mother tongue, as teaching in the mother tongue is considered a means of achieving social equality (Mother Tongue Charter, 1996). In Iran, despite this right being discussed in the country's constitution, it has not yet been implemented, and the entire educational process in schools and universities is conducted in the official language of the country (Persian). Meanwhile, ethnic groups are demanding the implementation of this right with the utmost seriousness. The demand for this right has, however, been turned into a security-political issue by the ruling Islamic Republic, and most activists in this field have been accused of separatism.

Regarding the mother tongue, the history of Iran shows that after the Constitutional Revolution and also during the first and second Pahlavi periods, a centralist approach prevailed, with an emphasis on the Persian language and the imposition of restrictions on ethnic minorities. During that period, any existing law was aimed at the development and expansion of the Persian script and literature, and no heed was paid to ethnic languages. This policy continued in the same vein after 1979, despite some practical changes at the level of cultural strategy.

Among the existing proposals regarding the mother tongue is policy-making and action in line with the constitution. On this basis, ethnic groups would be able

to approach the issue of language in ways free from coercion. Institutionalising the teaching of the mother tongue would reduce the existing tensions in this relationship.

> ***Mohsen Hesam Mazaheri, researcher of religion and war from Tehran:***
> *A social phenomenon is inevitably diverse, and I oppose standardization and homogenization—especially when enforced by the state. I have an attachment to the Persian language, and at the same time, a Turkic-speaking person's inclination toward their Turkic heritage is completely natural. I believe our culture has the capacity to embrace this diversity within itself.*

> ***Amin Shirzadi, poet and songwriter, Kermanshah***
> *My friend at Kubani, Osman Ravan, is now in Los Angeles. He used my poems about the Kermanshah earthquake and held a concert and donated the proceeds to the earthquake victims of Kermanshah.*

Throughout history, nations that have endured are those that have managed to preserve their authentic and deep-rooted ethnic, national, and religious identities. Language is one of the branches of the mighty tree of culture, through which the written culture of any society is recorded and transmitted to other generations. In every language, the expression of feelings, desires, and emotions has its own particular charm, which, when rendered into speech or writing in another language, usually loses its genuine appeal. Every language possesses a treasury of concepts, symbols, literature, music, and other arts, which constitute a valuable part of the heritage of human culture and civilisation. With the destruction of a language, not only the children of that nation but also all of humanity are deprived of knowing and using that precious heritage and cultural and historical experience. Languages differ from one another in subtle and complex ways. These differences are not limited to vocabulary; each language has a limited set of sounds, and moreover, each language has words for which other languages have no exact equivalents. Each language has a specific grammar; one cannot translate a Persian sentence word-for-word into Turkish and expect a Turkish speaker to understand anything from it. The rules for correctly ordering words

in two different languages differ significantly. Thus, to understand a language, one must first understand its rules; that is, one must know what sounds each language has, and in what way its sounds are organised into words and its words into meaningful phrases.

> ***Mohsen Soodmand, psychologist and consultant, Ardabil, West Azerbaijan***
> *In Turkish, my imagination is much stronger. In Persian, in a way, I find myself linguistically limited. The issue of language should be left to the people themselves. It is a right mentioned in the Constitution. The government or the Ministry of Education should allow the establishment of such classes if there is public demand. The foundation should be the will of the people.*

It is strongly clear that a language which is not the language of education will, sooner or later, be destroyed, or at least weakened and left obscure. If a pupil can read and write in their mother tongue, they will no longer need to relegate their mother tongue to the recesses of their mind when they want to think about their surroundings, and think in the language they have become acquainted with in their textbooks.

According to Articles 15 and 19 of the Constitution,[1] ethnic groups can have mother-tongue education in schools. In recent years, in some universities, fields related to ethnic languages have also been offered. The University of Kurdistan, since launching the Kurdish Language and Literature programme in 2015 (2015), admits students to this field annually, and in the university's curriculum, a two-unit course on Kurdish language and literature has been included among the elective courses (Department of Kurdish Language and Literature, University of Kurdistan). At the University of Tabriz, the field of Azeri Turkish Language and Literature is also among the university's fields of study (Department of

1. According to Article 15: The official and common language and script of the people of Iran is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, texts, and textbooks must be in this language and script, but the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and mass media and the teaching of their literature in schools, alongside the Persian language, is free. And in Article 19, among the rights of the nation, it is stated that: Article 19: The people of Iran, of whatever ethnic group or tribe, enjoy equal rights, and colour, race, language, and the like shall not be a cause for distinction. Research Centre of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, Laws and Regulations, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Link: https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/content/iran_constitution

Turkish Language and Literature, University of Tabriz). Regardless of how this legitimate ethnic right is implemented, mother-tongue education is viewed through a security lens, and this has led to a type of resistance among ethnic groups. The removal of ethnic names from shopfronts, streets, and so on are examples of the reaction against the mother tongue. Language is a social and cultural matter. A policy of politicising language leads to acts of resistance.

Diagrams bellow show the belief of the elites and the general public regarding the legitimacy of learning in the mother tongue. Accordingly, 85.9 percent of the elites and 63.9 percent of the general public believed that mother-tongue education is a legitimate and legal right. Also, 14.1 percent of the elites and 15.7 percent of the public were opposed to giving legitimacy to learning in the mother tongue.

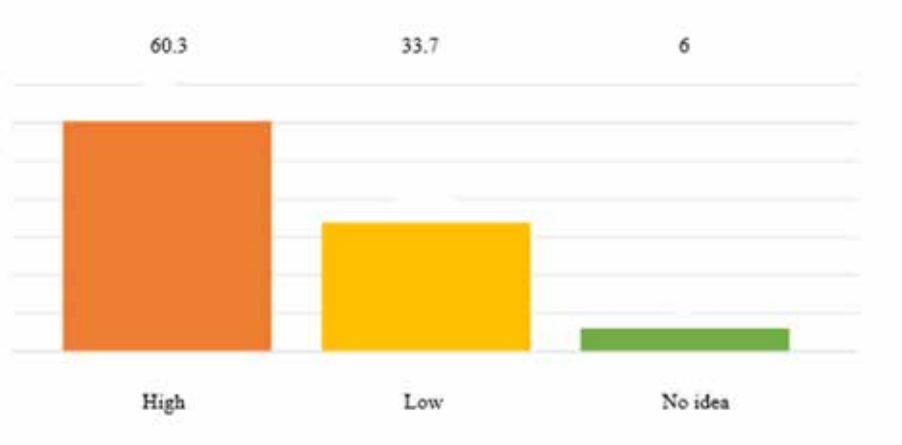



*Diagram 3-4. legitimacy of learning in the mother tongue according to elites*

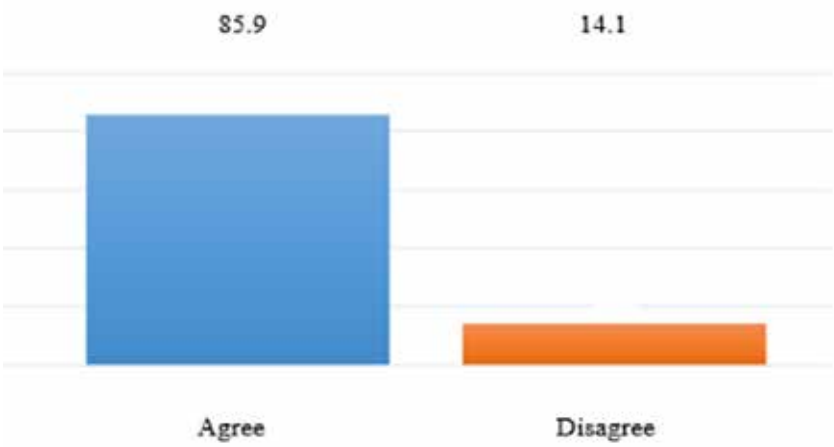



*Diagram 3-5. legitimacy of learning in the mother tongue according to general public*

Another important point regarding this neglect of the mother tongue, apart from its destructive effects on the cultural sphere, relates to the disruption of children's learning. The rupture from the mother tongue that a non-Persian-speaking Iranian child experiences upon entering school has significant cognitive and emotional effects on them, and gradually deprives society of the capacities of non-Persian languages. Also, from a psychological perspective, it strengthens cultural and linguistic continuity and individuals' social sense, while the linguistic schisms that occur during an individual's lifetime lead to bewilderment in their social life and to identity disorders. The linguist Professor Juan Carlos Godenzzi says: 'Language forms the basis of every individual's identity, and children who learn a foreign language from the beginning instead of their mother tongue will suffer from a lack of identity in the future.' An individual deprived of learning their mother tongue will lose a significant part of their deepest emotional and affective processes. This is not limited to the sphere of feelings and emotions but also has a significant impact on cognitive processes.

According to the studies of Jean Piaget, the theorist of mental development in healthy children, the mother tongue is the first determining factor in the learning process in later stages. Dr Moharram Aghazadeh, a pioneer in the field of education, especially curriculum planning in Iran, and a senior consultant and member of the steering committee for global education at UNICEF Iran, writes about the disorders caused by the lack of mother-tongue education in primary school pupils in Iran: 'We have nearly six million primary school pupils, a large portion of whom are educated in a second language. Many disorders arise in them. The first disorder is weakness in dictation. Second-language learners often have serious problems with spelling. The second disorder is in science lessons. Because science is in the context of life, pupils interpret science problems with their own ethnic reading. The second language does not understand this ethnic reading. Nowhere else in the world do we need editing as much as we do. This is because of the lack of mother-tongue education. If the mother tongue is taught correctly, linguistic distinction does not occur, and the writer does not mix them up and can distinguish the grammar. The main language must be taught precisely so that the second language is also learned precisely' (Mardapour, 1395).

Statistics on the bilingual population of Iran vary. Some domestic research shows that about 75 percent of the country's pupils are bilingual. Bilingualism and multilingualism are global phenomena, and it is almost rare to find a

country where at least a small part of the population does not speak two or more languages. For this reason, in many countries, in addition to the official language, there are other languages or dialects and accents, the use of which will enhance the education and learning of pupils. The optimal solution in most of these countries in dealing with the consequences of the phenomenon of bilingualism, and in order to eliminate discrimination, is the use of a type of education called bilingual education, in which more than one language is used for learning and teaching academic subjects (Allah-Karami et al., 1397: 44).

From a cultural-social perspective, shying away from a political view of the mother tongue and creating a basis for respecting linguistic plurality while preserving the Persian language as a unifying national element is a response to a widespread demand and also a moderation of the country's social atmosphere. It is the prevention of the destruction of a great cultural asset. By marginalising these languages and dialects, a part of the history, the spiritual and symbolic existence, the literature, music, traditions, and culture of the people is also consigned to oblivion. The death of any language is the decay of a part of that society's culture and history.

A content analysis of a collection of written documents, including 4 books, 5 dissertations, and 18 articles on the topic of mother-tongue-based education and bilingual and multilingual education, and a content analysis of interviews with specialists in the fields of linguistics, educational sciences, and psychology who have been active in the field of educating bilingual pupils and teaching in the mother tongue in Iran, in the form of a qualitative research study, indicates that the principled teaching of the mother tongue within the framework of multilingual education leads to cognitive growth, the promotion of mental health, the provision of national unity, the expansion of democracy, the realisation of development, the improvement of pupils' academic performance, and the cultivation of human resources (Allah-Karami et al., 1397).

The various ethnic groups studied in the present research acknowledged that depriving their children of the right to education in their mother tongue, especially in the first years of their attendance at school, creates a disruption in their learning. These children, until the age of seven and before going to school, speak their mother tongue in the family and neighbourhood, and suddenly upon entering school, their first formal and written education is conducted in Persian, while until that time, in most cases, they have not spoken even a single sentence

in the official language, and none of the words of those written sentences in the books have been uttered by them. This will certainly create a disruption and delay in their learning process.

***Salahuddin Khadiv, civil activist and journalist, Mahabad, West Azerbaijan***

*This is a natural right. Linguists know better than anyone that language is not just a means of communication, but a means of thinking. Many forms of cultural production are not possible without a native language to think about it. In psychiatry, counseling should only be given in the mother tongue. The delay in this regard is politically motivated by the regime.*



*Image 3-6. Interview with Amir Sajadi*

***Amir Sajjadi, history teacher from, Saqqez, Kurdistan Province***

*If you accept as a principle that Iran is multi-ethnic, it will be a natural consequent principle that everyone should speak their ethnic language. As stated by Mohsen Renani, a professor of political economics in Isfahan, bilinguals who do not have the right to education in their mother tongues have difficulty in learning, and suffer the issue of learning latency, resulting from an educational duality, which reduces the quality of learning. Furthermore, this is a natural, innate human right, and experiences from other countries, such as Switzerland, shows that linguistic diversity does not cause disintegration or separation.*

Considering the content of the interviewees' statements, which place a fundamental emphasis on the issue of education in the mother tongue, it can be said that paying attention to the cultural and linguistic policies of ethnic groups is essential for state infrastructures, the structure of the government itself, and supra-governmental bodies. Without a clear language policy, all the aforementioned institutions will be flawed and crisis-prone. Those who want to reduce the importance of language to the level of a simple means of conversation and communication are ignoring the findings of sociological, psychological, and neurobiological research. Language is not just a few thousand words with a specific pronunciation; it is a world in which a complex being called a human lives, and it contains meaning—the meaning of the lives of human beings who communicate with each other through it. It is the carrier of their culture and history, and thus, education must be based on it for a qualitative education to take place and for intergenerational transmission to continue. When children are taught in their mother tongue, they will certainly have better educational outcomes.

Language is the identity of the individual and the society in which the individual works and lives. Language is a cultural category and must be looked at with a cultural perspective. If, under the guise of a political and security matter, linguistic diversity is suppressed, national security, the cohesion of Iranian society, national unity, and the country's territorial integrity will be harmed. Therefore, the linguistic matter must be considered within the framework of civil rights and

not a political issue. In this regard, it is proposed that in the same way that we witness the teaching of Arabic (as a religious and Islamic language) and English (as an international language) to children in schools in the country's educational system, attention should also be paid to teaching children's mother tongue. And at the university level, it should be given more attention as a specialised field.

## The Primacy of the Ummah over the Nation

The concept of the ummah, or more precisely the 'Islamic ummah,' is a prevalent term in the history of the Islamic world, encompassing the entirety of the Islamic community. The Qur'an, in various verses, addresses the Islamic community with this term, irrespective of geographical and territorial boundaries (Qur'an, 2:143 & 213, 3:110, 21:92). In the Hadith, where it appears as the 'ummah of Muhammad,' 'my ummah' (spoken by the Prophet), or 'umam' (plural), it is used to mean a community that follows a single prophet (Turki, 1368: 30). Therefore, the ummah is a supra-national, supra-ethnic, and supra-racial concept that denotes a specific religious and sectarian community. The nation, on the other hand, is a modern concept pertaining to the contemporary era, which signifies the specific geographical and territorial framework of the people of a country under the political sovereignty of a specific state.

One of the fundamental differences between the Islamic political system and contemporary political and legal schools of thought lies in the demarcation between 'nation' and 'ummah.' Islam, by virtue of being a universal religion that addresses the whole of human society, considers its call to belong to all people, regardless of territorial borders and racial, linguistic, national, and cultural differences. It bestows the name 'ummatun wahidah' (one ummah) (Qur'an, 23:52)[1] upon its followers. This concept is entirely different from the concept of citizenship, which links individuals to the ruling state in a specific territory.

***Javad Oveisi, Teacher and History Researcher, Zabol, Sistan and Balochestan***
*We are hungry ourselves, but we help other countries. One must have a lyric to help another. The light that is necessary at home should not be sent to the Mosque. [Persian proverb]*

1. "Verily, this your ummah is a single ummah."

In Iran, the country's constitution is derived from religious principles and standards. Article 4 of the Constitution, which is the most important and the parent of all other articles, states that any legislation that conflicts with the unity of the Islamic ummah and leads to indifference towards the situation of Muslims is incompatible with the spirit governing our constitution. For this reason, in numerous articles, the unity of the Islamic ummah and support for Muslims in every corner of the world has been addressed and stated as an important and fundamental duty. From the perspective of the constitution, since all Muslims are one ummah, defending the rights of all Muslims and supporting the rightful struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors anywhere in the world is one of the fundamental criteria of the country and constitutes one of the principles of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Javanarasteh, 1379).

The significance of the 'one Ummah' ideal within the political apparatus of the Islamic Republic of Iran is therefore evident. Within the worldview and perspective of these individuals, what happens on the stage of the Islamic world is interpreted within a governmental framework, rather than the concept of the nation-state. On the other hand, there are many individuals who do not accept this worldview and, with an emphasis on the concept of the nation within the territorial expanse of Iran, criticise the country's governmental policies. These individuals express dissatisfaction with the government's foreign policies, which entail economic and human costs for the defence of the world's Muslims. They believe that when the people of their own country are facing problems in various economic, social, welfare, cultural, and other fields, why should the state spend its capital and resources on other countries and prioritise the interests of the ummah over the interests of the nation?

***Abdul Rashid Tariz, a religious scholar, history researcher and socio-political activist, Sistan and Balochistan***

*The government uses many of the resources we have available in other nations to promote Shia, its own religion. You can find Iranian-run colleges and schools in Balochistan. Our administration has invested money in Lebanon that, if it had been invested in Balochistan, would have developed this region like other provinces. However, due to religious concerns, Arab nations spends a lot of money for the welfare of their citizens. They exclusively spend money on religious activities in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen; they do not spend money on their own nation. As an Iranian, I often expect people to focus more on the inside than the outward. Investments ought to be internal, and indigenous people ought to be prioritised.*

The interpretation of the above views reveals two very important, frequent, and influential critiques of the macro-policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. First, in the age of nation-states, basing the country's macro-interests on supra-national concerns, especially in unfavourable economic conditions, is considered illegitimate and is criticised by a wide spectrum of the population. This issue is among the main demands and slogans in most of the collective protests and actions in Iran. The second point relates to the stark difference between the regime's claims and its performance regarding the Islamic ummah. The Islamic Republic, in its declared policies and even in the legal regime specified in the constitution, claims to preserve and protect the idea of a single Islamic ummah and the oppressed of the world. In practice and in its political actions, however, it strives to secure the interests and welfare of the Shi'i community, and in this path, it may even adopt hostile positions against some non-Shi'i Muslim communities and countries. This matter, regardless of its regional and diplomatic consequences, has been openly and severely criticised by the Sunni community of Iran. This is especially true when the peripheral Sunni communities within Iran suffer from compounded deprivation, while the Islamic Republic regime spends a significant portion of Iran's national wealth in the countries of the region in order to promote its Shi'i-centric policies. Instead of the state's welfare programmes being configured within the geographical framework of Iran's territory, it engages in supra-territorial ambitions that it may not even

have the ability to manage and direct. This has created the risk of a national economic crisis and irreparable harm to the people—a situation that is mostly driven by a tendency that prescribes state policy-making and investment in the countries of the region. Some supporters of this group, apart from religious and divine concepts, emphasize the concept of 'security' in stating their reasons for agreement. This group of individuals states that given the regional conditions and the numerous conflicts ongoing in various surrounding countries, the political authorities, in order to protect the country's internal borders, are forced to act like other global and regional powers. This is a matter that requires both a strong intellectual and theoretical foundation for persuasion in this domain, and the economic, financial, and executive ability to realise it in practice.

> ***Mohammad Gol Kahrazeh, Faculty Member of Zahedan University, Sistan and Balochestan***
> *I ask why Iran is helping Syria and Iraq when we are dying of hunger? [They say] we have to go beyond Iran's borders for our own security. Were it not for Iran's support to Iraq and Syria, we would be fighting in Khuzestan now or in neighbouring provinces!*

This view holds that if the ruling establishment acts contrary to this stated situation, the possibility of insecurity[1] on the country's internal borders will arise. Opponents of this policy, emphasizing the concept of the nation within the framework of the country's territorial borders, state that as long as the danger has not reached inside the country's borders, we should not incur costs in this regard. In fact, it can be said that the followers of the ethnic groups studied—most of whom belong to the two religious groups of Sunni and Shia—do not pay much attention to the concept of the ummah in the framework of their co-religionists from other ethnic and linguistic groups in order to redefine their identity. It can be said that the role of religion in creating cultural boundaries, from their perspective, is of secondary importance compared to linguistic, traditional, and ethnic issues. On the other hand, this ideological view that prioritises the ummah over the nation is not specific to the Islamic Republic; all currents attributed

1. Although the 1401 (2022) explosion at Shah Cheragh and the 1402 (2024) explosion in Kerman on the anniversary of Qasem Soleimani's death, and many other border attacks, have called into question the very security that the establishment has in mind.

to Islamic fundamentalism do not recognise the existing political borders and seek to form and revive a comprehensive state in the mould of the historical caliphates.

It is necessary to reflect on the fact that the relationship between the ummah and the nation in the legal and political regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran is not influenced by a simple equation of transitioning from the nation in favour of the ummah, but has a multifaceted character. The nation, nationality, Iranian, and Iranianness are enduring principles in the discourse of the Islamic Republic and in the constitution, about which there are specific and strong legal assertions under the titles of 'national solidarity,' 'national unity,' 'national defence,' 'national interests,' and 'national sovereignty.' However, the fundamental issue relates to the interpretation of these concepts under the supra-national and ideological aspirations of the system, in which even the concept of the ummah is faced with a specific and reductionist reading. Therefore, the Islamic Republic system, despite acknowledging the nation and nationality, considers it to be devoid of authenticity and an ancillary matter that must be at the service of the concept of the ummah.

## Ethnic Geography and Territorial Identity

Different ethnic groups try to find their identity through various factors and, by defining their identity boundaries with others, to specify and highlight the dimensions and limits of their identity. Ethnic geography and territorial identity are among the most fundamental elements of ethnic and national identity. They have a foundational importance and function in defining the spatial-locational dimensions and historical contexts of the identity of ethnic groups, and sometimes acquire a mythical and epic status in the redefinition of ethnicity, to the extent that in the popular understanding, the homeland and territory are spoken of as a mother. The importance of the intertwining of the collective identity of ethnic groups and nations with their historical land and settlement is clearly evident in the naming of ethnic geographies with the names of ethnic groups and nations: Kurdistan, Arabistan (the former name of Khuzestan), Azerbaijan, and Balochestan are examples of this naming in Iran. Any intervention in the demarcations of ethnic geography and the changing of their names leads to ethnic dissatisfaction and protest and resistance against it. The widespread changing of

the names of cities and regions during the first Pahlavi era[1] in order to advance homogenisation policies, and the resistance against it, are historical examples of this in Iran. The annexation of parts of the Kurdish-inhabited regions, including the Mukriyan region, to the province of West Azarbaijan is another example that has been the source of many conflicts in the inter-ethnic relations between Kurds and Turks in contemporary history. Of course, this important issue should not be overlooked that, apart from interventions and targeted policies to change demographic and border structures, in many cities, regions, and areas, the composition of the inhabitants has a diversity of ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds, influenced by migrations, wars, climate change, and other historical variables. In Iran, there are several provinces that have a diverse and composite ethnic fabric, in which different ethnic groups live. The province of West Azarbaijan is one of these provinces, where the two ethnic groups of Kurds and Azeris reside. In the province of Khuzestan, various ethnic groups such as Lurs, Bakhtiaris, and Arabs live. In the province of Sistan and Balochestan, the two ethnic groups of Baloch and Sistani live alongside each other.

One of the issues that has always been a subject of discussion among the people of these provinces, and especially 'pan-ethnicists,' is which ethnic group constitutes the original natives of these regions. Each of these peoples, citing a historical past, the naming of various regions, and oral literature, argues that their ethnic group is the original owner of these regions and the other group was an immigrant that later entered the region. On this basis, they claim historical ownership of the land of those regions. This very matter has also caused fundamental disputes between the people of these ethnic groups. A look at the Kurd-Turk disputes over numerous areas of Azarbaijan and the disputes between Arabs and non-Arabs over Khuzestan and some of its adjacent areas are clear examples of the challenges related to the territorial identity of ethnic groups in Iran. The city of Urmia and the disputes regarding whether this city is Kurdish or Turkish is a clear example, around which a voluminous literature has been produced at various levels of ethnic elites and ordinary citizens, concerning its historical, demographic, and toponymic dimensions. An analysis and re-reading of this literature well represents the depth of this issue. 'The Turks of Urmia

1. For more information, see: Shohreh Jalalpour, (1391). “Changing the Names of Iranian Cities during the First Pahlavi Era and the Role of the Academy of Iran,” Ganjineh-ye Asnad Quarterly, 22(88), 44-63.

argue that in various historical periods, a significant population of Urmia's inhabitants were Turks, and in the last hundred years, it has been a distinctly and predominantly Turk-inhabited city, and the Assyrians, Armenians, and then the Kurds only comprised a minority of this city's population. Based on this claim, until recent years, the Kurds did not reside in the city but more in the villages and surrounding areas, and the unprecedented increase in the number of Kurds in this city is the result of a political project designed by Kurdish nationalist political groups and currents, the ultimate goal of which is to change the ethnic demography of this city and to 'Kurdistanise' it. The Kurds, in response, say that this city, in most historical periods, has been a Kurdish-inhabited city, and in contemporary history, the process of the decrease in the Kurdish population in this city only began after the defeat of the Democrat Party of Azarbaijan and the dissolution of the Republic of Kurdistan in Mahabad, and continued until the time of the 1979 Revolution. The Kurds also attribute the significant increase in the Kurdish population in the city of Urmia in recent years to the unplanned growth of the process of migration from village to city in the few decades after the 1979 Revolution, and ultimately, they call Urmia a multicultural and multinational city, and in some cases, a Kurdish city… In recent years, and after the diversification of communication media, the insistence of the media, parties, and political activists on both sides to present the city of Urmia as solely Kurdish or Turkish has increased the intensity of mutual tensions. Urmia is seen in the hypothetical maps of both Greater Kurdistan and Greater Azerbaijan. One side calls this city a Kurdish city in its news and reports, and the other side introduces it as a solely Turkish city and considers the resident Kurds as uninvited guests who must leave this city' (Alavi, 1395).

***Mohammad Gol Kahrazeh, Faculty Member of Zahedan University, Sistan and Balochestan***

*I ask why Iran is helping Syria and Iraq when we are dying of hunger? [They say] we have to go beyond Iran's borders for our own security. Were it not for Iran's support to Iraq and Syria, we would be fighting in Khuzestan now or in neighbouring provinces!*



*Image 3-7. Interview with Meysam Sefidkhosh*

***Saman Rahnama, economic activist and member of the city council, Mahabad, West Azerbaijan***
*Why should a non-Azeri youth come to teach us? With all these young talents that we have.*

Thus, the discussion of authenticity and territorial ownership, and the issue of which ethnic group constitutes the original natives of each part of the soil and territory of Iran, has become a contentious issue in the last few decades. The findings also show that both the Kurdish and Turkish peoples are extremely sensitive about employment, and especially about the employment of teachers from the other ethnic group in their region. This is because they believe that apart from this situation harming their local economy and the presence of these individuals preventing the employment of local forces, they also have the perception that these actions harm their cultural and identitarian fabric.

## The Cross-Border Distribution of Ethnic Groups

A border is a concept that takes the form of determining the lines separating the territory of two countries, and border lines are conventional lines that are specified on the ground in order to define a political unit. These lines, while determining the limits of the territory of a government, are also determinative of the authorities of the state of that government. Therefore, borders are among the

main and important topics of political geography (Mirheydar, 1380: 161).

Iran is a country that has a common land and water border with fifteen countries. Of the country's thirty-one provinces, eighteen are in border regions and thirteen are in central regions. About 50 percent of the country's area and 49 percent of its population belong to the border regions. Along the existing border strip, native people reside. Studies show that in some border regions, since distant pasts, due to ecological homogeneity, social characteristics, and ethnic affinity with the people on the other side of the borders, they meet their needs through the exchange of goods with individuals on the other side of the borders (Sheikh Attar, 1382: 28).

***Mohammad Taghi Sheikhi, Lecturer in Demography, Al-Zahra University, Tehran***
*We live in a pluralistic world; thus ethnicity should not be a barrier for us. For a more robust economy and progress, we must all collaborate without discrimination.*

The spatial-geographical structure of the Iranian nation has emerged from two interconnected parts: central and peripheral. The peripheral part, unlike the dense and homogeneous central part, is fragmented and includes a diverse collection of cultural and ethnic groups. In the peripheral part, the ethnic groups of Azeri, Kurd, Arab, Baloch, and Turkmen reside, and the Sunni religious minority, with its two branches of Hanafi and Shafi'i, is scattered in the peripheral space of the country (Hafez-Nia, 1381: 149). The importance of the settlement of ethnic groups in the country's peripheral geography and its borders is made twofold by the cross-border extension of the ethnic fabric and population. A look at the country's borders from Azerbaijan to Balochestan shows that Iran's territorial borders with most neighbouring countries are conventional lines that have divided ethnic lands. The country of Azerbaijan in the vicinity of the northwestern borders, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the vicinity of the western border, the province of Balochistan in the vicinity of the province of Sistan and Balochestan, and the Arab areas of Iraq in the vicinity of the borders of Khuzestan well illustrate this reality.[1] Perhaps few other territorial geopolitics can be found that so validate

1. This issue and its effects have been discussed in the second chapter of this book under the title of the geographical distribution of ethnic groups.

Burton's argument that: 'if political geography does not place the existence and role of ethnic groups in the first rank, it will be nothing but an empty framework and a pictureless canvas, because ethnic groups, peoples, and nations are the true actors of history and the creators and animators of states' (Burton, 1380: 9).

***Sadegh Sotvan, sociologist and researcher, Sistan and Balochestan***
*I was a teacher at the border for two years. When the border people went to the doctor, they thought that if you wanted to be healed, you should go to a Pakistani doctor, they even went across the border. They had no sense of convergence with the center, but this is changing and the change is palpable.*

***Karim Bakhsh Kurdi Tamandani, political-social activist, Iranshahr, Sistan and Balochistan***
*Balochistan was a united territory before the British entered the subcontinent and had a government called Kalat government which is now in Pakistan. Then when England comes, it divided this territory between Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan. Now many of our people are in Pakistan and we have a relationship with them, because it cannot be broken at all. There is this sense of kinship and ethnic and linguistic solidarity, and the Baloch people, both here and in Pakistan and Afghanistan, wish to be connected one day.*

If various ethnic groups and religious minorities are settled in the most important strategic and border areas of any country, and their social and cultural hinterland is located beyond the borders and outside the sphere of national influence and sovereignty, due to the connection and link of these ethnic groups with those outside the borders, any external challenge and crisis will easily spread inside the borders, and the state's ability to monitor these areas will be severely reduced. The findings from this research also show the continuation of the gaze of ethnic groups towards the external borders and their co-ethnic groups.

The threats arising from the border crossing through Iranian ethnic groups can be divided into three categories:

a) Centrifugal tendencies: Studies show that if the ethnic majority is in the neighbouring country and they enjoy a better (political, economic, cultural, social) position in that country, they will attract their co-religionists towards them.

b) Whenever situation 'a' is accompanied by the religious and sectarian conflict of the ethnic groups with the mass of their own country, the centrifugal tendency will be more severe (Karimipour, 1379).

c) The greater the class differences of the minority ethnic group with the mass of the people of their own country, or the smaller the share they have of political-economic power, or even if they feel that they have been wronged in these respects, the centrifugal tendency becomes more severe and can even lead to armed confrontation (Leak, 1381).

***A young Kormaji Kurdish boy, studying sociology student at Ferdowsi University***
*Ethnicity is important to me, but humanity is more important. Now my roommate is an Iraqi Arab, my friend from Ardabil and we have friendly relations.*

***A housewife, 58 years old, Tabriz***
*Along with the Turkish Turks, I frequently interacted with the Kurds. Personally, I adore every living thing. However, Turks living outside of Iran have a much weaker culture. Do not rely on the image of these movies because women are severely abused in Turkey, despite the fact that there is more freedom there. Azerbaijan is similar to how we formerly were. They are just like our ancestors; for instance, the bride washes the feet of her father-in-law.*

The settlement of various ethnic groups in border regions and adjacent to their co-linguistic countries creates a suitable ground for the occurrence of ethnic crises in the border points. The Azeris, among the three elements of language, ethnicity, and religion, are congruent with the other side of the border in terms of language, ethnicity, and religion, and are only congruent with the centre in terms of religion. Kurdistan differs from the central points in the three elements of ethnicity, language, and to some extent religion, and is common with the other side of the border. The Balochestan of Iran and Pakistan are congruent with each other in the three elements of religion, language, and ethnicity. Ahmadipour believes: 'From a social approach, there are centrifugal forces in Iran (especially on the peripheries of the borders) that can be raised as crisis-prone centres in emergency situations' (Ahmadpouri, 1376: 45). The policy of the rulers of Iran

against the identity-seeking movements of various ethnic groups has mainly been of a severely coercive nature and has ended with suppression and execution. According to the data of this research, this has caused rebellion to always start from one point and continue in other points, and this process has had detrimental effects in the fields of political security, political legitimacy, social participation, and so on, and in some cases, has also resulted in crises. One of the conclusions that can be drawn is that the participants of this research recommend to the rulers that after the end of a protest process, they should listen to the demands of the identity groups that have naturally risen from the heart of society, because many of these demands are of a civil nature and are solvable through dialogue. In other words, they expand the capacities for political acceptance and the aspects of cultural pluralism, which greatly enhances the possibility of benefiting from all social potentials and human resources.

> ***Ashkan Zarei, cultural and heritage activist and writer, Khuzestan***
> *At the age of eighteen, I went on stage with Baku fiddle player Abel Elif. Our languages was so similar that we went on stage without much rehearsing. I am 90% connected to Baku Azeri. During the Azerbaijan Music Festival, we postpone every work to see what our friends in the other Azerbaijan doing.*

The results of some scientific research on the distribution of ethnic groups on both sides of the political borders of Iran and neighbouring countries corroborate the findings of this field research. A university study in this regard concludes: 'In the border regions of Iran where various ethnic groups reside, it seems that these ethnic groups can be both a source of challenges and provide opportunities for the growth and development of the country and be considered a source of power. In some countries that have severe regional cleavages, with the settlement of various ethnic groups in the peripheral parts of the country, the degree of divergence and the coefficient of vulnerability increases. It seems that spatially, as one moves away from the central part of the country towards the border areas, underdevelopment is clearly observed, which can strengthen the element of divergence in the border regions' (Pishgahifard & Omidi Avoj, 1388: 67).

***Amin Shirzadi, poet and songwriter, Kermanshah***
*My friend from Kubani, Osman Ravan, is now in Los Angeles. He used my poems about the Kermanshah earthquake and held a concert and donated the proceeds to the earthquake victims of Kermanshah.*

Contrary to the high cultural affinity among co-ethnics living in neighbouring countries, what is noteworthy among Iranian ethnic groups is a relative sense of distinction alongside cultural affinity with their co-ethnics outside the geographical expanse of Iran. The border ethnic groups of Iran, despite accepting their cultural commonalities with their co-ethnics outside the border, are convinced of their own specific ethnic distinctiveness within Iranian society and, in some cases (as in the interview above), of its superiority.

The cultural aspects of ethnicities and their literary and artistic spheres, such as folkloric literature, poetry, and literature, are among the subjects that link the co-ethnic border groups, which is effective in social cohesion and political satisfaction. Since the history of these ethnic groups is related to one territorial geography, and it was only in the modern era and the treaties of the Qajar kings, as well as the pacts after the world wars, that a territorial border was created between these ethnic groups, most of them have a common fabric in these cultural fields, and this issue is today considered one of the factors that links them. Consequently, attention to this cultural-social continuity is very important for the continuation of political legitimacy.

Borders can also serve as a connecting bridge, providing a basis for interactions and links between the two sides of the border. Cross-border trade exchanges are one of the main indicators in establishing relations between neighbouring countries and also for the livelihood of the border-dwelling people. Through this, the people living in the border areas of neighbouring countries can use common opportunities and resources alongside each other and with each other. This can lead to the continuation and stability of friendship and understanding between the parties in stabilising the border-dwelling population, providing job opportunities, creating security, economic prosperity, and the formation of a type of comparative advantage in the border regions. Despite the capacities and capabilities existing in the border regions, it must be said that one of the main characteristics of these regions is their distance from the centre of the country.

The inability to manage the economy in line with these border conditions has led to the spread of economic harms such as smuggling and informal jobs. Therefore, from an economic point of view, the borders, apart from providing the grounds for harming the country's domestic production with the entry of smuggled goods and striking a blow to the national economy, on the other hand, the performance of these economic exchanges has financial benefits for the people of the border regions. This is especially true in a situation where the central power does not have many financial and economic facilities on the periphery of the country, and there are no large or small-scale industries where the youth of the ethnic groups can be employed. In these regions, poverty is more intense relative to the centre of the country, and in sum, the existence of these border exchanges in the form of official markets or informal porterage (kulbari) has financial benefits for them. Of course, according to the findings, in the meantime, and especially in the last one or two years, severe restrictions have been imposed against this type of cross-border trade.

Since the past, the trade of nations and the (cross-border) economy have been considered an opportunity in the world, and a country that cannot make optimal use of this opportunity will surely see its economic opportunities turn into insoluble threats. Solving economic problems with a traditional attitude, in addition to wasting economic capabilities, also destroys intergenerational capabilities and will entail the possibility of an economic deadlock in the fields of modern production, and especially new aspects such as tourism, etc. Its consequences, in addition to the spread of state economic corruption, will appear among the people in the form of unemployment and the bankruptcy of producers and other economic actors.

***Mohammad Ehsani, documentary filmmaker, Tabriz, East Azerbaijan***

*In the border areas, we see general poverty. There is poverty also in Tehran, but it is not general as poverty in the peripheral regions of the country.*

***Qutbuddin Sadeghi, screenwriter and theatre director, Kurdistan***
*Because there are no big factories in Kurdistan, the main income of the people is through the same local bazaars that the Kolberi has created . . . which the government does not tolerate either. I do not understand why they put so much pressure. There are no industries, no agriculture, so what should the people do?*

## The Legacy of Iranian Identity: A Factor of Cohesion or Division

The prevailing narrative of Iranian identity in the contemporary period, which is the product of a homogenising and romantic nationalist discourse, is founded on two fundamental characteristics: 'anti-non-Iranianism' and 'Persian-centrism.' These characteristics have led to the formation, promotion, and dominance of a reading of Iranian historical identity that has always nurtured within it elements of self-superiority and a superiority complex, pride in the historical past, extreme nostalgia, other-hatred, archaism, and a tendency towards a supra-historical view of the Iranian nation and nationality. For many decades, using the facilities of propaganda and educational institutions, it has engaged in culture-building in this regard, to the extent that these indicators have been largely internalised at the societal level and have taken the form of public beliefs. Therefore, national identity, as a discursive construct, given its central components and elements, from the perspective of how it deals with the 'other' at the external level and social cohesion internally, has often had divergent and divisive functions. The findings of the aforementioned research also confirm such a perception of the intersubjective image of Iranian identity among the interviewees. The Iranian superiority complex, historical pride, identity nostalgia, and a critique of archaism are the main concepts extracted from the interviews, which, except for cases of the critique of archaism, are mostly characterised by other-hating, self-aggrandising, past-oriented, and nostalgic attitudes. In the following, each of these concepts will be analysed and explained.

## The Iranian Superiority Complex

Self-superiority, a superiority complex, and self-aggrandisement are concepts

from the science of psychology that entered this knowledge in the early twentieth century through Alfred Adler as part of individual psychology. According to this theory, all individuals, in their first experiences in the course of comparing themselves with the surrounding world, suffer from feelings of weakness and helplessness. When an individual cannot overcome their feeling of inferiority, this feeling is strengthened and intensified, leading to the formation of an inferiority complex. Adler defines this situation as an inability to solve life's problems. In his view, it is possible for an individual, in response to their feeling of inferiority, to develop a tendency towards overcompensation and to develop a superiority complex. In this state, the individual has a tendency towards arrogance and domination and develops an exaggerated image of their abilities and achievements (Schultz, 1384: 144-145). This term later entered the social sciences and sociology and was used in the interpretation and analysis of the collective behaviour of ethnic groups, nations, and various communities.

Each of Iran's neighbouring nations, such as the Arabs, Turks, Afghans, and others, has its own specific historical background and cultural past. Among them, however, Iranians have always considered their own past to be more golden than theirs and believe in the superiority of the people of the land of Iran over the other peoples of neighbouring countries. The findings from this research also confirm this type of sense of superiority.

> ***Mahmoud Ghaderi Mokri, Cartoonist, Mahabad, West Azerbaijan***
> *Naturally, there are prejudices, we are prejudiced about Islam and Sunni and being Iranian and a member of the Kurdish group.*

In Iranian society, narcissism has historical roots and, in some cases, has also manifested in the unethical forms of a superiority complex and self-aggrandisement, to the extent that by referring to historical texts, literature books, the speeches and writings of some politicians and intellectuals, and the virtual space, this social and cultural anomaly can be observed. Abdolreza Navaseri, a researcher of contemporary Iranian history, in his book A Pathology of Iranian Romantic Nationalism: Past-Orientation, Narcissism, Other-Hatred, Language-Centrism, counts narcissism and a superiority complex among the main components of Iranian behaviour and personality. In this research work, from a

pathological perspective, he examines its origins, the causes of its emergence, and the factors that strengthen it, and considers the main source of the promotion and strengthening of these attitudes in the contemporary period to be Iranian romantic nationalism. The author believes that the transformation of the past and history into an ideological narrative, self-aggrandisement, the introduction of the 'Arab-Turk' element as the 'other' of Iranians, and the transformation of language into an identitarian weapon are among the diseases afflicting this discourse (Navaseri, 1402). The findings of this research also indicate the existence of a historical neurosis among ethnic and religious groups.

The scope of this issue is so wide that sometimes state politicians also fall into its vortex and, when commenting on political, economic, and social issues, prescribe healing remedies for the entire world. The claims of Iran's political leaders in the contemporary era at the regional and global level, and their relations with many countries, well illustrate this attitude. As Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi once said to a Western journalist: 'Do not forget that all those things that you (the West) have today, we taught you three thousand years ago' (Navaseri, 2015). And in the era of the Islamic Republic, one of the explicit ideologies of the regime has been the claim to leadership of the oppressed of the world, the mission of establishing a world revolution, and the establishment of justice in the world. Some manifestations of this have appeared in the political behaviours and actions of high-ranking Iranian politicians, as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president of the ninth and tenth governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, spoke of global management and claimed that 'more than 100 world politicians, in conversation with me, expressed this expectation, that is, the management of the world, and they say that Iran has the potential to manage the world' (Ahmadinejad: World politicians expected me to manage the world, 2013).

The Iranian sense of superiority also extends into the domains of race and colour, and by comparing their own race with that of other peoples, and especially their Arab, Turk, and Afghan neighbours, and other nations, they consider themselves superior and greater than them. Dr Mohammad Al-Sulami, a professor of Persian literature, in a critical essay entitled 'The Shadow of Racial Superiority over Iran's Policy towards the Arabs,' addresses the main motives and historical roots of this behaviour towards the Arabs of the Persian Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, and has enumerated it as one of the most prominent aspects of the behaviour of Iranian politicians during the Pahlavi and Islamic Republic eras (Al-Sulami,

1399). Faraj Sarkohi, a writer and literary and cultural critic, also in a discourse entitled 'A Critique of the Iranian Mentality: Self-Deprecation before Europeans and Americans and Self-Aggrandisement before Neighbours,' while emphasizing the lack of field research to refute or prove this hypothesis, points out that its believers not only cite various and repeated examples of speech and action arising from this mentality and psychology in government institutions and among various strata of the people, but also name the silence of many Iranian intellectuals in the face of such dealings, the presence of the illusion of Iranian superiority in many past and contemporary literary and artistic works, the prevalence of derogatory jokes against minorities and immigrants, the unwritten prohibition on the entry of Afghan and Iraqi immigrants into the network of family and friendship relations, and the common image of the Afghan, Arab, and Turk in the collective consciousness of the majority as reasons to confirm their interpretation. He continues about the context of the emergence of these behaviours and attitudes: 'The feeling of inferiority before the powerful and self-aggrandisement before the weak are among the pathological psychological manifestations of man in societies where despotism is institutionalised in its political and social structure and in its culture and history. Humiliation and defeat in reality can lead to the illusion of superiority over the victors in the collective mentality and psyche… But the explanation of self-aggrandisement before neighbours in the dominant culture of Iran is not as easy to explain as their self-belittling before Europeans and Americans, because in this phenomenon, vague imaginations have taken the place of clear indicators. Iranians, in their long history, have been defeated and humiliated in most wars by their Arab, Turk, and Afghan neighbours. Humiliation and defeat in reality can lead to the illusion of superiority over the victors in the collective mentality and psyche.' Sarkohi, in explaining the historical roots of the self-superiority behaviour, writes: 'The propaganda and promotion of the illusion of the superiority of Iranians over Turks and Arabs is one of the main themes of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. The Shahnameh was created at a time when the Arabs had shattered the Sassanian empire and Arab caliphs ruled over one part of Iran and Turkic dynasties over another part' (Sarkohi, 2022).

***Sardar Kayani, Sistani poet and popular activist, Zabul, Sistan and Balochistan***

*When the Arabs came to the east of Iran and saw the Zagros region, they said, 'Wonderful gardens and trees under which there is a flowing river.' Arabs who came from Arabia and did not understand what a tree is at all and has seen nothing but dust and storms, they saw this place as paradise... They passed Zagros and saw that Iranians have amazingly beautiful women, they said that these are the nymphs as described in the Quran. They took Iranian women,.... they took everything... This is so annoying. An Iranian woman, who has thousands of civilisations, should be taken by the hand of an Arab lizard-eater, is it really true? The daughter of Yazdgerd III, the king of the world, will be captured by an Arab and taken away?!*



*Image 3-8. Interview with Sardar Kiani*

***Rasul Nami, carpet designer, Tabriz***

*In radio and television series, low-minded and backward characters usually have a Turkish accent or, for example, are stupid Gilak people. This is an insult and ridicule.*

***Zahra Khazaal, entrepreneur and tourism activist, Abadan, Khuzestan***

*Iraqi money is impure and forbidden. Every child understands what this means.*

***Hassan Behdad, Director of Cultural Heritage, Hamidiyeh, Khuzestan***
*When an Arab gives an opinion, he is severely confronted and asked if he is Arabic or Iranian. This is a very bad question. I am an Iranian Arab. He wants to say you do not belong here and you have come here. He wants to say that you have no rights. This has its effects in the long run.*

***Mehdi Hamidi Shafiq, political activist from East Azerbaijan***
*Turks are stupid stereotypes on the radio. We are in a racist society. We are racist in the works of such great literary figures as Hedayat and Al-Ahmad, and the Arabs have been insulted frequently in these works.*

The Iranian superiority complex sometimes becomes so extreme that clear aspects of racism are observable in it. Given the historical experiences and contemporary nationalist discourses, it has mostly been Arabs, and in some cases Turks, who have been the target of this racist attitude, to the extent that even the coming to power of the Islamic Republic not only did not lead to the elimination of this attitude but in some cases also fanned its incitement and encouragement. The insulting title 'lizard-eating Arabs,' which has its roots in verses attributed to Ferdowsi's Shahnameh,[1] is one of the common epithets that is applied to Arabs in the public parlance. Of course, this attitude is not limited to ordinary people but is primarily rooted in discourses whose foundation was laid by Iranian elites, intellectuals, and men of letters. Naser Fakouhi, in the discourse 'The Intellectual as a Process,' with a pathological look at the phenomenon of anti-Arabism among Iranian intellectuals, has addressed this issue and says in this regard: 'The chauvinistic nationalist discourse in Iran, which is intensely racist, archaistic,

1. 'From drinking camel's milk and eating lizards / The Arab has reached such a state / That he desires the Kayanian throne / Fie upon you, O turning sphere, fie.' Regarding the authenticity of these verses, which are brought from the mouth of Rostam Farrokhzad, the commander of the Sassanian army, in condemnation of the Arab attack on Iran, there are different views. Some literary experts believe that these verses are not Ferdowsi's and are forgeries, some consider them his and believe that they are recorded in old manuscripts, and another group believes these verses are from another work called the Qesseh-ye Hamzeh. Jafari, Siavash, & Radfar, Abolghasem. (1391). 'A Study of Verses from the Shahnameh in the Edition of Jalal Khaleghi-Motlagh.' Kuhannameh-ye Adab-e Parsi, 3(2), 49-66.

and far from reason… easily takes on an ‘anti-Arab’ tone and approach without being aware that in Iran we have a population of several million Arabs who are our compatriots. A group of Iranian intellectuals take anti-Arab and historical nationalist positions and advance the discussion based on the centrality of central Iran' (Mirmiri, 2013: 7). Traces of this phenomenon can also be found in the official policy of the ruling establishment. According to Sadegh Zibakalam, 'whenever our Arab neighbours in the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait take a position against Iran, if you pay attention, you will see that the reaction of the officials of the Islamic Republic, while it is political, is more racial than political. What does that mean? It means, for example, our foreign ministry spokesman, or our foreign minister, or our Friday prayer imams, our speaker of parliament, and so on, react in a way that the smell of contempt comes out of their words' (Zare, 1390).

Another dimension of anti-Arabism in Iran is the focus on the Arab element as the Iranian ‘other’, while Arabs constitute a significant part of the ethnic and demographic composition of this land. Joya Blondel Saad, in the book Anti-Arabism in Contemporary Iranian Literature, writes about this: 'Iranianness has been the main theme of Persian literature from the beginning. Some Iranian writers, in order to find the concept of Iranian individuality and to define Iran as a nation and themselves as Iranians, take refuge in the alienating image of the Arab. They place the alien Arab against Iranian individuality, and for some others, racial and linguistic differences are considered, and some others, in addition to that, also calculate religious, historical, and cultural differences' (Blondel Saad, 1382: 161). This aspect of othering the Arabs was also present in the discourse of the interviewees.

Anti-Turkism is another aspect of ethnic-national discrimination in Iran, which often appears in the form of language racism. This type of racism is exercised through the imposition of one’s own language on others and also through the prohibition and contempt of the language of others. In this method, the language of the majority of the people is officially banned in administrative centres and state institutions. Another part of language racism is dialectism or dialect-worship. The normalisation of the 'dominant dialect' is one of the mechanisms through which the ruling group imposes its psychological, as well as economic and cultural, dominance. The hegemonic discourse promotes dialectism in such a way that if you do not speak with the dominant dialect in society, you are

considered illiterate, your level of knowledge is called into question, and your human personality is denigrated (Asgharzadeh, 2011).

Of course, this issue should not be overlooked that discrimination within Iranian society is not limited solely to racial and linguistic boundaries but is always reproduced in multiple forms and at multiple levels. Therefore, in the shadow of the macro-discrimination of Persian-centrism, which is built on the distinction and preference given to the cultural and identitarian elements of the Persian ethnicity and the Persian language over the identity and language of other ethnic groups, numerous forms of discrimination and ethnic and religious superiority complexes are also always current and flowing in the heart of social relations. The reflection of these attitudes can be clearly observed in the inter-ethnic jokes and humour, and even between sects and ritual schools of thought.

## Historical Pride

The term tafākhur means to take pride in, to glory in, and to boast to one another. It occurs when an individual verbalises something they consider to be a mark of their own perfection (Naraqi, 1378: 304). When this vainglory and boasting about the historical past of an ethnic group or a nation manifests in the form of collective behaviour and feeling among the members of that group, it is called historical pride. This pride stems from an exaggerated and epic perception of turning points in the historical past of an ethnic group, nation, or other collective, which is predominantly accompanied by projective readings. As such, historical pride is founded upon passeism. Passeism can be understood, to an extent, as the tendency to value what has been arbitrarily and authoritatively named 'the past,' which is generally a very confused mixture of reality and fantasy, and even conscious or unconscious manipulations of past events and mentalities. This is done with the intention of destroying the achievements of the present and, especially, with the intention of influencing the future-shaping processes of a culture, in order to push them towards being formed in the moulds of a specific ideology.

Therefore, just as the processes of 'experience,' 'memory,' and even nostalgia can be useful for building the future of a culture at its various literary, psychological, or social levels and dimensions, passeism generally has a negative impact. This is because it replaces healthy and spontaneous processes arising from the real needs of human beings and their good nature with self-serving processes for

acquiring power or wealth. To this end, it severely manipulates the structures of imagination and memory in order to impose its own ideological beliefs upon them. Two well-known examples of passeism can be observed in some forms of 'traditionalism' and 'nationalism.' There is a type of traditionalism that is a form of passeism and past-imagining, which engages in sanctification and the drawing of a fantastical image of traditions. This is whilst we know that some traditions were merely the customary structures of a society and, in themselves, possess neither intrinsic value nor are they defensible in all cases (Fakouhi, 1395: 16).

Iranian historical pride is founded on a type of archaistic passeism, coupled with the highlighting of certain cultural and literary characteristics of Iran throughout history. Archaism, relying on the Aryan race, in an exaggerated and mythologised portrayal, presents the history of ancient Iran as a glorious era of civilisation and culture, the achievements of which are considered a source of pride to this day. The attribution of the first charter of human rights to Cyrus the Achaemenid, the supra-historical representation of the political and administrative system of ancient Iran during the Achaemenid[1] and Sassanian periods, and the emphasis on the preservation and endurance of Iranian culture, language, and customs over thousands of years—which they consider a symbol of the steadfastness and invincibility of the foundations of Iran's history—are some of the elements of the historical pride of the land of Iran, which are collectively based on the three axes of the political idea of Iranshahr, the Persian language, and Iranian civilisation. This attitude has led to a belief in the invincibility of Iranian culture, the superiority of Iran and Iranians over other ethnic groups and nations, and the preservation of integrity and unity.

1. The Cyrus Cylinder is one of the cylinders that were written in ancient times by order of the king and by the courtiers. Attributing a human rights charter status to this work was a political ruse and propaganda that was fabricated and elaborated during the Pahlavi monarchy following the commemoration of the 2,500-year celebrations of Persepolis. With the cooperation of U Thant, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, it was registered as the 'Ancient Declaration of Human Rights.' For more information, see: Sotoudeh, Siamak, (2011), The Actors of the Age of Civilisation: Genghis, Muhammad, Cyrus, USA: Internet Publishing.

***Karimbakhsh Kurdi Tamandani, socio-political activist, Iranshahr, Sistan and Balochestan***
*According to the Charter of Cyrus, everyone with an Iranian national identity, regardless of religion, creed, or race, must be treated equally. The message 'death to a country' on our missiles draws global attention to us, isolates us, and portrays us as an aggressive nation, but we do not have a history of such hostility. A culture and civilisation that educated the world about freedom existed in our history. The Human Rights Charter was initially drafted by our nation.*

Mohammad Sanati, in a critical essay entitled 'Iranian Identity and Our Historical Memory,' from the perspective of historical collective psychology, critiques the ahistoricism and past-gazing of Iranians. He says in this regard: 'This way of looking at history was a defence against the feelings of inferiority that we had during the Qajar period when faced with the amazing progress of Western societies and comparing it with the misery and destitution, poverty and illiteracy, and disease and ruin of our own country. This experience was much more painful for our intellectuals, and in some of them, it has been repaired with a narcissistic compensation. This is a phenomenon that perhaps has a precedent in other fallen empires and unseated dynasties. Instead of accepting reality and making a realistic and rational effort to deal with failure in order to rise and progress—with the same myth-thinking prevalent among the common people—we engage in the reproduction of a mythical history. It is as if, in line with the 'striving for superiority' of the Iranians that was praised by Nietzsche, we are not only superior in terms of world conquest, imperial expansion, and the art of war, but also in religiosity and morality on the one hand, and in all sciences and arts on the other, we are the foremost of all peoples' (Sanati, 1391). The efforts of various ethnic groups to appropriate national honours and to recount ethnic feats of arms to prove them are clear examples of this kind of thinking.

***Sardar Kiani, Sistani poet and public activist, Zabul, Sistan and Balochestan***
*If there was no Sistan, you would not be able to speak your mother tongue today. Why? Because the Arabs came and took over the whole world. If Yaghub Leith had not left Sistan and taken them out of Iran, you and I would not have spoken Persian today.*

This incomplete and incorrect historical information, and the pride influenced by it, speaks of a fabricated human rights charter of Cyrus, of the lofty sciences and arts and the Iranian scientists, philosophers, men of letters, and poets to whom humanity is indebted, and of individual freedoms and social justice and equality. It is claimed that, unlike the countries of the region, no instance of slavery and human exploitation can be found in the history of Iran.

***Mukhtar Haghighat, manager of the Shadow Poetry and Literature Association, Zahedan, Sistan and Balochestan***
*The original Iranians were Zoroastrians who did not come under Arab rule and did not accept Arab culture. Zarathustra promoted monotheism 3,700 years ago. Unfortunately, some people think that they are fire-worshippers. The fire temples were for worship. Fire is a symbol of light and purity. Two hundred years after Zarathustra, Abraham, the prophet came from the nation of Israel. This means that there was no prophet before him and we are the first people on the planet to accept monotheism, and this makes us proud as Iranians.*

But the interesting point is that of this glorious history that we claim, there is no recorded and written work about it anywhere. Although we acquired script and writing relatively early, it seems, and is highly probable, that we did not have the interest in writing that the peoples of Ionia and Athens had. Otherwise, our history would not have been written solely by foreign historians like Herodotus, Xenophon, and others. It seems we were more preoccupied with war, war preparations, conquest, and imperial expansion,[1] and they wrote the history

1. Essentially, the ancient era was the era of the emergence of mighty powers and their wars and plunder for the purpose of expanding their power and territory. These kingdoms all arose

of these events. Of course, we have always heard that all our libraries were burned by the Arabs and, before them, by Alexander. But it seems unlikely that not even one book or one clay tablet on the subject of sciences and arts would have remained among the thousands of tablets that were discovered, if we had been a people infatuated with knowledge. People infatuated with knowledge go everywhere with books and writing; they hold books very dear, and life has no meaning for them without books and writing. We know that many Persians went to India without taking a single history book or scientific book with them! And if there was an oral culture, which there was, their knowledge should still have been transmitted from person to person.

In the book The Sociology of Vainglory: A Typology and Cultural Essentialism, in a sociological analysis of this behaviour, it is stated that 'the unconventional desire to acquire status is one of the cultural issues of contemporary Iran. In any society, acquiring status and prestige is among the most important social advantages that motivates individual and collective action, but this situation in today's Iran, through the course of several historical transformations, has acquired a pathological state, the manifestations of which can be recognised in various spheres of social life' (Soleimani-Fakher, 1400).

> ***Mehdi Keyvan, retired historian and lecturer at the University of Isfahan***
> *The reason for the misery of our society is that today the Persian language has lost its history and glory, that is, the language of used in the History of Bayhaqi, the language used but such literary figures as Ferdowsi and Saadi.*

It can be said that the gaze of Iranians, instead of being directed towards the future, is more focused on the historical past. A society that wants to move on the path of development must set aside this type of prejudiced view and, by eliminating the negative points in its historical background, plan more for the future and focus on it. It is in such a situation that the facilities, resources, human

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from the ruins of the democratic and communal systems of prehistory. The historical theme of this transformation was the rise of the first oppressive and powerful states and empires in human history and the establishment of the system of slavery, placing the absolute majority of humanity under the domination of absolute individual powers, and the oppressive empire of Cyrus was also one of the most important of these empires in history. (See: Sotoudeh, 2011)

capital, and potentials of a society take on a developmental orientation.

## Identity Nostalgia

The belief in the superiority of Iran and the Iranian, and the historical pride derived from it, causes Iranians to constantly express dissatisfaction with their current conditions and, in the form of a nostalgic feeling, to lament their golden past. The closest word genealogically for nostalgia is gham-e ghorbat (the sorrow of exile), meaning sorrow for the past and the desire to return to it (Ramazani, 2015: 17). A sense of regret for customs and traditions that have been eliminated from the cultural sphere of Iranians exists in most individuals of various ethnicities; a regret for cultural assets and treasures that have faded or disappeared in the tumult of history.

Nostalgia, or regret for the past, is a central concept in contemporary identity and political debates. Understanding nostalgia and its dimensions and angles in political psychological theories indicates a state of fundamental despair and self-alienation, a spatiotemporal dislocation, the appearance of a type of deprivation and longing, and an increasing desire for the past, centring on a past-oriented attitude. The symbolisation and ritualisation of the heritage of the past, delving into the past and distant ancestors and a purified world free of conflict, the appropriation of the present and future in favour of the past, the effort to recover a lost past, the pursuit of the future in an idealised past, the discovery of the nation’s golden past, and futurology in the sense of a return to a supra-real past are among the political-identitarian characteristics of nostalgia (Nazari, 1399: 201).

Just as individuals need nostalgia, they also need identity. Otherwise, their lives are in danger of perishing and meaninglessness, and for many human beings, such a situation is unbearable. Therefore, those who have nothing with which to construct nostalgia at least create nostalgia for themselves from the 'irrevocable' passage of time, and speak of a 'lost childhood' or ask, 'O youth, where are you? Fond memories!' (Ramazani, 2015: 17).

***Mohammad Ali Daneshgar, theater director from Semnan:***
*The authenticity of every Iranian is defined by their customs and traditions. We also had festivals that, unfortunately, have been eliminated — such as Mehregan and other millennia-old celebrations. But we should note that inheritance plays an important role; if I were born into a Christian family, I would become a Christian.*



*Image 3-9. Interview with Mohammad Ramazani*

***Mohammad Ehsani, documentary filmmaker, Tabriz, East Azerbaijan***
*All my thoughts and dreams go back to the stories of my childhood, which are in Turkish. Through these stories, I found my identity. The manifestations of personal and collective identity rooted in ethnicity remain with individuals of every group, even if they are geographically distant or separated from their origin.*

The nostalgic approach to past phenomena and events is accompanied by the exaggeration and sensationalising of their positive, pride-inducing, and joyous aspects. For this reason, often in an unrealistic and supra-historical view, many

of the flaws, harms, and unfortunate historical consequences are overlooked. In a re-reading of the events of contemporary Iranian history, one can point to numerous examples of individuals, events, and currents that were subjected to the most severe criticisms in their own time, and for which the people, upon their departure, may have shouted with joy and cries of freedom. Yet, subsequent generations of those same people, or even some of those same individuals in later decades, have remembered that era with a nostalgic longing. The revolutionary generation of Iran in 1979, who in later decades would remember the Pahlavi period with a nostalgic approach, are among these strata. It is in such a situation that, for example, when speaking of the era of Reza Shah, society, and especially the thinking of the youth, takes on a mass-like character. No one speaks of the negative aspects, and especially the political suffocation of that era. No one speaks of the Reza Shah despotism in its denial of the ethnic identity of various ethnic groups and tribes and its efforts to eliminate traditional manifestations and to standardise them. There is no discussion of the decision to deny the religious identity of the people and the unveiling of women. No word is uttered about the effort to settle the nomads and the attack on the black tents; instead, the focus and emphasis are solely on its positive and defensible aspects. In connection with the above nostalgic quote about the era of Reza Shah, it is worth noting that many of the elite individuals of the first Pahlavi era, such as Foroughi, Davar, Teymourtash, and others, who are referred to in this quote, fell victim to the despotic and monolithic policy of Reza Shah, to the extent that they either committed suicide, were murdered, or fell from favour and, after being cast out from politics, withdrew. [1]

1. Regarding the tale of the history-making men and architects of the first Pahlavi era, one can refer to the books on the contemporary history of Iran and the historical works of the Reza Shah period, as well as monographs on Ali-Akbar Davar, Abdolhossein Teymourtash, Nosrat-od-Dowleh Firouz, Mohammad-Ali Foroughi, and others.

***Shahin Sepanta, veterinarian, writer, and civil activist from Isfahan:***
*I have preserved the customs and traditions I inherited, but I have also added to them, such as the Sadeh or Mehregan festivals. We have tried to revive these forgotten traditions through associations and online platforms, beyond what has been commonly practiced. We should revitalise local clothing that is fading away — the attire of the Bakhtiari, Kurds, Baluchis, and all other groups. These represent entire worlds of culture; their material, colours, and the craftsmanship involved are art. Even if we do not consider the ethnic aspect, these are Iranian arts and must be preserved.*

The safeguarding of cultural elements and the effort to preserve and perpetuate them is a purposeful and specific action that seeks to adopt the best strategies and processes for the continuation of the historical culture of a nation and ethnic group by assessing the current conditions and estimating its opportunities and threats. This active strategy is fundamentally at the opposite pole from nostalgic approaches, which are mostly a mournful and regretful reaction to the past and possess a completely passive stance.

***Ali Tahmasebi, retiree, researcher and writer, Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi***
*Society needs a more modern version of Reza Shah — a Reza Shah who has a few intellectuals beside him, like Foroughi, Bahar, or Nafisi, who can guide him and help reform the society.*

In a general view, the main axes of identity nostalgia in contemporary Iran can be considered to be archaistic revivalism, nationalist fervour, romantic-racist nostalgic ideas, and the effort to purify the Persian language. The political history and identity thoughts of contemporary Iran are replete with narratives of nostalgic history-making. In general, the cycle of the emergence and appearance of nostalgic thought in Iran is not limited to the Constitutional and Pahlavi eras. The Islamic Republic period has also witnessed the emergence of nostalgic thought in the forms of traditionalism, religious democracy influenced by the

city of the Prophet, populist justice-seeking, and so on (Nazari, 1399: 218 & 229-230).

Identity nostalgia, rather than being an interactive and effective identity strategy that gives cohesion and dynamism to the construction of a collective identity by looking towards the horizons of the future, is a type of emotional and psychological reaction that seeks to soothe the pain and loss of its present in the refuge of a fabricated past.

## A Critique of Archaism

In the dominant narrative of Iranian identity, historical exaggeration and an emphasis on the glorious and magnificent historical past of Iran, which is termed archaism, is one of the prevailing perceptions of most Iranians. Archaism in the political culture of Iran means a return and an emotional and romantic inclination towards the monuments of pre-Islamic Iran or the Iranshahri elements of the Islamic era, which has been criticised from various aspects. Some criticise its romantic aspect, calling it an 'opiate nationalism,' while others criticise the neglect of the post-Islamic historical period by the archaists (Seyf-od-Dini, 1391). But beyond these points, the most fundamental critical aspect of archaism is its supra-historical and fantastical imagery, which elevates the utopia of ancient Iran to the level of an Iranian paradise lost and sees felicity in the revival of Iranian society on its foundations.

Among the various spectrums of society, there are also many individuals who do not accept the archaistic attitude and have reacted critically towards it, considering this perception to be more of an illusion and a fantasy. In this regard, Mostafa Malekian, a contemporary Iranian philosopher, states: 'One of the biggest lies that we have told to history is that we have had a great culture and civilisation. My dear friend! Culture and civilisation require proof. If the Greeks did not have a book from Plato, a book from Aristotle, or… did not have the Parthenon building, did not have the great architectures, and then said that we Greeks had a culture of such greatness that it would make all our mouths water, would we not in all fairness say to them that everything requires proof? In all fairness, from what you see in the territory of Iran, apart from a number of buildings that all historians have said were built for us by the Romans, such as Persepolis, which historians have said the Achaemenids brought a number of Roman engineers and architects and built these for us, if you put these aside,

show me one philosophical work, show me one lofty religious work, show me one artistic or mystical work. Some may say that all of these have been burned, but this must be shown by the one who says we had them. Did we have one first-rate physician before Islam? Did we have one first-rate philosopher before Islam, one first-rate artist, and so on? We do not have a hundred pages of writing that is comparable to the culture of Greece, we do not even have five pages…' (The Loud Critique of Malekian on the View of Seyyed Javad Tabatabai, 1384). This has become a long-standing habit of us Iranians that whenever a scientific or artistic discovery occurs throughout history, we try to find its equivalent somewhere in our own past.

It seems that given the disarray and lack of coherence in archaism, one cannot speak of it as a political or historical discourse. Archaism is more akin to a romantic inclination and current that has no answer for today's questions and problems and only speaks about the past. Since archaism is concerned with culture and history, the search for political concepts such as democracy, individuality, and human rights in it will be fruitless (Seyf-od-Dini, 1391).

Based on the findings of this research, it can also be said that despite all the optimism and emphasis on the historical background and the nostalgic feeling related to that era, there are some who do not hold such a view and state that the historical past of this country, like all other countries, alongside its positive aspects, also contained negative aspects.

Image 0-10: Interview with Seyyed Taha Hosseini

Another approach that existed among the interviewees was the transcendence of ethnic classifications. This means that citizens of various ethnicities do not consider belonging to an ethnicity and the values arising from it to be very effective or involved in their lives. The expression of concepts such as 'Iranian citizen' or 'global citizen' stems from this attitude.

***Mahmoud Eftekhar, retired cultural heritage officer from Tehran and Iranian art expert from Semnan:***
*Darius prays that these people remain free from falsehood, which indicates that lying existed in this land.*



*Image 3-10. Interview with Seyyed Taha Hosseini*

The subject of the historical background of the land of Iran has been discussed in many cases by political leaders and rulers (both in the historical past and in the current situation). In recent years, a number of the country's presidents have also referred to it in international forums and have considered the existence of this historical background to be a symbol of the ostentation and pride of the Iranian nation. This is while the historical age of a number of the countries of today's world does not even reach three decades, and in none of the world organisations and forums are these countries criticised for not having a historical background.

***Seyyed Taha Hosseini, building contractor (former mosque imam) from Saqqez (Kurdistan):***
*For some occasions considered national, if they do not align with my thinking, I do not show disrespect, but I also do not pay attention to them. For example, I do not recognise Nowruz as a Kurdish national day. Nowruz marks the defeat of the Median Empire. Kaveh the Blacksmith, who is presented as a Kurdish hero, along with Fereydun of the Persians, killed the last Kurdish king, and I regard that day as a day of mourning. I do not believe in unlucky numbers or such superstitions. Therefore, I do not accept a tradition that does not align with my religious thinking and historical studies. However, if people pay attention to it, I have no problem and respect their beliefs.*

Today, to show the state of power and knowledge and the degree of development of different societies, no one asks about their historical background; rather, their current situation is what is considered. This is the very point that should be heeded by the people of the land of Iran and the political leaders of the country, who should, by eliminating the discourse of the historical background of the land of Iran, think more about the present-day situation and the future of the country.

***Yahya Shariatnia, lawyer and legal advisor, Tehran***
*In fact, I have become stateless in terms of ethnicity. If ethnicity is understood as a kinship arising from language, blood, or similar ties, I have lost all of these.*

***Mohammad Jamaleddin Waji, religious researcher and sociologist from Poso, Piranshahr (West Azerbaijan):***
*Nowadays, the ideology of "Iranian" has effectively become an ideology seeking to fabricate a golden historical narrative for itself while simultaneously denying and erasing others. Sometimes, in this project, the exaggeration is such that not only non-Persian speakers but even other Iranian ethnic groups and nations are denied and labelled as "uncultured." If there were sound reasoning behind this movement, they would know that no nation is without culture, because culture is nothing but a way of life and the values of a people. Those who accuse others of being uncultured often lack an understanding of this concept, and sometimes cannot distinguish between technological progress and culture. Some Iranians, at times unknowingly, fall into the trap of a narcissistic and radical ethnocentrism, whose claims and slogans are supported by neither historical nor scientific evidence.*

## The Inefficiency of Ethnic and National Movements

Ethnic and national movements in their various forms—from civil movements committed to the ruling legal and political structures, to radical and transformative movements—are a significant part of the socio-political equation in multi-ethnic societies. The extent to which they achieve their demands and aspirations is a

function of the nature of the ruling political system and its ethnic policy strategy on the one hand, and the efficiency of the ethnic and national movements themselves on the other. Based on the propositions and concepts extracted from the interviews, this section explores the causes and reasons for the inefficiency of the policies and strategies of Iran's political and governance system in peacefully resolving the issue of ethnicities. It also examines the social contexts of ethnic activities and assesses the internal capacity of the elites and the popular base of ethnic groups in pursuing their demands.

The governments of multi-ethnic societies are frequently confronted with demands from their ethnic populations, and in response, they adopt their own specific strategies and approaches. Depending on the nature of the ruling system, this approach can range from a democratic commitment to ethnic demands to harsh and repressive crackdowns. Naturally, when this strategy is based on coercive measures and a security-oriented perspective, the space for dialogue and interaction is disregarded. Social elites will not dare to emerge, voice criticisms, or lead ethnic demands, and will be driven into isolation. The result of such a situation will be the ignorance of ethnic groups regarding their own rights and the inefficiency of their ethnic and national movements. Therefore, although the pursuit of ethnic demands in this context may lack any positive and constructive outcome, it becomes a fire smouldering beneath the ashes, liable to flare up when least expected.

This section will first describe the strategy of the Iranian political system towards ethnic groups. Based on this, two issues will be explained: the absence of leadership for their demands and the isolation of active ethnic forces—a state of affairs that results in the ethnic groups' lack of awareness of their rights. Then, based on the analysis derived from these categories, the role of the social structure of the ethnic groups studied in the inefficiency of their ethnic and national movements will be examined.

## The Strategies of the Iranian Political System

Every country, society, and social system requires institutionalised and efficient political management to regulate the relationships between its sub-systems and sub-cultures, to guarantee the cohesion and integration of society, and to positively guide and influence all the conditions in which the social system is situated, be they cultural, political, social, or economic. Since ethnic

positions and demands in multi-ethnic societies are intertwined with the national and political interests of countries, efficient political strategies for creating and maintaining social consensus in such societies are of vital necessity.

Adopting a suitable strategy in the sphere of ethnic politics requires a multidimensional and comprehensive view of the political, economic, social, and cultural fields, so that through it, the internal political and social cohesion and unity of societies can be preserved and strengthened, and ethnic and identitarian diversity can be transformed into an opportunity for the country's growth and development. However, the unjust distribution of economic opportunities and national wealth based on ethnic geography leads to a sense of discrimination and dissatisfaction in these communities and the formation of protest and demand-oriented campaigns, or at the very least, it will result in political and social divergence between the peripheral ethnic communities and the central society.

***Mojtaba Shahnoushi, sociologist and faculty member of Khorasgan University from Isfahan***
*In economics, the greater the economic disparity, the more ethnically driven activities that elevate one group over another can lead to separatist tendencies and threaten the country's territorial integrity. I support any action that preserves the country's territorial integrity, whether carried out by the government or not.*

During the first Pahlavi era, the strategy of Reza Shah's government for confronting the demands of various ethnic groups was based on the use of coercive force and suppression. During the second Pahlavi era, in the interval between September 1941 and August 1953, in the absence of an authoritative government, a spectrum of ethnic and local movements emerged to assert their rights. The establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Kurdistan were the most prominent among them, both of which ultimately faced severe suppression by the central government and collapsed.

***Jabbar Rahmani, faculty member at the Center for Cultural and Social Studies and anthropologist, Tehran***
*In foreign fields, we are culturally broke. Domestically, the set borders leave our cultural levels in crisis.*

The inability of the Pahlavi regime's identity-building policies to forge a nation according to democratic norms and the principles of citizenship led to the formation of a new category in Iran known as 'resistance movements.' The resistance and conflicts of local rulers in the Kurdish, Lur, Arab, and Baloch geographies with Reza Shah, and the ethnic movements for the autonomy of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan after his fall, can be examined within this framework. [1]

Although the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran recognised religious, linguistic, and ethnic diversity as a reality and a self-evident matter, and in Articles 13, 19, 20, 26, and others, emphasised the social and political rights of ethnic and religious minorities and the provision of equal opportunities in the economic, social, cultural, and political spheres (Keshavarz, 1396), a suitable strategy and context for the realisation of the ethnic and religious rights specified in the constitution was not provided during the Islamic Republic period either, and the principles based on the ethnic and religious rights in the constitution were largely suspended.

The main policy of the state during the first decade of the revolution regarding ethnic groups was to resort to the instrument of force and the extensive presence of the army and the Revolutionary Guards in the region. The result was the elimination of ethnic activists from the scene, the strengthening of national identity through the denial of ethnic demands, and the suppression of their press. In that era, when the country's atmosphere was intensely ideologised, no opposing voice in conflict with the thinking of the ruling current was tolerated and was nipped in the bud. In fact, during this period, the government's strategy in the face of ethnic demands was the use of coercive and military force. The outlawing of ethnic parties and currents after the victory of the 1979 Revolution and the extensive conflicts in ethnic regions were the consequences of this political strategy, which severely securitised ethnic issues in Iran from the very beginning of the Islamic Republic regime.

***Rahmatollah Hemmati, economic activist from Semnan***

*Unfortunately, the government suffers political and cultural dogmatism, does not tolerate any criticism, and does not admit reforms.*

1. For a more detailed study of the ethnic policies of the Pahlavi state, see Chapter Two of this book, under the title: "The Pahlavi State and De-ethnicisation in the Light of Homogenising Nationalism".

The second decade of the revolution and the performance of the 'Government of Reconstruction' also retained a security-oriented nature. Although the main orientation of the government in this period was defined within an economic approach, in this approach too, the Kurdish and Baloch regions had no place in the developmental and economic plans.

The coming to power of the Second of Khordad Front with the slogan 'democracy and Iran for all Iranians,' as well as the government's agreement to the creation of new political parties and groups and the granting of political and social freedoms to the extent of publishing newspapers, establishing ethnic non-governmental organisations, and so on, must be considered the first serious step by the state to deepen democracy, which resulted in a high level of participation from ethnic groups.

During the eight-year tenure of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, similar to the reconstruction period, the government was more concerned with economic matters than with social and cultural issues. In this period, as in the reconstruction period, little attention was paid to ethnic and Sunni regions.

In 2013 (2013), when power was in the hands of Hassan Rouhani, although in both election periods of 2013 and 2017 he had slogans regarding the realisation of minority rights, most ethnic groups, while acknowledging the implementation of practical and positive measures in a few matters, believe that most of those slogans remained mere slogans and no practical action was taken on them. [1]

The findings of this research show that in the last hundred years, the dominant strategy of the central government for dealing with the demands of various ethnic groups has been based on a security-oriented perspective, fear, threats, and forcible confrontation. Of course, the intensity and severity of this strategy varies with respect to different ethnic groups. For example, since the Kurds have had the most intense political activities compared to other ethnic groups in the past hundred years, their movements and actions are more closely scrutinised, and the reactions shown to their actions are more severe than for other ethnic groups.

1. For a more detailed study of the ethnic policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, see Chapter Two of this book, under the title: "The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Dominance of the Discourse of Islamic Traditionalism".

> ***Mohammad Raouf Jahani, civil activist, Marivan, Kurdistan***
> *Interestingly, if I — a Mariwani — am accused of, say, having a pistol or a weapon, and they seize it, they would probably sentence me to two to five years; but in Hamadan, if they seize the same weapon, they might only sentence someone to six months.*

The security-oriented strategy based on suppression and elimination adopted by Iran's central governments towards ethnic groups has, from different angles, had a fundamental impact on changing the form of the ethnicity issue in Iran and making it more complex. This policy, in its first step, influenced by the strategy of homogenising and exclusionary nationalism, turned the ethnic matter into a political issue and an important index in the political sociology of Iran. Then, in order to complete its nation-building project, it placed the suppression and incapacitation of ethnic movements in their various forms on its agenda. Therefore, any ethnic movement or ethnicity-based demand was considered an action in opposition to national interests and the public good, and confronting it was legitimised. This attitude prevented the emergence of civil and non-political ethnicity-based movements, and inevitably, the space for any emergence of ethnic movements within the framework of the existing legal structures was closed. For this reason, most ethnic movements, sooner or later, were met with suppression, expulsion, and elimination, or continued their activities outside the country's territorial borders as a regime-change opposition.

In another interpretation, ethnic groups believe that their feelings and emotions are usually used instrumentally. Their existence is deemed necessary at times of threat, but when it comes to implementing development plans, discrimination is practiced against them. Therefore, the formation of structures of opportunity and deprivation, or the enjoyment of public benefits and national wealth, based on ethnic characteristics is one of the established and self-evident assumptions of a wide range of ordinary people and elites in ethnic communities. It is a discrimination that the statistics and indicators of economic, administrative, and social growth and development in ethnic regions, and the feeling of relative deprivation of these groups, clearly demonstrate.

***Amir Nabavi, university lecturer and political science researcher from Tehran***

*The problem is that everyone is counted as an Iranian upon wars and problems, i.e. at the time of expenditure, and all the people must fight in a war, while some of them are considered more Iranian than others and benefit more as resources and advantages are distributed.*

## The Absence of Official Leadership for Demands

Leadership, in the sense of the ability to exert non-coercive influence over others and to motivate them towards the realisation of specific and defined goals and aspirations (Sa'atchi, 1377: 57), is, alongside ideology and organisation, one of the three pillars of collective movements and campaigns, playing an unparalleled role in the success of any movement. The leadership must act to formulate and articulate identity-based demands and to negotiate over them, and must focus on the overall effectiveness, influence, and direction of the movement.

For about a hundred years, until roughly a quarter-century ago, the leadership of the demands of the Kurdish people was primarily formed by two groups of political elites. The first group consisted of former tribal chiefs whom the central government had exiled or imprisoned during the Reza Shah period. With Reza Shah's removal from power and the transfer of government to his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, this group took full advantage of the central government's weakness and reorganised themselves. The second group comprised the new educated elites who had emerged from the late Reza Shah period and were, to some extent, a product of the government's centralist policies (Ahmadi, 1379: 241). In the post-revolutionary era, many of the leaders of the two parties, the Democratic Party of Kurdistan of Iran (KDPI) and Komala, were from the great tribes of the region. However, most of these individuals were not chosen solely on the basis of their class position; most of them also had university educations. This group, for about a decade after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, was responsible for leading a part of the Kurds' demands and, in order to achieve this, was at war with the central government and also held official negotiations with representatives of the ruling body. In all those years, the ethnic demands of this group were voiced by these two parties, sometimes in diplomatic language and

sometimes in harsh language. On the other hand, since the ruling establishment considered them counter-revolutionaries, it never responded rationally to their demands, and the expression of these demands led to clashes and conflicts between them.

> ***Ismail Mahmoudi, cultural and environmental activist, Marivan, Kurdistan***
>
> *Due to the weakness of the political discourse, our political demands are mostly expressed and presented in harsh political languages, sometimes this leads to some conflicts.*

After the complete withdrawal of these two parties from the country's territorial borders in the late 1980s, the Kurds had no leader within the country to express their demands. With the beginning of the 1990s, the Kurdish-inhabited regions were gradually emptied of the presence of these forces, and these parties were mainly based on the country's borders, in Iraqi territory, and continued their activities from there. Given the relatively strong social base of the Kurdish parties among the strata of Kurdistan's society, after the withdrawal of these parties from Iranian soil and their seeking refuge and settlement in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Islamic Republic pursued a policy of weakening, restricting, and creating internal crises in these parties, especially the KDPI, by resorting to various and multifaceted military, security, political, economic, and diplomatic strategies. One of the most prominent and effective of these policies was the resort to the assassination of the political leaders of the Kurdish parties in order to create a leadership crisis. It was a policy that overtly placed the theorist and strategist leaders of the political parties on the Islamic Republic's assassination list. The most prominent examples were the assassination of Dr Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the then Secretary-General of the KDPI, in July 1989 in Vienna, Austria (Gol, 1398), and the assassination of Dr Sadegh Sharafkandi, the then Secretary-General of the KDPI, and his companions in September 1992 in the incident known as the 'Mykonos restaurant assassinations' in Berlin, Germany (Payandeh et al., 2000: 164-167). This strategy of incapacitation and the creation of a leadership crisis in the Kurdish parties, which were the strongest and most influential party currents within the social body of Iranian Kurdistan, caused these parties to be deprived of the capacity for charismatic leadership that would have had the ability to play an effective role, even beyond the party, in

sensitive situations. As a result, some of these parties, in later years, under the influence of the leadership crisis, experienced schisms. With the death of the initial leaders of each of these two parties, alongside other factors such as the modern, less political inclinations of today's youth and other components, their role has diminished and they have become weaker. The strategy of eliminating charismatic and influential leaders and figures was at the forefront of the Islamic Republic regime's policies in confronting opposing political currents, especially ethnic parties and movements, which left a lasting impact on the leadership crisis in the opposition to the Islamic Republic.

For about three decades, the Kurdish people have had no official leadership to express their ethnic demands, other than the representatives they send to the Islamic Consultative Assembly. Of course, regarding these very individuals, most of the people, and even those who participate in their election process, do not accept them as the true representatives of their demands. This is because they believe their selection takes place through the state's rigorous vetting process, and that they are more the voice of the country's officials than the voice of the people of their constituencies.

The most important movement for the demands of the Azeri people that took on a political colour dates back to 1324 (1945) and the formation of the Azerbaijan People's Government, led by Sayyid Jafar Pishevari, which lasted for one year. With the re-empowerment of the central government and the Soviet Union's withdrawal of its support, it was defeated after a year. The same is true for the Democratic Party of Kurdistan in the same time frame.

An important factor that distinguishes Azerbaijan from Kurdistan is that the traditional-tribal elites did not play a significant political role in the political life of Azerbaijan in the post-Reza Shah era. The effort to politicise the language issue in Azerbaijan, apart from international factors, was mostly carried out by the educated elites of the urban middle class in the Caucasus and Arran. The tribal factor also existed in Azerbaijan during this period, but its political role was limited (ibid., 278). After that period, the people of the Azerbaijan region, both during the Pahlavi era and in the post-revolutionary period, have always pursued their demands by having representatives in the central structure. The reason for this is perhaps that the people of Azerbaijan were, in terms of religion, aligned with the central political apparatus. Also, the demands of the people of Azerbaijan, after the failure of the Pishevari government, did not have much of

a political colour.

Regarding the demands of the Baloch people from the perspective of their leaders, it can also be said: the role of the elites in raising ethnic awareness in this region has two fundamental differences with other ethnic groups. First, the process of the formation of an educated urban class among the middle class of Balochestan was much slower than in other ethnic groups. Second, the leadership of the political movement in Iranian Balochestan remained in the hands of the traditional elites of Baloch society (the heads of the tribes). In the post-revolutionary years, this leadership was also taken out of the hands of the tribal chiefs and was mostly placed in the hands of religious figures such as Molavi Nazar Mohammad Didgah, the representative of the people of Iranshahr in the first term of the Islamic Consultative Assembly; Molavi Abdolaziz Mollazadeh, a member of the Assembly of Experts for the Constitution (both of whom are no longer alive); and Molana Abdolhamid Esmailzehi, the Friday prayer imam of the Makki Mosque in Zahedan. Today, the acceptance of Molana Abdolhamid within Baloch society and even among the Baloch armed groups is such that in the last one or two years, during the hostage-taking of five soldiers by the armed group known as Jaish al-Adl, while the security and intelligence forces of Iran had not been able to free the hostages, he sent a delegation with a copy of the Qur'an to negotiate with this group and asked the hostage-takers to release the border guards out of respect for the people. This was met with the agreement of the aforementioned group, and four of the soldiers were released.

The final topic of discussion in this section is the position of the representatives of the city councils and the Islamic Consultative Assembly in leading the demands of the various ethnic groups. In this regard, these representatives themselves, by forming various ethnic and religious caucuses, claim to lead the demands of their co-religionists. However, the results obtained from the interviews conducted with the various ethnic groups show the opposite; in these interviews, the interviewees stated that due to the various governmental vetting processes, they do not accept these individuals as their representatives and consider them more to be aligned and in step with the policies of the central government.

***Javad Tariri, Lawyer, Writer and Political Activist from Khuzestan***

*None of these city officials can find a real vote. Sovereignty does not believe in a concept called democracy and legitimises election fraud. These people are hired by the government through violating the most basic civil rights. Politically, all Iranian ethnic groups have been severely deprived of their rights and ethnic groups have not been given the opportunity to act. In these forty years, your total turnover of power has been through 2,000 people. During the time of the Shah, there was 1000 rentier families and now 2500 families based on 2500 years of Persian history.*

In sum, the political movements in Iran, due to their ethnic and national demands and aspirations, have been organised in the form of political parties and cultural and civil institutions. However, these political parties and institutions, due to the lack of the necessary ground and conditions in the ruling political system, have faced serious challenges and have usually been transferred outside the borders of the political system. These political movements, due to their emphasis on identity-seeking and focus on the principle of the right to self-determination, have entered into conflict and sometimes civil wars with the official political systems.

Every political movement has demands and aspirations in line with its political goals, and one of the requirements for the expansion and success of movements is the existence of a strong charismatic leadership. When the interviewees were asked to name a number of their elders and role models, the Kurdish people, in the various political, literary, cultural, and scientific fields, mainly named individuals who are no longer alive today. The interviewees from the Azeri and Arab ethnic groups mainly named individuals who are not active within the geographical borders of the country and are their co-linguists in other regions of the Middle East. The Baloch-speaking ethnic group, when naming their elders, mainly named their past and present religious leaders and religious elders.

In Balochestan, if an individual within the country or a foreign media outlet wants to obtain information about the living conditions and various social, ethnic, cultural, and even environmental demands, they will go to individuals such as

Molavi Abdolhamid. In the Kurdish-inhabited regions, many researchers, and especially foreign media, still go to the Democratic and Komala parties and ask their questions of them. Since the Azeri ethnic group does not have a very organised expatriate group, one must usually go to their internal elites to obtain information about the people of this region. The same is true for the Arab ethnic group. Of course, in recent years, armed groups that claim to support the rights of the Arab people inside the country have been formed, which are sometimes consulted.

Regarding the degree of adherence of the people within each of these ethnic groups to the policies of their co-ethnic parties, no systematic research has been conducted. In recent years, strikes in the form of market closures by various guilds have taken place in different regions of Kurdistan, and a statistical correlation can be established between these protests and the position of the parties within them.

## The Isolation of Active Social and Civil Forces

Civil institutions are one of the emerging social achievements related to the movements of the late second and early third millennia. Such movements are referred to as transformative movements and are close to the tradition of libertarianism. The goal of the formation of these institutions is to achieve equal civil, social, public, civic, judicial, and other rights. These institutions, and the activism of civil actors within them, act as the vigilant eyes of society for improving the situation of vulnerable groups or the general conditions prevailing in society.

Civil society does not form in a social vacuum or by chance; rather, it is based on various interests within the structure of society. The general condition of society, the economy, the political and cultural atmosphere, or the scope of existing social harms in society are part of the realities that determine the civil sphere. Furthermore, one of the pillars of the formation of civil society is the necessary awareness of citizens, which leads to the channelling of learned awareness into the social strata. Civil society also has a history, an experience, and a historical memory that is present in the conscience and consciousness of its activists today. This institution usually forms around social cleavages and social conflicts and contradictions.

Closeness among Iranian ethnic groups and their knowledge of one another can help to reduce the existing pressures and distances. Moreover, interaction between ethnic groups reduces the intensity of ethnic neuroses and actions based on ethnocentrism.

> ***Sadegh Sotvan, sociologist and researcher, Sistan and Balochistan***
> *One of the issues, along with structural issues and problems, is that our proximity with other races is very low, and this lack of proximity makes us more nervous, more ethnocentric.*

Sadegh Sotvan, sociologist and researcher, Sistan and Balochistan

A society that witnesses a restricted political space, a lack of free access to the media, the sterilisation of election results, the suppression of protests, the disregard of parties, the impossibility of dissident activities, and also the diminishing of the activity of civil institutions, will see its forces, instead of striving for social dynamism, drawn into isolation, and the society will face a brain drain and stagnation.

In the history of Iran, since long ago, social forces, albeit in a traditional form, have been active in frameworks such as voluntary associations, guilds, popular mutual aid societies, traditional cooperatives, cultural associations like Sufi lodges (khāneqāhs), various movements, religious delegations, charitable organisations, and so on. However, the activity of social forces in a codified and organised form dates back to after the Second of Khordad in 1376 (1997). In that era, a type of dynamism took shape in the country's social structure, which in the social and political spheres of the 2000s, manifested in the form of various progressive social movements, such as the women's movements known as the One Million Signatures Campaign and the political movements of the end of this decade.

The scope of the process of movement of these forces in Iran can be divided into several parts. A part of these forces is active in the field of human-social development and the realisation of matters such as citizen awareness, local community empowerment, education and the use of collective cooperation, the training of social actors, the cultivation of the power of reason, the transformation of people into citizens, the teaching of individual independence, and the welfare and happiness of the people. Another part of these activities

takes place in the social sphere and in matters such as changing behavioural patterns in life, changing wrong values and beliefs and transforming them into what is correct and fitting. Another group of these activists has an environmental concern and is concerned with addressing matters such as air pollution, pollution of waters, rivers, and lakes, waste, improving green spaces, the living conditions of animals, and other such things. A part also has a political and legal concern and is active in matters such as improving the political atmosphere, individual and group freedoms, women's freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of dress, freedom of thought, and the rights of children and women. These forces also have the role of monitoring governmental activities and overseeing the performance of subordinate governmental institutions in order to improve the performance of their officials. In addition to these matters, confronting social harms and sometimes intervening in order to reduce or eliminate them is also a part of the collective activities that take place with a view to social anomalies and deviations.

In Iran, the attitude towards participation in the public sphere and civil organisation does not have a favourable image from the perspective of the ruling establishment and is looked at with a security-oriented approach. This is because participation and civil organisation lead to the internal networking of society, the exit of the community from a populist form, and the emergence of orderly formations based on defined legal-juridical structures and specific, transparent, legal, frameworked, and demand-based aspirations. This matter, in non-democratic or quasi-democratic and populist political systems, is in practice considered a barrier against the non-transparent tendencies and ideological intentions of the regime. Therefore, from the perspective of some, this has prevented civil and social activists from being active in the public sphere and has isolated them, trapping them in a political and security impasse.

***Jalal Jalalizadeh, religious activist, lecturer at the University of Tehran, former member of parliament, Sanandaj***
*When the general secretary of the largest party is not approved to become a candidate in parliamentary elections, can this really revive the hope of political activism in the hearts of young people?*

***Payam Dorfeshan, a basic lawyer and a civil activist from Tehran***
*It is a fact that we are losing a lot of our important knowledge under the influence of the current media. You examine the myths of the modern world and the traits that have led to their mythic status. This substitution of abhorrent values for ones founded on profound human conceptions is a loss. How much does a teenager today use proverbs or poems in his or her language?*

***Amir Sajjadi, History teacher, Saqqez, Kurdistan***
*I was the editor of Rajan biweekly for nine months. I left it because of the pressure. I participated in the 2013 council elections; In the first stage, I was rejected on charges of belonging to an illegal group!*

The state, through various means, tries to impose restrictions on social forces and activists. One of these restrictions relates to the field of media. The media, as the fourth estate of democracy, is one of the important tools for social activists and civil institutions in advancing their goals. However, some individuals refer to them as obstacles to awareness and tools of de-valuation.

In Iran, the audio and visual media are considered state and national, and in this field, the private sector is not much allowed to operate. In the field of the press, too, civil institutions, in order to carry out their activities, need to obtain a license from the government, and after that, their field of activity is regularly monitored (The Law on Press and Media). The next area of the state's confrontation with the activity of civil institutions is to incapacitate them in terms of having reference personalities and influential civil activists. Unfortunately, the security apparatuses try to confront, through the reference and influential personalities of civil society and their symbolic role in shaping public opinion, in the moral, cultural, or political fields, and with special sensitivity, they monitor the elites and political, civil, and cultural personalities and independent actors.

The statesmen of the Islamic Republic tried to restrict civil institutions and force them into silence and passivity, oblivious to the fact that the complexities of social issues are such that they suddenly appear in the form of critical phenomena and disrupt the desired social order of the ruling establishment. In

this situation, the officials, instead of looking inward and correcting their own mistakes, in a closed cycle, look for an external factor to blame someone else. The existing situation in the last decade can be considered a clear example of this claim, where almost every day we witness gatherings and protest movements by a group of people in different parts of the country.

Social forces have a great deal of capacity and potential that government officials can use to improve social conditions. In the last decade, with the occurrence of incidents such as the earthquake in the Azeri-inhabited regions of Varzaqan or Sarpol-e Zahab in Kermanshah, the fire at the Plasco building in Tehran, or the fires in the trees and forests of the western regions of the country, we witnessed a part of the capabilities of these forces in resolving crises. These social forces brought a considerable volume of skills, abilities, and resources to the field. This capacity and potential indicates the existence of a vast indigenous and specialised knowledge in these forces, which, by paying attention to and strengthening them in normal times, can be duly utilised.

Iranian society is a society of ethnic and religious cleavages, great tensions, and impasses that, in isolation, eat away at the soul of society like a canker and make it weak and listless from within. In many cases, having an ethnic and religious identity basis has prevented the elites and active forces of these groups from achieving important and key positions. In the last few years, various videos of the youth of these identity groups have been circulated in the virtual space, who, despite having higher education and various domestic and foreign scientific and research articles, have been engaged in jobs such as porterage (kulbari), factory work, street vending, and cleaning, which indicates the non-utilisation of specialised forces in positions commensurate with their skills.

> ***Working at Cafeteria and stationery, Oshnavieh, West Azarbaijan***
> *In Kurdistan, people are forced to do kolbari as they have no other job. The is the case that a doctorate does such a job! Kolbari is the same as porting, this is so awful! Everyone who hears this gets nervous; what does it mean? Someone who has educated at a university, is forced to start kolbari!*

In many cases, this matter has a legal basis, and according to legal articles, minorities such as Sunnis cannot attain political posts like the presidency. In

some cases, the problem is not from the law but is the result of the discretionary view of high-ranking government officials who arbitrarily impose such a restriction on the activists of ethnic and religious groups. For example, after the revolution, in the managerial fields, the Sunni followers of ethnic groups such as the Kurds and Baloch have never been able to attain positions such as minister, ambassador, or governor. In some cases, too, these restrictions are not created by the central government but by shadow groups.

Another aspect of these restrictions does not relate to the issue of achieving job positions, but to other aspects of the isolation of active civil forces in various cultural, artistic, political, environmental, and other fields. In this regard, apart from the ethnic groups discussed in the previous paragraph, ethnic groups such as the Turks and Persians are also critical of government policies and the security-oriented view of them.

## A Lack of Awareness of Civic and Ethnic Rights

Civic rights are a set of rights and freedoms that the individuals of a society enjoy as citizens, and which the state and other members of society are obliged to respect. These rights include a wide range of political, civil, social, and economic rights (Jafari, 2015: 4083). Ethnic rights are also a part of the general system of minority rights under the human rights framework, which emphasizes non-discrimination, the right to enjoy legitimate freedoms, and the necessity of safeguarding and preserving the rights and dignity of the religious, linguistic, and cultural identity of ethnic groups (Declaration on the Rights of Persons…, 1992). Every citizen must be aware of their rights and duties, and this plays an important role in the demands and also in the share-seeking of ethnic groups from the central government. However, the findings of the present research showed that most Iranian ethnic groups are not aware of their basic rights, which in a way include their civic and ethnic rights.

Civic rights guarantee all the rights that citizens in a society should enjoy. Considering that human dignity, freedom, free access to information, popular government, and access to justice and a fair trial, the right to security, and the right to equality are emphasized as civic rights in the constitution and the Holy Qur'an, the implementation and protection of these rights is the duty of the state. The rule of law is considered the main and primary foundation for ensuring civic rights and their implementation (Charter on Citizens' Rights).

According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in the spiritual dimension, there are two types of minorities: one religious and the other sectarian. The issue of religious minorities is stated in Article 13 of the Constitution, which stipulates that Iranian Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the religious minorities recognised in the constitution, and they are free to perform their religious ceremonies. In matters of personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance, and wills) as well as religious education, they act according to their own rites (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 17).

The issue of sectarian minorities is raised in Article 12 of the Constitution, according to which, the official sect of the country is Twelver Ja'fari Shi'ism. At the same time, it is stipulated that other Islamic sects, namely Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali, and Zaydi, have full respect, and the followers of these sects are free to perform their religious ceremonies according to their own jurisprudence. In religious education and personal status, they act according to their own sectarian regulations, and the courts, in dealing with lawsuits related to the personal status of these sects, also apply their own sectarian rules. In addition, in any region where the followers of one of these sects have a majority, the local regulations, within the limits of the authority of the councils, will be according to the majority sect, while preserving the rights of other sects. The latter point has not created a ban on the activities of religious or sectarian minorities in local affairs.

***Akbar Yadegari, painter, writer, and theater director, Semnan***
*Some do not even know that their citizenship rights have been violated. For instance, a car dealer may park their cars on the sidewalk and occupy yours; another example concerns the pedestrian crossing rights, which are not observed at all in Iran. Citizenship rights are developed to ensure your safety on the street or on the bus, in life in general.*

***Masoud Azizi, singer and artist from Islamabad (Kermanshah):***
*I myself do not know what citizens' rights are. The only thing we know is that the mother tongue should be used in media, publications, and formal education, but we do not know, for example, what rights we have as Kurds.*



*Image 3-11: Interview with Masoud Azizi*

The recognised religious minorities, and by extension, the sectarian minorities, have the right to have their own associations and societies. According to Article 26 of the Constitution, no one can be forced to participate in these associations or be prevented from participating in them. The various ethnic groups of Iran can likewise use their mother tongues in the press and mass media and teach the related literature in schools. Although the official and common script and language of the ethnic groups of Iran is Persian, Article 15 of the Constitution, while declaring the latter point, has recognised the right of the various ethnic groups of Iran to use local dialects and languages. In any case, the Persian language must be taught alongside other dialects and languages. What has been stated should be considered in the light of two articles, 19 and 20 of the Constitution. According to Article 19, the people of Iran, of whatever ethnic group or tribe, enjoy equal rights, and colour, race, language, and the like are not a cause for distinction. Also, according to Article 20, all individuals of the nation, both men and women, are equally under the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights without discrimination (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 17-20).

The sum of what has been said must be considered in light of the specific provisions contained in some of the other articles of the constitution. One of these articles is the preservation of ethnic and national identity, including language and culture, and respect for the religious and sectarian rites of individuals, for which a legal guarantee has also been provided. In Article 20, 'all individuals of the nation, men and women alike, are equally under the protection of the law

and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.' But a very important point about the rights of ethnic groups is that most of these peoples are not aware of the existence of such explicit laws regarding them. The findings of the present research showed that the main knowledge of ethnic groups about their rights relates to the issue of the mother tongue, and the majority of the interviewees did not have much awareness of their other rights. A part of this lack of awareness of rights pertains to the rights that the people should demand from the ruling establishment, and another part of it is the rights that everyone has in their living environment and in relation to those around them.

It is quite clear that what is meant by the demands of ethnic groups are those needs that the constitution has considered for the different ethnic and sectarian groups. Adhering to the relevant legal regulations would be a suitable response to most of the different needs and demands. The use of ethnic cultures and the literature, stories, songs, and proverbs of different ethnic groups in textbooks and other references for learning cultural matters; the use of the human capacities of these ethnic groups for their employment in various administrative and non-administrative posts; their freedom in performing their religious ceremonies and having their own places of worship; freedom of dress; and other such things are among these demands, most of which are mentioned in the country's constitution but have not entered the executive sphere. Apart from the discussion of the implementation or non-implementation of the rights of different ethnic groups, what is of interest in this section is the lack of awareness or the not-so-great awareness of the peoples of different groups about the rights enshrined and written in the country's constitution. Naturally, when such awareness does not exist, demanding rights also becomes meaningless.

> ***Hassan Naser, director of the Cultural Heritage Office of Karun County (Khuzestan):***
>
> *If you ask people from any social class, literate or illiterate, whether they are aware of their citizens' rights, you will certainly hear "no." Do you see films, animations, or visuals that teach citizens' rights? People are not aware of their rights.*

The lack of awareness of individuals and groups of their civic and ethnic rights stems from numerous structural and executive factors and reasons. A part of the causes of the lack of awareness of individuals and ethnic groups of their rights

pertains to the ruling establishment and is rooted in the non-implementation of laws, the lack of democracy in the ruling establishment, and the lack of enlightenment and proper teaching of these rights and duties by the statesmen.

According to the findings, the state, as the custodian of public education, has deliberately been negligent in this area and has not been able to include this issue in the educational and media levels as it should. The lack of access to free media, both at the national and ethnic levels; the suppression of activists, especially civil activists, by the ruling establishment; not allowing the activity of non-governmental organisations and having a security-oriented view of them are among the things that have highlighted the role of the ruling establishment in the field of the legal unawareness of ethnic groups. In fact, the ruling establishment systematically pursues a policy of keeping ethnic groups unaware through its vast propaganda and media apparatus. It tries, by relying on the components of Iranianness and Islamness, to regard and impose ethnic issues as local, native characteristics, devoid of a position and values worthy of legal and political rights. The application of the titles of 'local' and 'native' to the languages, literature, press, and other cultural productions of ethnic groups stems from this idea.

The weakness of social and political institutions, including non-governmental civil organisations and political parties, are among the structural factors affecting the lack of awareness of ethnic rights. Another reason for this legal unawareness pertains to the ethnic groups themselves and the low level of their literacy and political knowledge. The findings show that the people of these ethnic groups themselves are not very sensitive in this area and do not strive to acquire this awareness, a part of which may be due to the economic poverty prevailing in some ethnic groups, which also brings with it cultural and legal poverty.

On the other hand, the systematic elimination and disregard of the rule of law by the political system and statesmen, and its replacement with rent-seeking and cronyism, has so emptied the constitution of legitimacy that it is not looked upon as a reference by society. Therefore, the people also do not have much motivation to be aware of an un-practiced written law.

***Mohammad Gol Kahrazeh, Faculty Member of Zahedan University, Sistan and Balochestan***
*The individual plays an active role in their own citizens' rights and must pursue the means to access them. When someone is not demanding or not enlightened, they cannot claim their rights and are certainly unaware of them. Therefore, a person must seek education and develop insight in order to understand and assert their rights.*

## The Social Structure of Ethnic Groups

The country of Iran possesses ethnic and cultural diversity, and the model of the nation within it is composite and unbalanced. Accordingly, in Iran, we are faced with a rainbow of ethnic groups.

History has shown that different ethnic groups have always created boundaries between themselves and other ethnic groups. At times, the circle of these boundaries has been narrow, and penetration into them has been very difficult. The main reason cited for this enclosure is the protection of one's own culture and customs against those of other ethnic groups. Furthermore, the demonisation of other ethnic groups has inflicted many harms and hostilities upon the relations between ethnic groups in Iran. This matter may, from one perspective, succeed in achieving the goal it pursues, but from other perspectives and during various interactions, it has reduced their bargaining power. Therefore, it can be said that creating restrictions in inter-ethnic relations can disrupt the process of development in these communities. In other cases, a cultural and ethnic fabric, in order to protect and preserve itself against a more general culture, may take refuge in the nearest social and ethnic culture. In such a situation, they find greater power to protect themselves and to resist the dominant culture.

***Mahmoud Eftekhari, retired from Tehran's Cultural Heritage Organisation and an expert in Iranian art, from Semnan:***
*Ethnicity, nationality, culture, religion... all these beliefs are historical phenomena; there's no escaping them. Our lives are, in fact, completely intertwined and bound up with all of them.*

The social structure of ethnic groups in Iran, despite all the changes and

transformations governing the overall structure of society in recent decades, still possesses some unique and specific components that have had a significant impact on its functional dimensions at the ethnic and national levels. Among these impacts is its role in ethnic and national movements. The different ethnic groups of Iran define their relationship with other Iranian ethnic groups based on the three fundamental variables of language, religion, and shared historical interests. The differences in these variables are often a deterrent in the path of forming a comprehensive movement composed of all ethnic groups. It must be said, however, that a pathology of the failure to achieve this desirable situation often attributes the obstacles to the policies of the state and the dominant ethnic group. In any case, it will lead to a divergent function. This situation, alongside some other factors of ethnic conflict, often also becomes an obstacle in the way of achieving a focused ethnic unity centred on demand-making in inter-ethnic relations. It is a movement that could, by adhering to the principles of democracy and human rights and under the banner of a modern movement, provide the ground for a transition to a civil society and a pluralistic nationalism based on legitimate individual and social freedoms and reliant on sustainable peace and tolerance.

New nationalism relies on a combination of integration and social cohesion that builds a stable society on the basis of cultural pluralism in a multinational state founded on democracy. The result of this nationalism is the creation of a national state that resorts to more democratic and humane solutions to solve the problems of the ethnicities within it. These solutions include cultural pluralism, social democracy, affirmative action policies, the granting of autonomy, and other such measures.

> ***Ashkan Zarei, a cultural and heritage activist and writer, from Khuzestan:***
>
> *These discussions simply didn't exist before. Everyone identified under the umbrella of 'Iranian-ness' and lived alongside one another. Nowadays, everyone wants to cling to their own ethnicity and prove it.*

Among the fundamental issues in multi-ethnic societies has always been how ethnic communities should be linked together to form a comprehensive and stable national community. Social cohesion and integration in such societies are

influenced by the quantity and quality of relations between ethnic groups. In this state, social integration takes shape in the shadow of the connection and integration of ethnic groups (Naqdi et al., 2015: 132). If governments do not succeed in redefining the relations between social groups based on peaceful coexistence and equality, the existing tensions will remain a permanent problem in political life. The realisation of this is conditional on a comprehensive view, the avoidance of partiality, and the participation of ethnic groups in the power and the political, social, and cultural sectors of the country. The policies of governments in intimidating and assimilating ethnicities have had consequences such as ethnic tensions, internal conflicts, the weakening of national integration, and the vulnerability of national security. Experience has shown that wherever leaders have sought to compromise with the interests of ethnicities, they have come closer to resolving ethnic conflict, and pluralistic, egalitarian policies strengthen social integration and increase the coefficient of national security. To this end, it is necessary to use the basic democratic values such as the avoidance of centralisation and the shunning of monopoly, tolerance and forbearance, and the comprehensiveness of dialogue, negotiation, and compromise as keys to creating a lasting agreement for the resolution of ethnic conflicts. No country or state can live in isolation and be indifferent to its political and economic relations with the outside world. Instead, the method of assimilating ethnicities into a dominant ethnicity is a failed experience (Beheshti and Hagh-Moradi, 1396: 27).

***Qasem Siyasar, Director of the Zahedan National Library, from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*This 'us and them' debate, in a place like this, began to form from the first Pahlavi era onwards. The concept of 'ethnicity' in its modern sense exists in our minds, and has unfortunately, for many reasons, become politicised. In a place like our province, this meaning didn't exist until around 1921. Before the Pahlavi era, if you asked someone who they were, they would refer to one of the local tribes and say, 'I am Rigi' or 'Sargazi' or... You know that with the Constitutional Revolution, the political structure changed, but these transformations reached Sistan and Baluchestan with a delay, a delay of almost twenty years.*

Apart from how the central system deals with the different ethnic groups,

another part of this issue relates to the structure of the ethnic groups themselves, and to what extent they are receptive to this coexistence based on cultural pluralism. Before anything else, it must be acknowledged that based on various scientific sources and also the results obtained from interviews with different ethnic groups, the politicisation of the issue of ethnicity relates to the last hundred years. Before that, in the country of Iran, individuals defined themselves more in the framework of tribal and clan groups than ethnic groups.

In the past, relations between two people of different languages and religions were very limited, and the majority of relations between individuals were intra-group relations. A part of this was due to the geographical conditions and the harsh nature of that time, the lack of suitable means of communication, and the limitations on travel. Another part was due to cultural and social issues, according to which different linguistic and ethnic groups did not desire to establish inter-group relations with other ethnic groups and sects. In the last half-century, this situation has changed to some extent, and based on the results obtained from the interviews conducted with different ethnic groups, with the creation of flexibility in the social structure of the various ethnic groups, the level of communication, travel, and economic and cultural exchanges between these groups has increased significantly.

***Mullah Ahmad Bahrami, a religious-social activist and former Member of Parliament, from Javanrud (Kermanshah):***

*I have had contact and dealings with the ethnic groups of Khuzestan province—the Arabs in the south and the Laks in the north—and the Arabs there all the way to Bandar Ganaveh. I have also had connections with the Baluch people from Saravan and the Zahedan region. I am in contact with and know the people of Khorasan in the east, both South Khorasan and Razavi Khorasan. I have had more interaction with the people of Golestan, and with the Talysh people who live in that area. Further on, in the western cities, I am in touch with people from Khorramabad in Lorestan, where most of my friends are now, and from Kuhdasht. I have little contact with Hamedan, but in the three Kurdish-inhabited provinces of Kermanshah, Kurdistan, and West Azerbaijan, I know and have connections with nearly 90 per cent of the people, have visited most of the cities, and have travelled through all 31 provinces of Iran.*

The increasing communication between ethnic groups and the growth in their level of integration will have various benefits for them. Apart from the economic dimension and the creation of various financial relationships, and also helping economic growth and development, by aligning the demands of the different ethnic groups, it will increase their bargaining power against the policies of the central government in various matters and in the realisation of cultural pluralism.

> ***Ghaffarzadeh, a carpet merchant, from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan):***
> *Due to our work, we've dealt with Kurdish, Lur, and Gilaki groups. It's mostly Kurds who buy our carpets.*

Another manifestation of the demands of ethnic groups in the last hundred years, apart from economic, social, and cultural issues, has been the political demand. According to this, whenever the central government was powerful, it overcame the centrifugal and divergent forces on the periphery. Conversely, whenever the central government became weak and lost its authority, the centrifugal and divergent forces on the periphery became active. For a short period, which generally coincided with a change of regime, they took control of regions and, by creating local and regional political-administrative structures, temporarily established a kind of local self-government. This situation, especially in the last century and at historical junctures such as the Constitutional Revolution, the First and Second World Wars, the removal of Reza Shah and the coming to power of the second Pahlavi, and also the victory of the Islamic Revolution, has arisen in some of the peripheral regions of Iran. But with the re-empowerment and the revival of the influence of the central part, the central forces have once again taken control of affairs, so that it can be said that the life of the local self-governing political-administrative structures has been short.

At present, although there may be no apparent trace of the organisational form of the demands of ethnic groups, these demands still exist within the heart of society and appear from time to time in various forms. It should be mentioned that religious movements among the Baloch have greater power. It can also be inferred from the responses of most of the research participants that the peripheral units, while desiring a kind of relative freedom and local self-governing authorities, especially in the cultural field, are interested in being part of the composition of the Iranian nation and national state and consider themselves a part of the

Iranian nation. However, the ruling structure, with the aim of controlling the situation and preserving its own existence in the face of ethnic uprisings, tries to produce divisive propaganda and to distort the massacres and killings that it carries out at various junctimes among these ethnic groups, blaming them on separatists. Although this strategy has faded after four decades, it still has an audience among the government's own people.

## The Inefficiency of Iran's Social and Political Institutions

Institutions are the legal and normative structures invented by humans that shape and constrain their social, political, economic, and cultural interactions (North, 1991: 97). An institution in this sense possesses a dual function: to direct and organise human behaviour while simultaneously limiting and regulating it. From this perspective, social and political institutions are formal and informal structures based on laws, customs, public beliefs, and doctrinal foundations, which have come into being and evolved under specific methods and strategies to meet and organise the enduring social and political needs of humanity. Given the breadth, diversity of aspects, and multiple hierarchies of the needs and issues of human societies, collective institutions are plural and varied at different micro and macro levels—local, national, and even supra-national. There is a harmony and correspondence between the general nature and characteristics of societies and the nature of their various institutions, and the emergence of any incongruity and conflict between these two leads to institutional dysfunction and inefficiency in societies.

The inefficiency and functional disruption in some of Iran's local and national political and social institutions is another central theme of the findings of the present research. In this section, its dimensions and consequences—including the inefficiency of local institutions, the marginalisation of cooperatives and the private sector, the absence of free political parties, the system's contradictory political structure, the macrocephalisation of the urban hierarchy, the exaggeration of crises, inter-ethnic discrimination, the conflation of traditional and modern beliefs, the absence of elites, and underdevelopment—are examined and analysed.

## The Inefficiency of Local Institutions

In today's world, there are two models for the administration of a country's public affairs. In the first model, the state assumes responsibility for all matters and is obliged to provide all services for the consumption of civil society or its citizens. In the second model, the responsibility for administering public affairs is divided among three institutions: the government, civil society, and the private sector. These three sectors interact with each other in such a way that the weakness or excessive power of any one of them will upset the social balance. Therefore, creating the necessary connection and balance and delineating the duties of each of these three sectors provides the possibility of a better life in a desirable society (Seddigh Sarvestani et al., 1386: 9). This second method of administration is, to some extent, applicable in Iran, although the role of the state in it is very prominent.

Urban local government in Iran, prior to the Constitutional Revolution, was traditional, appointed, and undemocratic. The creation of modern local government began with the Constitutional Revolution and, with a history of over a century, has seen many transformations. With the failure of the Constitutional movement and the consolidation of Reza Shah's rule, the decentralisation arising from the duties and authorities of the urban local government of the Constitutional period gave way to centralisation and the weakening of local institutions. With the fall of the first Pahlavi state until the coup of 1953, the period of expansion for local associations began again. After the 1953 coup, a period of creating semi-governmental and controlled local institutions began and continued until the 1979 Revolution. After the revolution, the decentralisation manifested in the constitution through Islamic councils and the Councils Law of 1982 was not implemented due to political instability, war, and the pretext of the existence of centrifugal forces, and it continued as a centralised system until 1998. From that year, the limited and weakened version of the Councils Law was implemented, and a period of the re-emergence of decentralising and semi-centralised motives continued. Perhaps it can be said that the most important political development project of the reformist government was the nationwide establishment of local councils in 1998—a promise in the constitution which, at that time, had already been delayed for several years to be put into practice, but which the government of the day was committed to implementing. Thus, amidst the doubt and suspicion of the executive managers and mayors of the time, the council elections were

held, and the first generation of urban and rural local councils was formed in the country. In recent years, some contractionary and centralising movements have been seen again.

Although city and village councils are considered part of the state's decision-making and management structure, the implementation of this legal capacity in the sphere of local management was a step towards increasing public participation in the appointment of local managers and towards the localisation and decentralisation of management. However, due to the lack of necessary intellectual and institutional infrastructure and executive shortcomings at the practical level, it did not achieve much success. The excessive and discretionary supervision and interference of state institutions in the electoral and executive mechanisms of local councils caused the councils, in practice, to lack the necessary independence to perform their legal duties, and even led to the prolongation and complication of bureaucratic mechanisms. The majority of comprehensive studies and specific field research on the track record of Islamic councils in Iran report the unfavourable performance of this institution and the failure of its experience. In their pathology, factors such as legal and juridical weaknesses, organisational and administrative weaknesses, the duplication of efforts and interference by other institutions and organisations, and the lack of necessary civil and social awareness and insight for electing competent and specialised individuals are pointed out. [1]

Non-governmental organisations, too, are naturally non-governmental in nature and are in the hands of the private sector, but the shadow of the state has always loomed large over these local institutions. None of them have had the necessary independence, and consequently, they have not shown much efficiency. The findings of the present research indicate the extent of state power in the administration of the country's affairs. Even the minimum of institutions that have a local title and are elected by the people, after the election process, act completely in line with state institutions and in harmony with their interests,

1. In this regard, see: Ashtarian, Kioumars & Karimi Fard, Hassan. (1395). 'A Critique and Review of the Performance of Islamic City Councils in Iran.' Dolat Pajouhi, 2(7), 95-132, p. 125. & Mehdipour, Asieh, & Mehdipour, Ahmad. (1401). 'A Study of the Level of Satisfaction of Villagers with the Performance of the Village Administration and Islamic Village Council (Case Study: Villages of Darreh Shahr County).' Iranian Journal of Social Development Studies, 14(3), 61-83. & Mohammadi, Esfandiar. (1382). 'A Pathology of Islamic City and Village Councils.' Rahbord Scientific Quarterly, 11(2), pp. 289-308.

and in opposition to the interests of the people. This inefficiency is related to the entire structure of the country, and the ethnic groups, as a part of this structure, are involved in it.

> ***Nasser Amoli Moghaddam, a journalist and reformist activist, from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan):***
> *This very economy has a two-headed management: one side holds 65 to 70 per cent of the power, and most of the long arms belong to it, and it is accountable to no one. The other part, meaning 30 to 35 per cent of the long arms, is elected by the people, and even that is not entirely controllable. The tragic part is when that 35 per cent aligns with the 65 per cent, for example, in municipal corruption.*

In fact, it can be said that governmental or semi-governmental local institutions in Iran have not yet been able to be institutionalised as they should and to perform their real function. This type of institution has the power and authority to manage more in countries where there is a decentralised system and a division of power has taken place at various levels. In Iran, the situation is not like this. Here, although these institutions are legally independent, they are always under the supervision and control of the ruling institutions, and this prevents them from having a real function.

Urban management can only perform properly when it moves within the framework of correct and planned urban policies. One of the characteristics of good urban policy is its participatory nature. However, the administrative system of Iran at the provincial and county levels only implements the orders of superiors. The selection and employment of senior managers is done through the centre, and the people have no role in their selection. This top-down view of the country's management process and the appointment of non-native managers to executive posts in ethnic regions shows the greater inefficiency of these institutions in those regions. This is because most of these managers are not aware of the cultural and social issues of their area of management, and by the time they want to become familiar with these issues, their term of management is over and other individuals replace them (A Study of the Role of Councils in Urban Management, 1396). In addition to the government departments and organisations (the executive branch), the institutions of the city council and

the municipality, from the perspective of the people, not only have no positive function but, in some cases, have even been an obstacle to development and have themselves become a factor for economic and administrative corruption. As such, the level of public trust in them has greatly declined, and they have distanced themselves from their main role and duty.

> ***Zhila Hesami, a literary activist, from Naqadeh (West Azerbaijan):***
> *In recent years, mistrust has grown so much that if my own sister were to stand as a candidate, I wouldn't participate.*

The national report of the Social Capital Assessment Project—which was published in 2015 (2015) by the Social Observatory Centre of the country's Social Council—shows that 'organisational trust' in councils is not in a good state. Organisational trust is trust in a set of organisations that have specific and defined structural arrangements and, in the light and framework of these arrangements, are responsible for a set of actions and interactions with members of society and other organisations and institutions. The responses received show that the Islamic city council did not achieve a rank better than 16th, with a trust score of 81.85, among the twenty-three organisations questioned, and is among those organisations whose trust score is below 100. Of course, the municipality is not in a better situation either, ranking 19th with a trust score of 63.48 (Ministry of the Interior, 2015).

Furthermore, the entry of representatives and high-ranking local officials into economic activities and their entanglement in the trap of administrative and financial corruption has led to the public's loss of trust in them. If we compare these institutions with similar ones in developed countries, we will realise that they only resemble each other in terms of appearance and administrative and organisational framework. In terms of function and administrative performance, contrary to the high efficiency in developed societies, in societies like Iran, they are not very efficient. In other words, they suffer from functional inefficiency and lack the ability to understand the issues and problems of the local people. Also, in some cases, it is seen that these institutions are not aligned with each other or with civil institutions, and may even act in conflict with each other.

***Salah Payaniani, a researcher and lexicographer, from Mahabad (West Azerbaijan):***
*At the local level, in the municipality and at the council and city council level, we monitor their performance. I see no alignment or coordination.*



*Image3-12: Interview with Salah Payaniani*

## The Marginalisation of Cooperatives and the Private Sector

'Cooperation' (ta'āwon) is an Arabic and Qur'anic word with meanings of collaboration, assistance, support, mutual aid, and helping one another, which conveys the concept of participation in a collective matter and action towards a specific and defined goal (Mohaghegh Damad and Farhadi, 1398). Institutionally, a cooperative is an independent association composed of individuals who voluntarily come together to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through an institution with joint ownership and based on popular supervision. Free and voluntary membership, popular supervision by members, economic participation (based on the number of members, not the number of shares or the amount of investment, as well as self-governance and independence), and the education and training of members are among the values that are the main components of a cooperative's identity (Dabirzadeh, 1396).

Therefore, cooperatives, alongside governmental and private institutions, are the most democratic organisations in which the members constitute the main owners. The main capital of the cooperative sector is the aggregation of the small savings of the people, which is used for the development of employment and production.

In Iran, the Cooperative Sector Law was approved by the Islamic Consultative Assembly in 1370 (1991). The first article of this law enumerated the goals of the cooperative sector of the Iranian economic system, among which can be mentioned the prevention of the state becoming an absolute employer, job creation, providing the means of work to those who are able to work but do not have the means, the prevention of the concentration of wealth, and the prevention of monopoly, hoarding, inflation, and harm to others. Article 43 of the Constitution considers cooperatives to be central to 'ensuring the economic independence of society and eradicating poverty and deprivation' (Haj-Mohammadi, 1397). For this reason, the important role of cooperation in the development process of societies is also directed towards the economic development of that society.

In the early years of the 1979 Revolution, the public sector controlled most of the economic and financial enterprises. From the 1980s onwards, the transfer of state-owned units to the private sector gradually began. However, the cooperative sector did not achieve much success in attracting state capital. According to the latest published statistics, so far only 47 percent of state-owned economic units have been transferred to the private sector. Considering the time that has passed since the beginning of the implementation of the privatisation law, the pace of this process has been very slow. Various types of cooperatives, including production, rural, and border-dweller cooperatives, have only been registered on the relevant systems, and there is practically no sign of their activity and dynamism (Abedi, 1396). The findings of this research indicate that in the regions inhabited by ethnic groups, as in the entire structure of the country, the public sector still holds the primary power in various affairs, and the transfer of management to the private sector has not been very successful. The important point about this private sector is that even where power has been transferred from the public to the private sector, it has mainly fallen into the hands of security and military forces, and the transfer of power to cooperatives and popular governance has not been realised.

The mission and ideal of the cooperative economy is to achieve welfare along

with social and economic justice, which requires the existence of a democratic culture and a sense of the collective. In Iran, despite the emphasis of officials and, most importantly, the constitution, cooperation has a marginal position and has been pushed aside from the economic and social culture of the country. This is while, with a look at the experiences of other countries, we will realise that the culture of cooperation, with management, planning, and the reform of the structure of laws, has been able to gain an important position in the fields of the economy, culture, collective work, employment, and most importantly, sustainable development. Cooperative companies, as international institutions such as the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) have emphasized, have a direct and indirect impact on the socio-economic development of the communities they cover. Various types of cooperatives, through their activities and business planning, in addition to being entrepreneurial and income-generating, are recognised as among the largest economic enterprises in the fields of production, distribution, and services. In the path of development, where the growth and improvement of livelihood, which ultimately aims for welfare and economic justice, is considered, the pace of growth must be in line with the centrality of social justice. In this regard, cooperatives are considered the best mechanism for sustainable and just development (Dabirzadeh, 1396).

> ***Mojtaba Ghestouni, a journalist and cultural heritage activist, from Khuzestan:***
> *Our private sector has by no means materialised; it is completely in the grip of a select few. Cooperatives haven't been able to grow. Governments have proven to be poor employers in managing the economy. Fortunately, in recent years, we have seen some ruling, governmental, and state institutions being prevented from entering the economy, but despite this, over 70 per cent of the country's economy is in the hands of the state and the rest in the hands of the private sector—and not just any private sector, but a filtered private sector.*

Although the creation of the Ministry of Cooperatives in the early years of the revolution showed a kind of optimistic approach regarding the highlighting of the role of cooperatives in regulating and establishing balance in the country's economic relations, in past years, not only have cooperatives not grown and

prospered, but the existing previous cooperatives have also been so weakened and marginalised that they are no longer able to influence the decisions of the relevant authorities. Naturally, the reason for this—as has been obtained from the results of the present research—goes back to the intense concentration of power in the hands of the government and politicians, who have always been apprehensive about moderating it and transferring it to the heart of society. In such a centralised system, the marginalisation of cooperatives should not seem strange.

> ***Amir Sajjadi, a history teacher, from Saqqez (Kurdistan):***
> *They must implement a system of decentralisation. When approaching the people and ethnic groups, they should raise the issue of decentralisation.*

The lack of material and moral support for cooperatives and cooperators, the absence of vision and belief in the impact of cooperative work, the weak culture of collective and participatory work in society, value-added tax, and dozens of other problems in the way of cooperatives do not open up a bright prospect for them. The peak of this event was the decision made regarding the merger of the Ministry of Cooperatives with the two ministries of Welfare and Labour and Social Affairs on 8 Tir 1390 (29 June 2011), to form a Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare (Law on the Formation of the two Ministries of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare, and Industry, Mines, and Trade, 1389).

The findings regarding the role and position of private and cooperative institutions indicate a dubious view from each of the five ethnic groups studied about the transfer of affairs to the private and cooperative sectors. The inefficiency of the government in the field of economic management and production on the one hand, and the unprincipled transfer of affairs to the private sector on the other, has placed the country's economic situation in an unfavourable condition. According to experts, the transfer of state-owned enterprises to the private sector has been done in a nominal way, and these units have mainly been transferred to specific individuals and institutions, which in reality, have created a kind of monopoly. This monopoly has not only not led to economic growth and development, but has also completely eliminated competitiveness. In such a situation, the economic units that are in the hands of the private sector

or cooperatives have been severely marginalised and have gradually become smaller and smaller, to the point that more than 50 percent of the country's cooperatives have become inactive or suspended (50 percent of the country's cooperatives are inactive, 1398).

Regarding the reasons for not valuing and marginalising cooperative companies and the private sector in the country—as came in the previous explanations—perhaps the most important reason can be attributed to the specific ideological, security, profit-oriented, and propagandistic view of the state and the ruling establishment for its continuous presence in various economic, social, cultural, sports, and other sectors, which cannot easily transfer these spheres of wealth and power to their real owners, who are the people.

## The Absence of Free Political Parties

A political party is an organisation with the goal of achieving legitimate control over the government through the electoral process. The fundamental objective of all parties is to dominate the sphere of action and influence of other parties in order to attain and remain in power. According to Gilchrist, a political party is 'an organised group of citizens who share common political views and, by acting as a political unit, strive to control the government. The main goal of a party is to promote its own ideas and policies at the political level' (Alam, 1383: 344).

If we accept the reality that democracy means the political participation and competition of a number of organised groups and interests for the purpose of capturing political power and administering the country according to the policies and positions of each of those groups (Bashiriyeh, 1382), then political parties and elections form the core and nucleus of a free and democratic life.

The party in Iran, in its modern form, is not more than a hundred years old, and its history dates back to the post-Constitutional period (Zibakalam et al., 2014: 14). Over the forty-plus years of the Islamic Revolution, various parties have received licenses to operate, and according to the Ministry of the Interior's statistics, 223 parties and political associations have activity licenses. All of these parties are from the spectrum of supporters of the Islamic Republic, who are divided into four categories: reformist parties, principlist parties, moderate parties known as centrists, and student associations (Of 223 parties, how many are active?, 1390).

Two fundamental points arise regarding the activity of parties in this period.

First, the existence of such a volume of parties in a country is not only not a sign of political progress and development but is indicative of a kind of disharmony in the political structure and political culture of that country. When nearly two hundred political parties and associations receive an activity license in a country, it indicates that that society, in terms of culture, has not yet reached the necessary political growth and socialisation for party activity. Even if someone has no knowledge of the political culture of that society, as soon as they find out that there are over two hundred political parties in a country, they will not only not see it as a sign of political pluralism but will consider it a sign of a kind of tribalism, political immaturity, and self-centredness.

The second and more important point is that many of these parties are just a name and are miles away from a party in the true sense of the word. This is because none of them have been able to perform the real functions of parties, including political participation, political socialisation, political communication, the training of political forces, and so on. Most of them only carry the title of a party and sprout like mushrooms at election time, disappearing with the end of the electoral process. Sadegh Zibakalam, a critic in the field of political science, believes in this regard: 'In the Islamic Revolution, parties in the true sense of the word have never been formed. Rather, political groups under the name of parties have been temporarily active during election periods, and after that, no precise and defined relationship has been established between the party representatives and the party itself' (Zibakalam et al., 2014: 7).

If we enter the heart of society and ask a citizen to spontaneously name a few parties from among those two hundred official ones, they might struggle to name one or two. If we are a little lucky and the respondent is interested in political issues, they will name familiar names like the Islamic Coalition Party, the National Trust Party, the Executives of Construction Party, and the Association of Combatant Clerics, which still will not amount to the fingers of one hand. This is an issue that indicates the foreignness of the position of the party and party activities, despite their numerical multiplicity.

***Shahin Sepanta, a veterinarian, writer, and civil activist, from Isfahan:***

*I consider our domestic policy regarding individual and political freedoms and parties to be completely flawed and bankrupt. Nearly forty years have passed since the revolution; by now, parties should be freer and political groups should be active. I myself am a member of a political group, but we face problems every time. Even though we have repeatedly said that we have no intention of overthrowing the system, nor do we engage in subversive activities, and are merely a critical opposition, they give us no opportunity to be active and they restrict us.*

There are various views on the reasons for the failure of party activity in Iran. One of the biggest reasons for the failure of parties in Iran can be considered the method of governments in their direct and indirect dealings with political parties and associations, a matter that overshadows their level and type of activity and, consequently, their effectiveness. In other words, one of the reasons for the lack of growth of parties and party activity goes back to the security-oriented view of them and the governmental restrictions, according to which parties with different intellectual inclinations are not allowed to operate, and political elites will have a fear and apprehension of party activity. Since this same security-oriented view is more severe among ethnic groups, there is no official party that has a free platform and media and is active at the level of ethnic regions and makes ethnic demands. This issue, at the same time, also relates to the goal and inclination of the ruling establishment in the de-politicisation or, more accurately, the presentation of ethnic issues and demands as non-political. The ruling establishment tries to prevent any political emergence of ethnic affairs because one of the foundations of the state's ethnic policies is the suggestion, promotion, and strengthening of the idea that in Iran, ethnicity and ethnicism have no political manifestation but are more of an anthropological and cultural characteristic. Therefore, any effort that contradicts this discursive component of the ruling establishment, including the establishment and activity of ethnic associations and parties, even if it is in agreement and in step with the policy of

the ruling establishment, is not acceptable or desirable.

The lack of an open political space and the dominance of a monopolistic thinking in the country's political structure is of great importance in this regard. This is while the most important factor in the formation of a party in a society is having a pluralistic thinking and accepting opposing views. Another important factor is the political culture of the elites and the general public. The spirit of tolerance, forbearance, and political endurance, flexibility, collectivism, open-mindedness, and the replacement of reason and awareness for prejudice and subjectivism are other important issues and a necessary precondition for the formation of a party culture in a society.

Ethnic and tribal cleavages are also considered an obstacle to the realisation of political parties. The prerequisite for political parties is the elevation of regional, ethnic, and tribal confrontations to political and intellectual competitions. The negative mindset of the people and elites about the category of the party, especially the misuse of the party by party leaders and its purely instrumental use to gain power, can be considered another obstacle to the absence of parties. The costs of party activity relative to its benefits in underdeveloped countries should also be added to the above collection. The imported nature of the party and the performance of party functions through some civil institutions such as the press, universities, seminaries, mosques, takāyā (mourning houses), and other institutions also create a lack of need for party activities. Such a situation leads to the weakness of the political institution and its lack of development and causes the elites and political thinkers, as well as society, to suffer from a kind of lethargy and disillusionment. These factors and grounds, in a dialectical cycle, reinforce each other and lead to the consolidation and continuation of the political passivity of citizens and the eclipse of efficient parties.

In such a situation, that is, the absence of a party in society, the media, and especially the press, which are considered the fourth estate of democracy, have usually acquired a political function and, in an unprofessional way, have shouldered the mission of filling the void of parties. They have also paid the price for it in various forms, such as suspension, closure, or the prohibition of their managers from working. The common and frequent term 'wholesale closure of the press' in the political and media literature of Iran well describes this situation. It is an event that in numerous periods has led to the closure of a wide range of independent and critical press and media and the judicial prosecution of their

managers and journalists on political and security charges. The closure of a large number of newspapers in Ordibehesht 1379 (April-May 2000) and the severe crackdown and closure of the press and media remaining from the reform era in the ninth and tenth governments of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are examples of these crackdowns. In the extensive judicial and security crackdowns on the press in the spring of 2000, which took place with the direct signal of the leader of the Islamic Republic, in a short time more than 20 newspapers were closed by the order of Judge Saeed Mortazavi. As a result, nearly 1,500 journalists became unemployed, and the circulation of the press decreased by up to one million. In the continuation of this trend of suppression and conflict with the media and the press, in an eight-year process, more than 150 publications were closed, more than 200 journalists were summoned and interrogated, and more than 50 of them were sentenced to prison (some for up to 14 years). The Press Supervisory Board of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government closed at least 36 publications in just 2 years. During the protests of 1388 (2009), the press was once again put under pressure, and according to reports, in just six months, nearly 40 journalists and bloggers were arrested, and five newspapers were also closed. It was a suppression that, in the belief of many, was a repeat of the same wholesale closure of 1999 (Khazaeli, 1390).

***Jalal Jalalizadeh, a religious activist, lecturer at Tehran University, and former Member of Parliament, from Sanandaj:***

*The political situation is favourable when we witness strong parties, party activities, and so-called student movements and trade unions in society. Today, we do not see these movements in our society; that is, our society is moving towards political disillusionment and frustration. I believe that as long as there are no powerful parties, freedom of expression and belief, freedom of the press, and the like, we will not witness political growth and prosperity.*

The absence or inefficiency of political parties causes many ordinary matters of daily life, such as culture, language and literature, sports, society, the environment, and so on, to become politicised and to be met with confrontational reactions from the rulers. Another result of this state can be seen in the candidacy

process for the presidential and parliamentary elections, in which anyone allows themselves to enter this arena. The publication of videos of these individuals at the time of registration provides, for a long time, grounds for the ridicule and mockery of many domestic and foreign critics and affects the intellectuals and domestic sympathisers in the field of politics.

When all social groups can participate in the affair of politics and government in the form of parties and political institutions, and public opinion gravitates towards them and they gain political power, they will undoubtedly replace violent struggle with peaceful competition. But if the path of peaceful struggle is blocked, in reality, the space for confrontational and violent movements is provided, and the way for underground activities and struggle will be paved. Experience has also shown that if all doors are closed to some strata or social forces or ideological spectrums, the way will be opened for transformative groups, and as a result of a crisis of legitimacy, the instability of the existing situation and fundamental transformations will come about.

After 1357 (1979) and along with the opening of the political space under the influence of the revolutionary process, many of the different parties that did not have much opportunity to show themselves during the political suffocation of the previous regime found the opportunity to bring their thoughts and ideas to the fore and to introduce their views and thoughts into the heart of society. But this atmosphere did not last long, and after a while, the views and ideas of many of the parties, along with their leaders, were eliminated from the social and political competition scene, at the head of which were the ethnic political parties and currents. With the beginning of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, a kind of cohesion took shape at the level of society, and the ideological war of the parties was extinguished under the influence of the war conditions and the presence of the youth at the fronts, and most of the election results were influenced by this atmosphere. With the end of the war conditions and in the last three decades, different political currents have taken charge of the executive branch of the country. At first, the Government of Reconstruction, with technocratic slogans and the reconstruction of the war-torn country, held power for eight years. After that, the reformist government, with slogans of creating an open political space and the concepts of freedom of expression and freedom of thought, took power, and this government also ruled the country for eight years, until 2005. In 2005, the principlist government of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, with the slogan

of justice and equality and being a helper of the oppressed and downtrodden, held power until 2013. From 2013, the government of Hassan Rouhani came to power, whose slogan was to follow a middle path and moderation and to turn the economic wheel of the people.

***Sardar Fotouhi, a consultant for public and private research projects, from Saqqez (Kurdistan):***

*Both the Principalist and Reformist parties have shown that they have done nothing useful in Kurdistan and have had nothing to offer Kurdistan.*

***Seyed Ahmad Azizi, a political activist and parliamentary candidate, from Sarpol-e Zahab:***

*After forty years, with the rise of the Executives of Construction, Reformist, and 'Prudence and Hope' governments, we see that practically no progress has been made, the gaps have deepened, and they have caused a stark difference between developed and underdeveloped regions. There is no balance to be seen in our country. When we see this situation, we infer that there is an underlying policy for Sistan and Baluchestan not to develop and for Kurdistan not to grow, and for them to remain deprived. This is how the people have come to perceive it.*

By putting together the sum of the views of the different ethnic groups with whom interviews were conducted, their views on the existence of political parties in Iran and the functions that different parties and political fronts can have can be placed in two categories. The first category believes that the governmental changes of these four different political tendencies have not been able to have an effect on the living conditions of their ethnic group.

Whereas the views of the second group show the relative satisfaction of the ethnic groups in question with the reformist government under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami during the years 1376-1384 (1997-2005). They believe that in this period, the ethnic groups were, to some extent, brought out of their previous isolation and empowered.

Studies on the political behaviour of ethnic groups, to some extent, confirm

the view of the second group regarding the influence of the country's political atmosphere and the ruling political current on ethnic political inclination and behaviour. The electoral behaviour of ethnic groups is one of the measurable examples of ethnic collective action which, according to the evidence, often has a positive correlation in its level of participation with the emergence of new political opportunities for the presentation and submission of ethnic demands and the possibility of ethnic groups acting on the country's political stage. [1]

***Qasem Siyasar, Director of the Zahedan National Library, from Sistan and Baluchestan:***

*Until 1997, the Sistanis had a better feeling, because the government paid more attention to them and most positions were held by Shias (Sistanis). When the 2nd of Khordad of '76 [the election of President Khatami] happened, a process began that gradually weakened that ideological hue, and the Sistanis no longer had that good feeling they had before 1997. As someone who works in this field, I assess the developments after the 2nd of Khordad positively. The Baluch people must also be involved in the administrative and political affairs of the province.*

***Zaher Saraee, a literary activist and poet, from Ilam:***

*If we adopt the reformist discourse in Iran and if Iran is for all Iranians, then naturally Iran and its political development will take shape. The focus will be more on internal affairs, the country will have a bright future, and it will face fewer domestic and foreign problems...*

1. In this regard, see the following articles: Maghsoudi, Mojtaba. (1385). 'Electoral Participation of Ethnic Groups in Iran, A Case Study: Presidential Elections.' National Studies, 7(4 (28)), 83-108. & Akbari, Hossein, & Fakhari, Rouhollah. (1396). 'The Role of Ethnicity in the Electoral Behaviour of Multi-Ethnic Communities (Case Study: Bojnourd County).' Applied Sociology, 28(2), 71-90. & Farhadi, Mohammad & Kazemi, Ali. (1392). 'Socio-Economic Development, Ethnicity, and Political Participation.' Social Studies and Research in Iran, 2(4), 571-597.



*Image 3-13. Interview with Zaher Saraee*

By summarising the total material mentioned in this section, it can be said that the existence of political parties in society is a necessary and fundamental need that has its own specific functions for both society and the state. In societies where there is a high diversity of political interests and tastes and ethnic-religious groups, this necessity acquires a twofold importance. This is a matter that, unfortunately, has not been paid much attention to in Iran, and none of them have, in practice, been realised. The presence of parties has been more nominal than concrete and real; the political framework of these nominal parties has also been more centre-oriented, and ethnic groups and their rights have been ignored in it. This is a matter that has always provided the ground for the protest of different ethnic groups, and unfortunately, these protests and demands have been accompanied by bloody suppressions and violent crackdowns.

## The Contradictory Political Structure of the System

The political system of Iran, in terms of its structure and foundations, is an Islamic Republic. A republican system is based on three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. In addition to these three independent branches, the institution of the leadership, as the highest governmental authority, has a supervisory role over the three branches and issues governmental decrees. The leader is a political-religious figure and is elected through the Assembly of Experts. The method of administering the government is based on the constitution and a collection of other laws such as the civil code, penal code, Islamic penal code, and other

laws, the implementation of each of which is carried out through the relevant apparatuses. In this view, it is imagined that, like many of the world's countries, all this legislation is done by the legislative branch. But the reality is that the leader of the Islamic Republic, as the highest political authority, has full powers in this regard. According to the explicit text of Article 110 of the Constitution, the determination of the general policies of the system is the responsibility of the leadership (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 41).

The contradictions between the branches and the lack of understanding of the position and status of the institutions of the Islamic Republic show a kind of internal incongruity in the country's political structure. The existence of parallel institutions to the government, as the custodian of executive affairs, is one aspect of this incongruity, to the extent that the president of the twelfth term, in a speech, speaks of the existence of a government in the shadow of his own government (The shadow government of Jalili, the destroyer of the Rouhani government, 1398: 3). This relates to the influence of the Revolutionary Guards in the economic sector and political management outside the body of the government. The presence of superior institutions in diplomatic relations and international affairs, without regard to political and international custom and ignoring the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is another aspect of this incongruity. The findings of this research also show the existence of this incongruity in the political structure of the three branches of the country.

> ***Ali Sahebi, a psychologist, from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan):*** *Iran's foreign policy has two faces; they're not on the same level. You have a Foreign Minister, and you have the Supreme Leader's representative for foreign policy; in international affairs, 'Velayati' gets up and goes to Hezbollah in Lebanon and negotiates, and nobody asks, 'What's your role in this at all?'*

> ***Rahmatollah Hemmati, an economic activist, from Semnan:*** *There is no uniform viewpoint in the country's politics. For example, the Foreign Ministry has its own policy, and cultural institutions have opposing views; they are not in harmony or agreement, and the political situation is shrouded in ambiguity.*

Regarding the judiciary, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the former president of

Iran, believes that thirty 'structural' and 'behavioural' flaws are attributable to this institution, and that this institution does not act according to regulations. In this regard, he called for the formation of a 'Supreme Judicial Council' with the presence of the head of the judiciary, the head of the Supreme Court, the Attorney General, and at least six high-ranking judges, to deal with the selection of judges throughout the country and for the employment and transfer of judges to be entrusted to that council. 'The concentration of power and transgression from the structure of the constitution,' 'the non-correspondence of authorities with competencies,' and 'the unity of the plaintiff, prosecutor, judge, and executor' are among the 'structural' flaws of the judiciary from the perspective of this former president of Iran. Ahmadinejad also, in another part of his protest statements, declared that the authority of the head of the judiciary to transfer judges 'has naturally violated the job security of judges and, in its wake, has seriously damaged their independence' (Ahmadinejad raised 30 'structural' and 'behavioural' flaws with the Iranian judiciary, 1396).

> ***Abdolqader Savari, a researcher, from Khuzestan:***
> *The intellectuals want a democratic society, like France or the Netherlands, but I'm not optimistic that Iranian society will have a truly independent national consultative assembly and an independent judiciary anytime soon... I find it very unlikely... It requires a great deal of work and effort.*

The existence of this view from the former president of the country and a current member appointed by the leader to the Expediency Discernment Council, as well as the findings obtained in the present research, indicates the lack of independence of the important and sensitive institution of the judiciary and the precedence of connections over regulations in this institution.

By examining the political structure and the laws of the country, at first glance, the impression is formed in the mind that the government has a precise and inescapable legal structure that no one has the power or ability to transgress. But various political and social events and incidents sometimes create this doubt in the hearts of citizens that the political structure is a long way from what it is and what it should be. The existence of various corruptions and law-breaking by high-ranking officials and the turning of a blind eye by the legal institution to them strengthens these suspicions even more. Also, illegal actions and the

imposition of legal restrictions against individuals and some currents, without any court process, shows the incongruity of the political structure with the actions within the system.

In such a situation, and despite the separation of powers existing in the country, which is a prerequisite for the formation of any kind of government that claims to be a democracy, the existence of the person of the leader in the position of the absolute guardianship of the jurist as the highest decision-making authority, whose power is derived from divine and heavenly matters, in another way, has diminished the independence of the important and strategic branches of the country. In such a state, the impression comes to mind that all fundamental policy-making is in the hands of the person of the leader.

The result of this institutional lack of independence is that sometimes some decisions and actions are taken within the system for which not only does no one take responsibility, but they are even sometimes attributed to external factors. For example, the assassinations that occurred in various periods, such as what happened in the chain murders, or the attacks that took place on the boys' dormitory of the University of Tehran in the years 1378 and 1388 (1999 and 2009) (known as the attack on the university campus), are attributed to forces within the Ministry of Intelligence, the Revolutionary Guards, the Basij, and so on. Some, too, in order to exonerate the government and officials, highlight the role of arrogance (the West) in this regard. This type of concealment and utter villainy in the political and security actions of the Islamic Republic is in conflict with what was demanded by the people at the beginning of the revolution.

> ***Marzieh Mohebbi, a barrister, from Mashhad:***
> *Almost the entire political structure relies on the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist [Velayat-e Faqih], and the economy relies on oil. On the other hand, with a stagnant, reactionary policy that refuses to connect with the world, the goals of development have not been achieved at all, and according to the indices, things are getting worse every day.*

The experience of four decades of the Islamic Republic of Iran's governance clearly illustrates the reality that the political structure of the system, at all three levels of decision-making and legislation, implementation, and judgment, suffers from insoluble structural conflicts. On the one hand, in a maximal reduction, it

has emptied the republicanness of this system of its content and substance, and on the other hand, the government, as the agent of the country's affairs, suffers from inefficiency and functional weakness in the administration of public affairs. The structural conflicts and contradictions of the Islamic Republic regime are, in the first instance, rooted in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic and the legal foundations of the regime. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, by combining republicanism and Islamism, and that of the type of the absolute guardianship of the jurist, fundamentally carries a fundamental contradiction within it. Ultimately, its substantive principle and content, which is an ideological reading of Twelver velayat-based Shi'i Islam, negates republicanism, even in its minimal meanings. This is because 'guardianship (velayat) is a correlative concept, one side of which is the guardian (vali) and the other side is the minor or the interdicted or anyone whose ownership is incomplete and whose dispositions and life affairs require the supervision of another person; therefore, the ward (mowla alayh) has a kind of deficiency and is in need of a guardian. Therefore, the concept of guardianship is related to deficient individuals, but a republican government is the delegation of authority by the public to a specific individual for statecraft' (Haeri Yazdi, 1994: 220). Therefore, a velayat-based government and republicanism are two incompatible concepts. On the other hand, founding the political and governance system on Islamic teachings requires a mandatory and compulsory system that limits the boundaries of freedom of choice and action within its principles and branches, and inevitably, republicanism, in the sense of the authenticity of the choice of the members of society, is violated in it. Apart from the substantive and philosophical aspects of republicanism, its structural forms have also been challenged in all dimensions within the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the provision of its bureaucratic functions as a model of the structure and division of political power and governance based on it has become almost impossible. The lack of full commitment to the principle of the separation of powers and the change in its structure, the establishment of parallel institutions to the three branches and the violation of their independence, the creation of institutions and organisations exempt from supervision and inspection, approbatory supervision in elections, the increasing trend of the dominance of security and military institutions over all pillars of power, contrary to the content of the constitution, alongside many other experiences of the Islamic Republic government in the last 4 decades, are among the factors

that have brought the republicanness of the system to a dead end, even in its functional and bureaucratic dimensions. All the mentioned cases are rooted in the contradictory political structure and nature of the Islamic Republic system, a situation that continuously adds to the curve of the system's functional deviation and the emergence of its structural conflicts.

## The Macrocephalisation of the Urban Hierarchy

In the scientific and theoretical discussions of urban planning, the best form of spatial and hierarchical organisation is the creation of a city in which the distribution of goods and services, the transfer of new technologies, and various ways of life take place throughout the entire society.



*Image 3-14. Interview with Ali Bakhtiarpour*

> ***Ali Bakhtiarpour, academic staff member and lecturer in geopolitics at Ahvaz University (Khuzestan):***
> *More than a fifth of Iran's population lives in Tehran, while the other four-fifths are spread across the rest of the country... Iran's primary city, with its suburbs, has a population of nearly 14 million. The second city, Mashhad, has a population of 4 million—that's 4 million versus 14 million—and the third city has a population of just over 2 million. This is a disease of 'top-heaviness', which is called macrocephaly. In our urban hierarchy system, Iran's head is huge, and its limbs are severely weak... Our urban hierarchy system is an interpretation of the centralisation of power: both economic and political.*

An urban system is not limited to a physical collection of urban settlements but also includes the flows and connections between them. These flows consist of population, capital, factors of production, ideas, and information, each of which is influential in determining the urban hierarchy. The trend of social, economic, and cultural transformations in recent decades and the diversity of the geographical context have led to the formation of a specific type of spatial system for human settlements. The imbalance between rural and urban centres in various social, economic, and cultural fields has caused, on the one hand, a disruption of the spatial order of settlements and, on the other, the accelerated growth of some first-tier cities. Out-migration from villages and small towns to such cities has led to the deprivation and isolation of those villages and small towns (Momeni, 1388: 35).

In Iran, the population concentration in a few of the country's cities, with Tehran at the forefront, indicates a regional imbalance and an intense concentration of population in these few points. Tehran alone is home to more than 10 percent of the country's total population. Such a phenomenon is technically termed macrocephalisation.

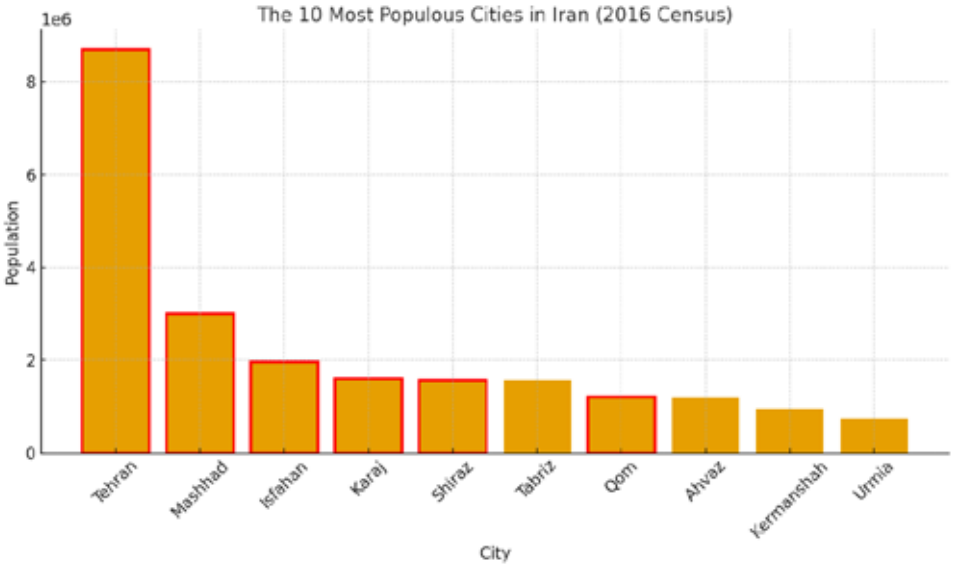



*Diagram 3-7. The ten most populous cities of Iran according to the 1395 (2016) general census*

The country of Iran, prior to the start of the urbanisation and city-dwelling of the contemporary period, had a relatively homogeneous urban system; that is, the country's urban network was galactic and continued its life under the influence of endogenous development and the traditional relations between city and village. After that, as a result of the transformation of the trend of endogenous growth to exogenous development, with the course of the transformation of urbanism, urbanisation, and city-building in the contemporary period, it begins from the mid-Qajar rule onwards (Habibi, 1375: 6).

Although population density in an urban settlement is not in itself a sign of a disorder, this density significantly causes inequality and a lack of distribution of facilities at the national level. The results obtained in the table above show that the top five provinces of the country, which have about 40 percent of the country's population, are not among the main provinces of residence for the Turk, Kurd, Baloch, and Arab ethnic groups. The concentration of human capital and economic resources in these regions has caused other regions to be emptied of capital, and the gap between cities will gradually widen. The concentration of the main economic resources in these five points has been at the price of creating poverty and inequality in other regions, including the ethnic regions.

***Mohammad Ehsani, a filmmaker and documentarian, from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan):***
*Step outside of Tehran and 4 or 5 other major cities, and you are confronted with a cultural, economic, and social catastrophe, until you reach Sistan, where poverty reaches the level of starvation. In the border regions, we witness widespread poverty. There is poverty in Tehran and other cities, but it is not widespread.*

***Shahram Geravandi, a sociologist and journalist, from Khuzestan Province:***
*From Mr. Rafsanjani's government onwards, and even during Khatami's government, we have a serious affliction called the Ministry of Energy. The Minister of Energy has always been from among the people of Isfahan or Yazd.*

On the other hand, the visual attractions, facilities, services, and social welfare in these cities have made it difficult for young people from minority ethnic groups who have experienced life in these cities to return to their own hometowns and cities. This trend is particularly noticeable among university graduates and scientific elites. Consequently, the elites and human capital that are the main drivers of the development of any region become concentrated in the large cities, which in turn will disrupt the process of development and the equal distribution of wealth and capital. This phenomenon, which is referred to as the internal migration of elites and in the present discussion is focused on ethnic elites, is an important variable in changing the balance and upsetting the equilibrium of specialised forces and elite human capital between the peripheral ethnic regions and the central regions. It confronts the process of development and growth in ethnic regions with a severe weakness of specialised and capable human resources. The negative migration balance of the deprived and less-privileged provinces, which are mainly located in ethnic geographies, clearly shows this reality. According to the findings of a trend study of internal migration in Iran over the last thirty years (1986-2016), Kermanshah, Kurdistan, Lorestan, Sistan and Balochestan, and East Azarbaijan are among the top 7 provinces with the highest negative migration balance, while Tehran, Isfahan, and Alborz are among the provinces with the highest rate of in-migration (Karami, 1402: 18-19).

Ethnic regions generally lack the minimum of attraction and facilities to retain the elites for whom better facilities and opportunities are available in other cities and regions. Many of them, including university elites, have likely spent their student years in Tehran and the large cities and have the experience of living and benefiting from their environmental facilities. In 1389 (2010), the Vice President for Science and Technology and the then head of the National Elite Foundation, during a visit to the city of Kermanshah, referred to the phenomenon of the internal migration of elites and deemed it a negative phenomenon (Head of the National Elite Foundation: Provincial offices of the foundation will prevent the internal migration of elites, 1389).

This phenomenon is one of the persistent problems arising from the unequal growth of urbanisation in underdeveloped countries. As a result, the continuous or severe increase in inequalities in regions and cities has inevitably led to the search for better living conditions and migration. In the meantime, the rapid growth of urbanisation in all countries has not occurred in a balanced manner and has mainly involved the large cities and the capital. The country of Iran has not been an exception to this rule in the last half-century, to the extent that the rapid growth of the country's urban population over the past four decades has not taken place in a guided manner and within the framework of a comprehensive national planning system based on sectoral and regional coordination. Given that the pattern of population distribution has a close relationship with political, economic, and social functions, it is natural that following the concentration of activities and capital around a few cities, the movement of the population will also be towards these points. This pattern of population distribution has created the ground for the emergence of a demographic and functional vacuum at the middle and lower levels of the urban centres and confronts the country with problems in the system of urban hierarchy (Rezaei and Taqvaei, 1388: 1). Most researchers in the urban field consider the starting point of urban problems in Iran to be from the entry of capitalist relations, when the dynamic relations of rural production and the dependence of the city on the village gave way to the dependence of the village on the city, and society took on a consumerist orientation. It was after that that the balanced and stable city-village relations became one-sided and unbalanced, and rural migrants flocked to the cities. Cities that did not have the possibility of employment and suitable urban housing saw their lower classes grow larger and larger. Thus, Iranian society witnessed the

spread of cultural and economic poverty, the consequences of which have cast a shadow over all social pillars and have left numerous social issues unresolved. The growing social inequality is the most important and most damaging product of this process, which draws more individuals into its maw every day.

The macrocephalisation of cities, in addition to emptying some of the country's regions of capital, will also cause social problems and issues in the large cities. After a while, the problems and adverse effects of centralisation, in the framework of urban issues such as marginalisation, air pollution, traffic, and population density, will manifest at the regional and national level in the form of creating inequality in many fields, a rupture in the urban network, the absorption of all opportunities, and the disruption of equality and growth and development at the national level.

> ***Amir Sajjadi, a history teacher, from Saqqez (Kurdistan):*** *Given the situation I see in Kurdistan, the distribution of resources across the country is by no means equal or just. All of Iran works for Tehran, and all of Tehran works for North Tehran. This sentence illustrates the state of Iran.*

The congregation of the poor in an area of the city leads to the creation of marginalised areas in large cities. In addition, the concentration of facilities in a few large cities also causes the unequal development of regions, and villagers and citizens living in small towns, in order to access facilities and a better life, are forced to migrate to the cities. Therefore, the main causes of the creation of marginalised neighbourhoods and areas around large cities are considered to be the migration of villagers, citizens living in small towns, and the poor existing at the city level. To prevent the creation of marginalised areas in metropolises and to moderate it, solutions such as 1. balanced regional development for the equal distribution of facilities and services; 2. the decentralisation of administrative, economic, social, and cultural activities from the central and large cities; and 3. the empowerment and improvement of the quality of life of the marginalised from various dimensions can be applied. In order to move beyond the issue of macrocephalisation and the rupture in the urban network and to distribute facilities equally at the national level, the following are proposed: - Strengthening small and second-tier cities and the regional growth poles of the urban hierarchy; - Preventing the excessive growth of the large cities of the provincial centres; -

Providing special services and facilities in small and medium-sized cities; - The geographical dispersal of investments in the peripheral cities; - Paying more attention to deprived areas (Khadem-ol-Hosseini, 1390).

## The Exaggeration of Crises

The environmental crisis, which has today become a serious and noteworthy issue in the world, is the result of man's unreasonable intervention in and exploitation of the nature around him. Today, there is a danger that man will destroy his own habitable and arable land, to the extent that the scope and importance of this issue has aroused the attention of scientists to save it.

The situation of Iran today, too, due to the excessive and destructive intervention and exploitation of the environment by policymakers, has confronted the country's resources with numerous crises. The drying up of large rivers such as the Zayandeh-Rood, the disaster of the Gotvand Dam, the drying up of the Hamoun and Urmia lakes and the Karun, Karkheh, and Dez rivers,[1] the creation of sinkholes, the extinction of rare animal species, dust storms, and economic, industrial, agricultural, and other problems are among these cases. The existing public belief is that these crises have a managerial root. There are other factors in the lower layers of the social system that prevent the resolution of the crisis, which can be sought in the lack of public awareness of the crises. The lack of proper understanding by the general public of natural resources such as water and the lack of sufficient knowledge about how to use them have also intensified the crises. In sum, the lack of public knowledge, the absence of a national will to solve the crisis, the lack of integrated and long-term policies, the weakness of scientific institutions in evaluating and assessing the crisis-creating factors, and the inefficiency of providing ways out of it will always intensify the crises.

> ***Ahmad Bahri, managing director of Mahabad Monthly and a cultural activist, from Mahabad (West Azerbaijan):***
> *The geography of the Zagros region is being destroyed. Agriculture and water are being destroyed.*

1. In Nowruz of 1398 (2019), with the occurrence of heavy and torrential rains, many of the rivers and dams that had been facing water scarcity problems over the last decade were revived again. Of course, it is too early to imagine this abundance of water as an exit from the drought period of the last decade, and perhaps in the future, with an examination of the continuity of the rainfall, one can comment on this matter more easily.

***Shahram Zamani, a sociologist and journalist, from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan):***
*You dam our sea, dry it up, and build a road through the middle of it. All sorts of skin diseases have emerged in the region that doctors cannot diagnose.*

***Ghanem Savari, a teacher, from Hamidiyeh, Khuzestan:***
*It's deliberate... for the Karun, Karkheh, Dez, and all the others to dry up all at once?!*

Environmental crises in general, and the water crisis in particular, which has placed Iran among the countries with high water stress and, according to Kaveh Madani, a researcher and expert in the field of the environment, has led to the emergence of a state of 'water bankruptcy' (Madani, 1396), have the potential to turn into human, social, and political crises. Linking the protests of Dey 1396 (December 2017-January 2018) in most of the country's cities to the water scarcity crisis is an example of this type of analysis. The water problem leads to protest, and gradually the protest spreads and takes on a political colour, and little by little, structure-breaking and radical slogans create a violent atmosphere and lead to conflict, suppression, and the harming of the protesters. Without a doubt, the role of the human factor and managerial inefficiency in the creation of these crises cannot be ignored. The findings also show that the people of the ethnic groups in this field consider the role of the human factor and the government to be more important than any other matter.

***Mohammad Bahari, a university literature lecturer, from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***
*My people have absolutely nothing; they lack basic sustenance, the freedom to work and provide for their lives. There is nothing left for my people. Their sea has dried up. Their agricultural products have been ruined. They no longer have livestock, they have no industry.*

***38-year-old man, from Bushehr:***

*It doesn't matter anymore, because we don't see anyone caring about us or our rights. So, as the saying goes, hold on to your own hat, lest the wind blows it away. For this reason, discussing collective interests is very difficult for people now.*

***Mohammad Hosseini, a religious and cultural activist, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***

*The distribution of employment, production, and wealth in Iran is not at all fair; rather, it is very unjust. The economy is in the hands of someone who is ignorant. They do this deliberately and knowingly. You can observe the economy of this region and see that from every side, Shias and non-Kurds have been made managers, while Kurds have been placed in lower-ranking positions.*

The people of Iran look at most events through a political lens, and the ruling establishment, by intervening in the most self-evident matters of the people's daily lives, is complicit in the formation of this perception.

Apart from environmental crises, in recent years we have also witnessed various other types of crises, such as labour, social, and livelihood protests, an increase in tension in foreign relations and the return of sanctions, an economic crisis and increasing inflation, the efforts of some political groups to homogenise the ruling establishment, and other problems. The multiplicity and continuation of the mentioned crises and the lack of any visible will aimed at finding solutions and efficient management have been effective in shaping a negative public mindset about the country's future and in promoting pessimistic views and sometimes the exaggeration of crises. Pessimism and the exaggeration of the dimensions of the crises can be observed, explicitly or implicitly, in most of the views and statements mentioned. Below are some examples of the findings from the research.

***Female student, from Saqqez (Kurdistan):***

*I don't think any rights have been granted in the first place, let alone whether they are respected to some extent or not.*

The way of dealing with these crises, on the part of the respondents, is absolutist, or in other words, 'all or nothing'. As was observed in the aforementioned quotes, some of the respondents believe that the government has not given them any rights, and that all the necessary and required rights have been allocated to the central regions, and there is no will or plan in the direction of solving or even admitting to this discrimination. These perceptions are visible through the observation of the application of discrimination in daily matters and the unequal investments that are allocated to the central and peripheral cities at various levels.

The exaggeration of the existing crises in the country from an ethnic perspective, beyond the nature and depth of the crises, indicates a learned view that has the least trust in a political and managerial behaviour based on the national and sustainable interests of the state and government. This is a matter that, in the words of Homa Katouzian, is rooted in the historical problem of the 'conflict between the state and the nation.'[1] Alongside this general perception of Iranian society, the centralised structure of governance and the macro-management of the country, which has fanned the flames of the centre-periphery dichotomy and whose type of management has led to the greater export of crises and the greater vulnerability of the peripheral regions, has been effective in the formation of a negative and pessimistic view, coupled with exaggeration, in ethnic communities.

## Inter-Ethnic Discrimination

What is meant by inter-ethnic discrimination is the attitude of each of the ethnic groups towards their own conditions and those of other ethnic groups; what relationship they see between their own ethnic group and the 'other', in what way they describe, explain, and analyse it, and how they compare the two. Under this heading, the view and perception of each of the ethnic groups of their own economic, social, cultural, and religious conditions, as well as those of other ethnic groups, is described, so that in the next stage, the ground for a comparison between them is provided.

With a look at the situation and economic indicators such as the share of the country's budget, the distribution of wealth resources, the prevalence of poverty and destitution, the unemployment rate, and so on among the ethnic groups

1. See: The Conflict Between the State and the Nation: A Theory of History and Politics in Iran, by Mohammad Ali Katouzian, translated by Alireza Tayyeb. Tehran: Ney Publishing.

discussed in the research, it seems that the worst conditions in this regard belong to the Baloch ethnic group, as the province of Sistan and Balochestan is at the lowest level in terms of development indicators (Mokhtari-Heshi, 1385: 111). The Azeri Turks are in a better economic situation compared to the rest of the ethnic groups. The Kurd, Bakhtiari, Sistani, and Arab ethnic groups are at the middle levels.

In the cultural field, which includes the customs and traditions of the people of different regions, such as the style of dress, music, the way of holding celebrations and mourning ceremonies, and other matters, no superiority or inferiority can be attributed among the different ethnic groups. Each of these rites and cultural values has its own specific function in the culture of that society, which has preserved its identity and remained through the passage of history.

One of the forms of the views of ethnic groups towards the 'other' is a macro-level view, free from difference and distinction.

> ***Hassan Hemmati, academic staff member at Yazd University, from Semnan:***
> *I have interacted with everyone under the title of them being Iranian, and I see no difference. My relationship with individuals has been based on their Iranian identity. I have paid no attention to ethnicity.*

In social terms, too, each of the ethnic groups has positive and negative characteristics and aspects. Apart from positive aspects such as social capital, quality of life, and other components, in other matters such as addiction, violence, divorce, and such things, they have problems.

The interviews conducted show that the Kurdish ethnic group sees its world of life as more favourable than that of the Baloch ethnic group and believes that they have a better situation than them. On the other hand, they believe that compared to their neighbours, namely the Azeri Turks, they have less favourable conditions, and their perception is that the Azeri Turk ethnic group, especially in economic terms, has more favourable conditions than them. Although no statistical report or official economic assessment based on the variable of ethnicity is provided in Iran, a comparison of the economic situation of the provinces and regions that have a dominant ethnic population, to some extent, shows the economic distinctions of Iran's ethnic geography. Based on such a criterion, the view of

the Kurdish interviewees regarding the Turks' enjoyment of a better economic situation and superior advantages can be corroborated. [1]

The attitude that the Baloch ethnic group has towards its world is that of a deprived and underdeveloped world. As was explained in the previous section, they consider a part of the reasons for this situation to be intra-group, and the small number of their elites and university-educated individuals. The feeling of this ethnic group is that they have more in common with the Sunni-following Kurds than with other ethnic groups. Their confrontational attitude, from among the other ethnic groups, is more directed towards their co-provincial ethnic group, namely the Sistanis. They believe that this ethnic group, despite its small population, due to being of the same sect as the central government, enjoys more privileges in the province, and most of the important provincial affairs are managed by them. This is a matter that the field and statistical findings over the 4 decades of the Islamic Republic regime's rule, with a high coefficient of difference in the enjoyment of state economic and financial privileges between the two ethnic groups of Baloch and Sistani, confirm.

***Raouf Azari, a civil activist, from Sardasht (West Azerbaijan):***
*In Kurdistan, we have a relatively more favourable situation compared to Baluchestan.*

***Mohammad Raouf Jahani, a civil activist, from Marivan (Kurdistan):***
*Right now, the Turks hold most of Iran's industry and wealth.*

The results of a comprehensive documentary-field research on the topic of 'State Policy and the Inter-Ethnic Relations of Baloch and Sistani' indicate that the historical peaceful relationship between the two ethnic groups of Baloch and Sistani has, in recent years, under the influence of state policy, turned into a hostile relationship. This is because after the Islamic Revolution and the dominance of a religious view in the country of Iran with an emphasis on Shi'ism, the Sistanis were considered as the executive arm of the central government in the entire province of Sistan and Balochestan, and the government adopted a supportive

1. For more information about the economic situation of ethnic groups, see: Chapter Two of this book under the title "Historical Genealogy, Geographical Distribution, and Cultural and Economic Characteristics of Ethnic Groups in Iran."

view of them. This policy has caused tension in the region and, apart from reducing the integration of the Baloch with the central government, has turned the relationship between the Baloch and the Sistanis into a critical and hostile relationship (Hafez-Nia et al., 2013: 17-18). From the perspective of the Baloch, this very matter has caused that, apart from the central government, the greatest injustice against them has been committed by this local group, and they imagine the existence of this group as the external factor of their underdevelopment. In contrast, the Sistani ethnic group believes that they have a common history with the Baloch, and the reason for their underdevelopment is more related to the lack of their own intra-group conditions than to external factors.

***Zafar Ahmad Didgah, a seminary teacher and social activist, from Sistan and Baluchestan:***
*We feel a closeness to the Kurds. We feel a cultural affinity with them.*

***Mohammad Gol-Kohrazeh, academic staff member at Zahedan University (Sistan and Baluchestan):***
*The Baluch elites in the province (all their doctors and professors) probably don't even number 50 or 60... Compare that with the Kurds.*

***Sadegh Sotvan, a sociologist and researcher, from Sistan and Baluchestan:***
*The concept of the 'Sistani state', which is a dominant society in the province, has created many problems for us.*

***Reza Keikhah-Aria, a Cultural Heritage employee, from Sistan and Baluchestan:***
*We don't consider ourselves very separate from the Baluch people; we are like cousins.*

The Arab ethnic group considers its world to be more suitable than that of ethnic groups such as the Baloch, and they also believe that the Baloch have the worst developmental conditions in the country. This ethnic group itself is considered prejudiced by the Bakhtiaris.

***Hamid Hammadi, a university lecturer, from Khuzestan:***
*When I saw the deprivation in Sistan and Baluchestan, I was horrified. In the last two years, 200-300 villages in Baluchestan have been buried under sand. In comparison to them, I feel very fortunate.*

***Masoud Zalizadeh, a researcher and writer, from Ahvaz (Khuzestan):***
*Arabs have certain specific behaviours, such as a tendency for conflict, quarrels, and fanaticism, which sometimes makes me feel negative.*

The other ethnic group discussed is the Azeri Turks, who believe that their economic situation is better than that of other ethnic groups, and they attribute the reason for this more to their own hard work and effort compared to other groups. The negative attitude of this group is more directed towards the Persian-speakers, and they believe that if any of their rights have been violated, it has been mostly by the Persian-speakers, because the administration of the country is in their hands, and they are trying to culturally assimilate other ethnic groups. This is while, in terms of the two indicators of religion and integration with central policy in Iran, the Turks are in the first place among the ethnic groups integrated with the central government and the central Persian ethnicity. This situation has undoubtedly had a positive effect on their greater enjoyment and benefit from national resources and wealth and state facilities. A cursory reflection on the general economic conditions of the Turk ethnic geography and their level of participation in the macro political and economic management of the country clearly displays this characteristic.

The Persian-speakers also believe that the country's issues and problems are not specific to a particular ethnic group, and that different regions of the country are affected in this regard. In other words, many Persians, while acknowledging the underdevelopment and lack of privilege of the ethnic regions, do not attribute it to ethnic and inter-ethnic discrimination but rather assess it as a consequence of the state's centre-oriented and inefficient policy, and consider the ethnic variable to be secondary in creating these conditions, not central and original. The attitude of this group towards the Sunni minority is that this group has the capacity for tolerance and forbearance and is flexible in its behaviours.

***Peyman Nasehpour, a university lecturer and musician, from Ardabil:***

*Turks are hardworking and are in a better economic situation than the rest. The lowest unemployment rate is in Tabriz. For example, I went to Kermanshah and one of the managers said the people there are lazy.*

***Asghar Izadi Jiran, a sociologist and lecturer at Tabriz University (East Azerbaijan):***

*During my doctorate, I compared three Persian-speaking provinces with three Turkic-speaking provinces and saw a huge gap between them. It seems as if there is systematic discrimination against ethnic groups.*

The findings obtained in the lines above, in the form of two types of seeing one's own world and the world of the 'other' and the comparison between them, cause the creation of a sense of discrimination, according to which, each of the ethnic groups believes that discrimination is being practiced against them, and the country's facilities are in the hands of another group. The creation of this type of sense of discrimination can be the result of various factors. A part of this type of feeling is rooted in the law, according to which, different ethnic and religious groups believe that there is discrimination against them in the official laws of the country. Another part of this feeling goes back to the religious matter, according to which, the belief is created that there is discrimination against the unofficial religious groups in the country. Another part of the feeling of this type of discrimination is rooted in the political matter and the discretionary behaviour of the rulers of the government, that in the forty-plus years of the Islamic Revolution, governance has been in the hands of one linguistic, regional, and religious wing, and other wings have been deprived of this leadership, and based on that, more facilities are applied for those specific regions and against other regions.

***Rasoul Nami, a carpet designer, from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan):***
*I think the Persians have somewhat usurped the rights of the Turks, and this issue has unfortunately become entrenched within families.*



*Image 3-15. Interview with Rasoul Nami*

***Nasser Amoli Moghaddam, a journalist and reformist activist, from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan):***
*At the Khawaf seminary, I used to debate with Mowlana Motahari about Shia and Sunni Islam, and he would comfortably engage in conversation with me in front of his Sunni students. These people seem to be enlightened, tolerant, and good.*

The official religion in Iran, according to the constitution, is the Shi'i sect, and reaching political and high-level national and provincial management posts requires conformity with the official religion of the country. It is self-evident that other Islamic sects and minorities will have no position and will not enjoy these rights. When they are not in high managerial positions and a situation of powerlessness and subordination is created, the level of the feeling of discrimination will increase, a discrimination that is rooted in the spirit of the

constitution.

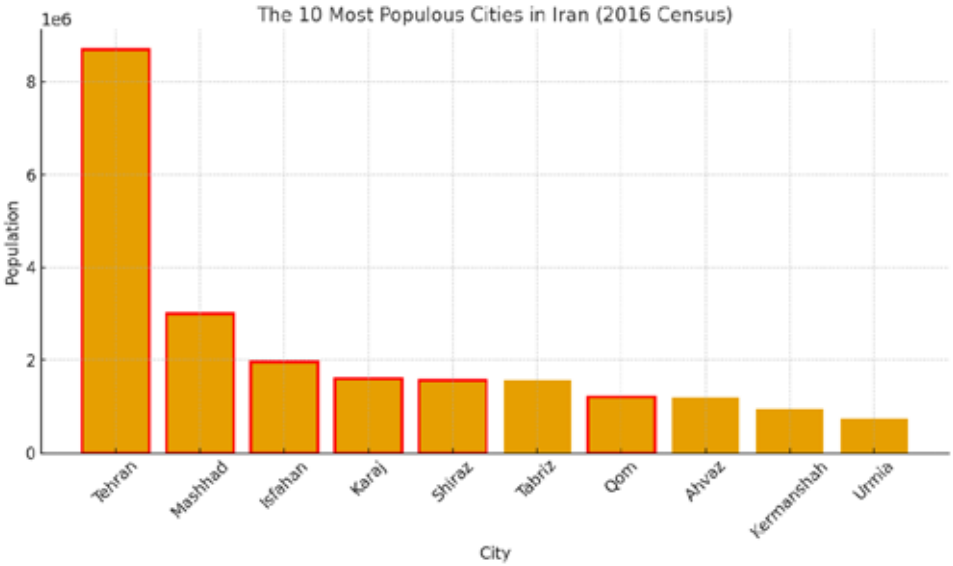



*Diagram 3-7. Sense of ethnic political discrimination according to elites*

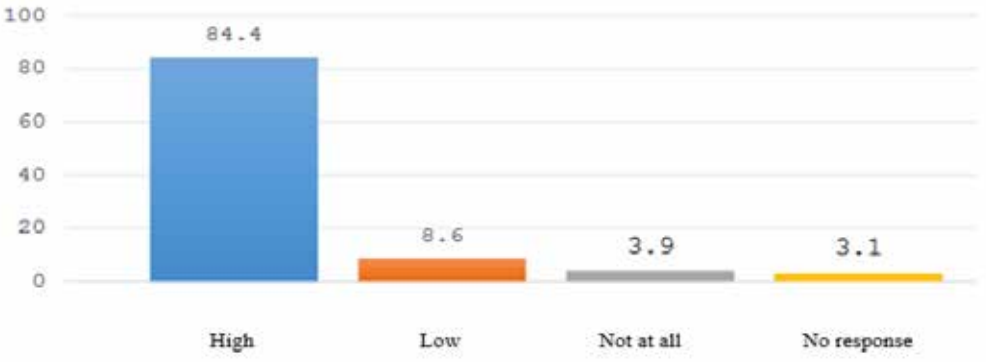



*Diagram 3-8. Sense of ethnic political discrimination according to general public*

Diagrams above show the level of the feeling of political discrimination among the elite and public groups of the ethnic groups studied. 84.4 percent of the elites and 85.5 percent of the public believed that Iranian ethnic groups are exposed to political discrimination and inequality.

The Conflation of Traditional and Modern Beliefs

In the history of human societies, the transition from the traditional and classical era to the modern age is a comprehensive and plural experience that, in proportion to the epistemological foundations and worldview governing the public sphere of societies and the technical, economic, and political transformations

affecting their collective conditions, has undergone a different fate in each of the civilisational spheres, regions, and countries. In Western civilisation, as the pioneers and architects of the new age, the transition from the age of tradition to the new era occurred in an endogenous and gradual process with the emergence of the Renaissance. This nascent experience then found its way to other societies as a result of Western contact with other lands and caused a transformation in the pillars of their collective life. Iranian society is among those societies that, despite more than two centuries since entering the circle of relations of the new civilisation, is still in a state of transition and exists on the horizon of both the traditional and modern worlds. It is a situation that, according to some experts, is contradictory and irreconcilable, while according to others, the possibility of fusion and coexistence between them exists. They see success in establishing a modern society not in opposition to the foundations and heritage of tradition, but in a rational and critical encounter with it. [1]

Naturally, modern humans, upon seeing the new ways of life of the modern era, find many of the behaviours of traditional society to be inappropriate. On the other hand, the cold, soulless, and individualistic conditions of life in today's metropolises arouse their nostalgic feelings, and in this way, they keep the memory of the old days alive. In addition to the emotional importance of beliefs, the living conditions of Iranian society, in which religion as a traditional and historical matter has taken root in its heart and form, is another factor that has led to the institutionalisation of many customary and local values and norms within it. However, this has not caused a change in the views and beliefs of successive generations. Although today we are witnessing a transition in belief and values among the members of society who, despite preserving some ethnic and ancestral beliefs, have created a new world of belief and values with a rational and functional view.

According to the findings of this research, the different ethnic and religious groups have preserved those old and historical customs and traditions that were reasonable, and they have no qualms about eliminating or forgetting the

1. The subject of tradition and modernity and the relationship between the traditional heritage and the modern achievements of Iranian society is considered one of the most important and central intellectual topics in contemporary Iran, around which a vast and considerable volume of historical, philosophical, and intellectual productions has been dedicated, and which has been re-read and subjected to different analyses from the perspective of various scientific and intellectual schools and views.

unreasonable aspects of their culture. In other words, some of the interviewees, by distinguishing between good and bad customs and enumerating examples of them, have pointed out that customs and traditions that are based on reason and logic and have humane and moral aspects in the modern world should be preserved and strengthened. However, customs that have no moral or logical justification and are mostly superstitious and irrational matters should be set aside.

Among the values that have come under serious criticism in the new era are wrong religious, doctrinal, and customary values. According to individuals, religion is a personal choice, and the fact that it is transmitted through society does not mean that it is unchangeable. Rather, an individual can, with thought and reason, make their own appropriate decision about it. Of course, the critique and revision of values by individuals is related to the perception and interpretation of society of that value. In other words, some of what we are faced with today are historical constructs. A critical re-reading of rituals such as qameh-zani (self-flagellation with blades), which takes place during the Ashura ceremonies in some regions, is a type of this rethinking that is applied to religious values. The attribution of this part of religion to a not-so-distant period indicates that values are not essentially intrinsic and have undergone change and transformation in every era. A number of other religious, customary, and traditional matters that require rethinking include issues such as the circumcision of women and men, child marriage, the marriage of girls as blood money between two family groups, and other such things that had a function in the life and tradition of the past and require rethinking and enlightenment. The findings of this research also show the interest of the interviewees in rethinking traditional and old views.

***Mohammad Ramezani, an English lecturer, translator, and novelist, from Bukan (West Azerbaijan):***

*In terms of traditions, I have preserved those that I found reasonable and logical (like honesty and hospitality), but I don't consider other parts reasonable (unnecessary shame and standing on ceremony), and I don't accept the superstitions that exist in some cases. Of course, the force of time and human evolution will set these issues aside.*

***Hassan Fesharaki, a writer and translator, from Isfahan:***
*Neither Nowruz nor Ashura should be imposed on anyone. People are free to have their customs and traditions. We have both good and harmful customs. For example, Qameh-zani [a form of self-flagellation] or female circumcision are harmful customs. We need customs that are rational, humane, and ethical, suitable for the modern world.*

In this regard, many citizens are aware of the acquired aspect of their ethnic and religious identities and, in the shadow of this self-awareness, have a slight and flexible prejudice towards them. Increasing the level and scope of this form of individual and collective self-awareness is one of the urgent needs of the society of Iran, which has a plurality of ethnicities and identities. In its shelter, an opportunity for resolving the challenges and conflicts of inter-ethnic and identitarian relations can be provided, and the possibility of peaceful coexistence and a collective life based on social tolerance and forbearance can be provided more than ever.

## The Absence of Elites and Underdevelopment

Development is a concept that denotes the expansion of a social system's capacity to meet the needs of society, economic growth, an increase in production, and the enhancement of the level of welfare. Therefore, it has economic, political, cultural, welfare, educational, health, and environmental dimensions (Azimi, 1382: 42). Based on the quantitative and qualitative indicators and criteria of development, societies are generally categorised into three levels: developed, developing, and underdeveloped.

Underdevelopment is a state in which, due to the disharmony between economic factors and applied technology, the simultaneous use of capital and labour in society is not possible. An underdeveloped country is a country that is at a low level in terms of development standards and indicators (Rasoulzadeh-Aghdam and Taheri, 2014: 92). This title is applied to countries that have not made progress in the way of science and technology, production and management, health, and education, and have not coordinated their learnings and acquisitions and placed them in the appropriate place. In the pathology of development and

its obstacles, the role and impact of various economic, cultural, political, social, and human factors have been discussed. In the discussion of human forces and resources effective in development, the elites are of central importance. According to some thinkers, in every society, there are two groups of intellectual and instrumental elites. What is meant by intellectual elites are the thinkers, theorists, and intellectuals of a society, and the instrumental elites are the owners of wealth and power. One of the essential conditions for development is the presence of these two elite groups in the heart of society and their consensus of opinion and will regarding the optimal use of their ability and expertise in the direction of the progress and growth of society. A pathology of underdevelopment in ethnic regions, from the perspective of the variable of human resources and specialised forces, speaks of the lack of presence of intellectual and instrumental ethnic elites in these regions and the deprivation of ethnic geography of their presence. From the perspective of elite theory, the sphere of the elite is the centre of gravity of the discussion of development, and in the development of a society, the intellectual and organisational abilities of the elites play an unparalleled role (Maleki, 1388: 148-149).

The findings of the present research also confirm this fundamental role of internal and human factors in the underdevelopment of the situation of the ethnic groups studied, to the extent that the interviewees point to the importance of the return of the university graduates of the city of Tabriz after the completion of their studies in the development of this city. On the other hand, regarding the reason for the underdevelopment of provinces such as Sistan and Balochestan, the role of internal factors and the small number of university graduates among the people of this region has been pointed out.

***Ali Tahmasebi, a pensioner, researcher, and writer, from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan):***

*I believe that we must constantly re-examine ourselves and be re-examined. It's true that we cannot break from the past, but we cannot remain in the past either. We are not a repetition of ourselves; we are a continuation of ourselves... however, this continuation is a form of re-examination... My ancestors made mistakes, and now that I am re-examining the past, I must critique it.*

> ***21-year-old man, from Semnan:***
> *Look, I'm not prejudiced, and the reason is that I had no role in my ethnicity or religion; because my parents were a certain way, I was raised and taught the same way. So if we understand this, we won't be prejudiced anymore.*

From this perspective, the elites who should take on the mission of social enlightenment and steer the helm of all-round growth and development have either not grown and been nurtured to the extent that society needs, or, due to the repellent factors of their own native society and reasons such as the lack of a work environment and migration, society has been deprived of the possibility of their presence and role-playing.

## The Relationship between the State and Ethnic Groups

As the custodian of social, cultural, and economic policies at both the micro and macro levels, the state develops an effective and specific relationship with ethnic groups and their demands, the forms, dimensions, and nature of which are manifested in the sphere of ethnic policy. In countries with multiple ethnic groups, the policymaking of the ruling system towards these groups generally takes two forms. The first is through the enactment and implementation of explicit and codified ethnic policies, which are effectively the outcome of the official political perception of ethnicity and the manner of interaction with it. In this case, the ethnic matter, like any other issue, is transparently defined by official bodies, and based on formal decision-making and policymaking mechanisms, explicit and transparent positions are taken in a codified manner. The second form of state policy regarding ethnic groups and the issue of ethnicity is the absence of a transparent plan and of explicit, independent, and specific attention to ethnic issues. In this approach, ethnic policies are mainly implemented in an unwritten manner under the umbrella of broader cultural, economic, and social policies. The state, for various reasons such as deliberately leaving ethnic discussions unaddressed and presenting them as non-political, refrains from overt engagement and from the formulation and specification of policy and programmes in this domain.

The ethnic policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is of the uncodified and unspecified type of policymaking, which is often raised in the course of other policies and takes on an executive form in the framework of regional and provincial management. Although at times, relying on the largely unimplemented capacities of the Iranian constitution which guarantee a minimum of ethnic and religious rights, and influenced by the reformist political discourse of some governments, efforts have been made to adopt minimal positions in the face of ethnic demands, in general, in the ethnic policy of the Islamic Republic system, apart from the provisions of the constitution, which have been mostly neglected, there is no clear, explicit, and codified policymaking regarding ethnicity. Given the system's security-oriented perspective on the existence of ethnic groups and ethnic issues, the general outlines of macro-political positions regarding ethnic groups are mostly adopted with the participation and consultation of military and security institutions and are placed on the agenda of governmental bodies in an undeclared and implicit manner.

The non-recognition of ethnic rights in general and specific laws, a lack of transparency in governmental positions regarding the demands of ethnic groups, the attempt to depoliticise ethnic identity and the existence of ethnic groups by reducing them to a cultural phenomenon under the idea of Iranian nationalism and demagogic suggestions, and the dominance of a security-oriented reading of ethnic discussions and, consequently, its security and military management, are the cornerstones of the Islamic Republic's policy towards ethnic groups. This has fanned the flames of a non-interactive, weak, unstable, untrustworthy, hostile, and antagonistic relationship.

> ***Mahmoud Eftekhari, retired from Tehran's Cultural Heritage Organisation and an expert in Iranian art, from Semnan:***
> *In a land such as the one we live in, we cannot say anything with certainty... It's as if we have learned no lessons from history and are just going around in circles.*

The findings derived from the participants' data in this section also speak of a weak and untrustworthy relationship and the unfulfilled demands of ethnic groups from the state. In this regard, numerous demands can be named, but based on the frequency of the propositions mentioned by the participants of this research, the most recurrent ones are cited. Among the prominent demands that

are incompatible with the ruling establishment's claims of Islam-centrism and religious democracy is the disregard for the wishes of the Sunni community, who are the country's largest Muslim religious minority.

The mass media are other important tools that play a role in cultural monopoly, and in the present age, their importance becomes more apparent every day. The participants' view on the role of the mass media is that they are exploited for the benefit of one part of the collective identity of the land of Iran. Although Iran derives its identity from a collection of ethnic groups and religions, the media, which is also given the name of 'national media,' acts only to reflect a part of that national identity, derived from the Shi'i sect and the Persian-speaking ethnic group. The reason for this can be traced to a significant debate in political philosophy: that a ruling power is inclined to exploit resources for the benefit of those in power, unless the subtle and qualitative mechanisms of democracy can prevent such a corrupting process, which itself requires freedom in various social spheres. On this basis, and according to the participants' statements, in Iran, the authority over the audio and visual media is in the hands of the ruling establishment. Naturally, when such authority exists, the issue of interests arises, and the group in authority exploits it for its own benefit.

***Peyman Nasehpour, a university lecturer and musician, from Ardabil:***

*The reason for Tabriz's superiority over Ardabil is the return of its educated individuals to their city after graduation.*

***Sardar Fotouhi, a consultant for public and private research projects, from Saqqez (Kurdistan):***

*There is also a policy at the university level: young people go to a bigger university, settle there, and don't return. The facilities available in cities like Tabriz, Tehran, and other industrial cities prevent the return of scientific and academic elites to their hometowns, which has led to Kurdistan's economic backwardness.*

Furthermore, the country's press is also under the authority of one of the government ministries, and they too manage it in line with their own ideological policies. In addition, there is severe control over the internet, social networks,

and virtual media, and under the shadow of the intense supervision and filtering of governmental institutions, they cannot freely express their information and views. Another condition that has caused the dissatisfaction of ethnic groups with the government is the unfavourable economic condition of these groups, who believe that the bulk of economic facilities is concentrated in the centres of the country and the region inhabited by Persian-speakers.

Another issue that has fanned the flames of the increased level of dissatisfaction of ethnic groups with the state's policies is the way the mother tongue is treated. The mother tongue is the most important indicator of ethnic culture and has great importance in the public sphere of each of the ethnic groups. In this regard, the participants from each of the ethnic groups believe that despite the legal principles enshrining the right to the mother tongue, its implementation has remained unimplemented to date. Another issue relates to the environmental conditions of the ethnic regions, which have a large young population, and where illiteracy, especially among the middle-aged and the elderly, is more severe than in the Persian-inhabited regions. These same environmental conditions, apart from governmental policies, play a fundamental role in intensifying their underdevelopment.

***Mohammad Gol-Kohrazeh, academic staff member at Zahedan University, from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):*** *The Baluch elites in the province (all their doctors and professors) probably don't even number 50 or 60... Compare that with the Kurds. First and foremost, we must pursue education... Has religion prevented the Kurds from achieving their political demands? I say no. Sanandaj also has its political demands, and they hold the best managerial posts, governorships, and so on. So, religion has not prevented them from accessing certain political demands here... The problem lies elsewhere. We must focus on our science and education to be able to make political demands.*

***Zaher Saraee, a literary activist and poet, from Ilam:***

*I don't think there is a specific, deliberate, and systematic discrimination aimed at holding our people back. This ethnic group, after all, lives in this society like all other groups, and the problems that exist all over Iran also exist here. Some of our problems are due to our geographical situation; for example, we are in a corner of Iran, so transport costs are a bit high and supply becomes difficult, which raises the prices of goods. There is an employment problem. These are major problems that exist everywhere in Iran.*

As a result of the described situations and other instances of inequality mentioned in other parts of this chapter, the people of the ethnic groups believe that when their demands are raised, instead of practical action being taken to resolve them, they become a tool for politicians to gain power. Each of them, at election time, by emphasizing these demands and turning them into campaign slogans, exploits the feelings of the people of these regions, and after coming to power, they forget their promises. The people of these ethnic groups believe that sometimes, when expressing their demands and also holding ethnic and religious ceremonies in their areas of residence, security measures are taken against them. In their view, a military atmosphere prevails in the country, and apart from the official military forces, actions are also taken against them by informal military groups. According to them, the result of such a situation is the monophony of society, the monopoly of cultural affairs in the hands of a specific group and faction, and the marginalisation of other ethnic groups.

## The Absence of Religious Minorities' Institutions in the Capital

Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights holds that minorities are entitled to the enjoyment and development of their own cultural rights (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966).[1] In other words, if minorities are able to develop their own specific culture, their right to

1. According to Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

a cultural identity will be honoured.

Among the data from this research are numerous references indicating that the cultural rights of minorities are being disregarded. Examples of this include the absence of non-Shi'i religious places of worship, especially Sunni mosques, in the capital. According to Article 12 of the Constitution, 'The official religion of Iran is Islam and the Ja'fari Twelver sect, and this principle is eternally unchangeable.' In the same article, regarding other sects, it is stated: 'Other Islamic sects, including Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali, and Zaydi, are to be accorded full respect, and their followers are free to perform their religious ceremonies according to their own jurisprudence. Their religious education and matters of personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance, and wills) and related lawsuits are recognised in the courts. In any region where the followers of any one of these sects constitute a majority, local regulations, within the limits of the authority of the councils, shall be in accordance with that sect, while preserving the rights of the followers of other sects.' Regarding the followers of other divine religions living in Iran, Article 13 also states: 'Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognised religious minorities who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious ceremonies, and in matters of personal status and religious education, they act according to their own rites' (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018: 17).

> ***Faisal Ameri, an environmental and social activist, from Khuzestan:***
>
> *We are Shia, we are Yamani; we want to hold a ceremony, but they won't let us. Or in Qom, they imprisoned Ahmad al-Hassan al-Yamani...*

Given the religious foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which are crystallised in numerous articles of the constitution, and also based on Article 13 of the Constitution, only Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians, who have monotheistic religions, are recognised as religious minorities. Consequently, the manner of interaction with non-Muslim Iranians who have a religion other than Zoroastrianism, Judaism, or Christianity is explained based on Article 14 of the Constitution: 'The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Muslims are duty-bound to treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equity, and to respect their human rights. This

principle is valid for all who refrain from conspiring and acting against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran' (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018: 17).

However, contrary to the enactment of these laws, the followers of non-monotheistic religions in Iran are under duress and pressure. The severity of the crackdown on the Baha'i community in Iran is greater than for other religious groups. The followers of the Yarsan faith, who mainly reside in the Kermanshah and Azerbaijan regions, are also deprived of publicly performing their religious rites, and most of their ceremonies are held in secret and clandestinely. On 15 November 2019, the member states of the United Nations, while expressing serious concerns about the severe restrictions imposed on the freedom of opinion, conscience, religion, or belief of minorities, including Christians, Gonabadi Dervishes, Jews, Sufi Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Zoroastrians, Baha'is, and followers of the Yarsan religion, by adopting a resolution, requested Iran to provide the right to freedom of religion and belief for all citizens, including members of religious minorities recognised by the constitution and also those whose religion is not recognised (Continued concern over the state of religious freedom in Iran, 2019).

***Hassan Naser, director of the Cultural Heritage Department of Karun County, from Karun (Khuzestan):***
*I have friends who are Mandaeans. Their elders are my friends and we have a relationship. In fact, we invited them. I invited the head of the Mandaeans of Iran on tree-planting day, and I got so much abuse for it: 'Why did you invite these impure people, you who are a Shia?'*



*Image 3-16. Interview with Hassan Naser*

The followers of these religions are deprived of having their own specific religious institutions in their areas of residence, and naturally, in the centre and capital of the country, they are also deprived of having their own specific places of worship. Of course, as was stated, the followers of the monotheistic Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian religions have the right to have religious centres in their areas of residence and also in the city of Tehran as the country's capital.

In the metropolis of Tehran, as the capital and political centre of the country, various ethnic and sectarian groups live. One of these religious groups is the followers of the Sunni sect, as the country's second-largest religious group. According to unofficial statistics, about one million of them live in this city. However, throughout the forty-plus years of the Islamic Revolution, they have been deprived of having an official and designated religious place for performing their rites and religious ceremonies. In all these years, the followers of this sect have unofficially rented houses to hold Friday prayers and Eid prayers (Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha), but in this regard too, restrictions have been imposed against them (Soleimanpour, 2022).

> ***Shopkeeper, from Oshnavieh (West Azerbaijan):***
> *Religiously, they don't give us any importance. This small town has a Shia mosque; why don't the big cities have Sunni mosques?*

***Nazarmohammad Didgah, former Member of Parliament and a religious Mowlavi, from Iranshahr (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*We don't have a mosque in Tehran or Isfahan. Sunnis pray at home. Imam Khomeini had given us the land for the great Mosalla of Tehran in Abbasabad. He had written a letter to Mowlana Abdolaziz. I even opened a bank account to collect public donations for building the mosque. A Kurd told me, when I was an MP, 'Don't collect public donations at all, I will pay for the construction,' but they didn't issue a permit. The same gentleman who is in power now didn't allow it; we were friends in parliament.*

The 'Sunni Online' website, which publishes news of the Sunni community of Iran, has in recent years repeatedly reported on the prevention of the holding of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha prayers. Apart from these preventions, one of the cases that has aroused the anger and dissatisfaction of the Sunni followers and the Sunni Friday prayer imam of Zahedan in recent years was the demolition of their prayer house in the Punak area of Tehran by municipal forces with the support of law enforcement and security forces in 2015 (Demolition of the Sunni prayer house in Tehran, 2015).



*Image 3-17. A line of Sunni worshippers in one of Tehran's prayer houses and the difficulty of attending in its small space*

Also, in Tehran, there is no dedicated notary office for Sunnis where marriage and divorce can be registered. Consequently, despite the fact that Hanafis and Shafi'is follow different rulings from the Shi'i sect regarding marriage and divorce, they are forced to legally register their divorce or marriage contract in Shi'i notary offices. The children and pupils of Sunni families also study in the same schools where the children of Shi'is are educated. Sunnis do not even have a cultural centre or a dedicated library at their disposal and cannot freely print and sell their books anywhere.

Apart from the restriction on having a religious place of worship for Sunni followers in the capital of Iran, in recent years, restrictions have also been imposed on the administration of religious science schools in Sunni regions. On 30 October 2007, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution approved a resolution entitled 'The Statute of the State Council for the Planning of Sunni Religious Science Schools' for the purpose of controlling the management of Sunni religious schools by Shi'i representatives appointed by the government and the leader of the Islamic Republic, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad promulgated it in March 2008. The statute of the Council for the Planning of Sunni Religious Science Schools of the country has 10 articles and 4 notes. In Article 1 of this resolution, it is emphasized that the administration of Sunni religious schools must be under the supervision of the 'Council for the Planning of Sunni Religious Science Schools' and the 'Council of the Representatives of the Supreme Leader in Sunni Affairs' (Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, 2007). On this basis, in recent years, many of the Sunni religious science schools in different regions of the country that did not submit to this control were closed down (Government interference in Sunni schools and the arrest of Sunni clerics, 2012). Among other cases that have caused the protest of the Sunni community is the creation of restrictions on the travel of their religious elders, such as the prohibition of domestic inter-provincial and foreign travel for Messrs. Molana Abdolhamid, the Sunni Friday prayer imam of Zahedan; Molana Gergij, the Sunni Friday prayer imam of Azadshahr in Golestan province; and Kak Hassan Amini, the director of the Imam Bukhari Religious Science School in Sanandaj and the head of the Fiqh Assembly Council of a group of Sunni scholars.

***A Dervish man, from Semnan:***

*There are restrictions on religious rituals. During Ramadan, they didn't let us hold our Quran recitation gatherings... You might not believe it, but it happened to us.*

The demand for a special religious centre for Sunnis in the city of Tehran was pursued more vigorously in the early years of the revolution, and then the level of demand for it somewhat decreased. In the last decade, this demand has once again become a concern for the followers of this group. In 2011, the Sunni representatives of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, in a letter to the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, demanded the lifting of discrimination against Sunnis, the lifting of the religious restrictions created for Sunnis, and permission to build a mosque in Tehran. The Sunni Friday prayer imam of Zahedan, Molavi Abdolhamid Esmailzehi, has also repeatedly, both officially (by writing a letter to the leader and the president) and unofficially (in various speeches), referred to the lack of special mosques for Sunnis in Tehran as one of the concerns of the Sunnis of Tehran. In 2015, in a letter to the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, while protesting the demolition of the Sunni prayer house in the Punak area of Tehran, he emphasized that 'this type of treatment gives an opportunity to violent and extremist elements to fan the flames of discord.' Molavi Abdolhamid also, in a letter to Hassan Rouhani, while protesting the demolition of the Sunni prayer house in Tehran, considered the spread of extremism in the world to be the effect of causes such as 'intolerance,' 'inattention to the rightful demands of the people,' and 'not seeing the existing realities' (Molavi Abdolhamid’s protest against the demolition of the Sunni prayer house in Tehran, 2015). Mamosta Abdolrahman Pirani, the Secretary-General of the Call and Reform Community, also in 2011, while criticising the prevention of the holding of the Eid al-Fitr prayer for the Sunnis of Tehran, asked the senior government officials to, by preventing mismanagement, provide the ground for the construction of a Sunni mosque. The directors of the Sunni religious science schools of Sistan and Balochestan province have also repeatedly, apart from protesting the lack of a special mosque for Sunnis in the city of Tehran, protested the new plan for the supervision of Sunni religious science schools by the ruling establishment. Human rights organisations and institutions monitoring the freedom of religions have also always emphasized the necessity of safeguarding the religious rights

of Sunnis and the right to have an independent place of worship in the capital of Iran (Human Rights Watch: Lift the restrictions on worship for Sunnis, 2013).

Respect for cultural diversity with an approach of accepting differences in society can lead to peaceful coexistence and the strengthening of national integration and security. Also, confronting different religious groups and the lack of freedom to perform religious rites can have undesirable and detrimental consequences for the country. Perhaps one of the reasons for the formation of extremist and terrorist groups in neighbouring countries can be considered the existence of these very restrictions. In the country of Iran, too, in recent years, we have witnessed numerous cases of the application of violence and terrorist behaviour. The attack on the Islamic Consultative Assembly, numerous cases of the abduction of and attacks on border guards, various bombings in public and Shi'i religious places, especially in the southeast regions of the country, and the formation of the Jundallah group led by Abdolmalek Rigi are examples of the application of violence in these years. It is hoped that with the necessity of respecting the followers of different religious faiths and accepting the model of pluralism, the ground for unity and having a secure society will be provided.

## Free Access to the Media

Today's world is named the Information Age. A world in which new technology has reduced the speed of the transmission of news of events and incidents to an instant and has created a revolution in this field. In such a situation, the issue of free and unrestricted access to information and the possibility of sharing data and news has found a fundamental importance, to the extent that many experts believe that the ability to produce, disseminate, and control information in the current era is the most prominent criterion of power at the national and global levels, which is realised by relying on the intertwined and global network of media tools and electronic communication. This comprehensive and all-encompassing media and information function is also effective in the internal relations of societies and has a central and stable role in organising the individual and social lives of individuals and groups. Therefore, the possibility of free access to the mass media and the free flow of information, or the restriction and prohibition of access to it, has a significant impact on the development process of societies. [1]

1. For more information, see: Divsalar, Abdolrasoul (2014), The Power of Information, Tehran: Tisa Publications.

***Bagher Sadri-Nia, academic staff member and university lecturer, from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan):***
*I have a strategic opposition to those who see the Turkish language in opposition to the Persian language, because it goes against our short-term and long-term interests; the two must grow alongside each other. However, the performance of the national and provincial media is narrow-minded and backward, and national diversity finds no room for reflection in the media.*

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights speaks of the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers. According to multiple interpretations, this phrase, in addition to freedom of expression, also speaks of the freedom of access to information (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1996).

In the country of Iran, the Law on the Publication of and Free Access to Information, approved in 2008, states in its Article 2: 'Every Iranian person has the right of access to public information, unless the law has prohibited it. The use of public information or its publication is subject to the relevant laws and regulations' (Law on the Publication of and Free Access to Information, 2008). But in practice, restrictions are imposed on access to the free flow of information in the mass communication media. In the media and press policy of the Islamic Republic regime towards ethnic groups, the strategy of 'issue-effacement' has often been adopted. This means that in the legal and official literature of the ruling establishment, a category with the title of ethnic media and press does not exist; rather, they are mentioned under the title of 'local press and media.' This policy, which can be interpreted as a continuation of other political de-ethnicisation positions, is in itself a ground for the imposition of extensive legal and juridical restrictions on the activity of the media and publications. At the level of work experiences in the field of mass media and the press, the imposition of a vast volume of pressure, prohibition, and security and administrative constraints on activities that have an ethnic character or that try, despite the restrictions, to take a step in this direction by using the existing capacities, is another fundamental problem that redoubles the difficulty of the arduous work of the media and the

press in Iran. A re-reading of the experience of the local media and publications with ethnic positions in Iran and the fate of their managers and journalists will clearly show the aforementioned conditions. The era of the reformist government was the only period of favour for the local ethnic media and press in Iran, in which for the first time in the public space of the ethnic regions of Iran, a part of the real demands of the ethnic groups was raised and reflected in the media and publications. But this period was not very continuous, and even before the end of the reformist government's term, the flame of its prosperity and activity subsided, and with the coming to power of the Ahmadinejad government, they were on the verge of complete closure. A journalist for ethnic publications in Tehran says about the activity of ethnic publications in the Ahmadinejad period: 'When the national newspapers are closed, speaking of the prohibition of local and ethnic press is futile.' He also confirms that the reporters of ethnic newspapers operate in very unequal and difficult conditions. In his opinion, the smallest criticism takes on an ethnic colour, and news that is even published in these publications from governmental sources and the official news agencies of the country is accused. He explains about his problems that in the ethnic regions, due to the smallness of the place, the limitation of the field of work, and the lack of freedom of expression, he came to Tehran to continue his journalistic activity, but in Tehran too, there is no news of freedom of expression (Shirmohammadi, 2010).

The findings of the present research also show the imposition of restrictions on having a free media with respect to the different ethnic groups. On this basis, apart from the fact that ethnic and religious groups are deprived of having a free audio and visual media, an atmosphere of censorship and filtering also prevails over their press and virtual media space.

***Mowlana Abdolhamid Esmail-Zehi, Sunni Friday Prayer Leader of Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*Ethnic groups, in reality, have no articulate voice and no access to the media. Now, if someone gives an interview to outsiders, do the gentlemen get upset? Well, who are we supposed to talk to then? The state broadcaster doesn't air our words; we don't have our own media. Where should we raise our problems? We have a website, 'Sunni Online', which they have filtered. My own website is also filtered.*

In the country of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) is a governmental institution whose head, according to Article 175 of the Constitution, is appointed by the leader of the Islamic Republic (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018: 59), and its directives are determined by the leader's political apparatus. In other words, the function of the IRIB in Iran is the reproduction of the ideology of the ruling establishment. Outside of this framework, no private audio and visual network is allowed to operate at the national level. It is natural that in such a situation, media freedom and the right of free access for audiences with different intellectual and cultural tastes to the audio and visual media spaces are disregarded.

In the last few decades, and since the domestic visual media have not been able to cover the intellectual, cultural, linguistic, religious, and other needs of the different ethnic and religious groups, the inclination towards foreign visual media and satellite networks has secretly increased. Secretly, in the sense that in 1994, the law on the 'Prohibition of the Use of Satellite Receiving Equipment' was approved by the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and according to this law, 'the import, distribution, and use of satellite receiving equipment, except in cases determined by law, is prohibited' (Law on the Prohibition of the Use of Satellite Receiving Equipment, 1994).

***Mohammad Jamaluddin Vazhi, a religious researcher and sociologist, from Pasveh, Piranshahr (West Azerbaijan):***

*The state broadcaster in Iran, like the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, is an ideological organ that defends the dominant power. It's natural that it cannot be the voice of the people, and this issue is not that important anymore because the people moved on from the state broadcaster a long time ago. Now, social networks are the bridge connecting people to the outside world, and news is also obtained through this channel and, to some extent, from satellite channels. This lack of trust is palpable even to those in power, and their programmes are solely focused on preventing further attrition among their own supporters. I believe that Iran's state broadcaster, with its fabrications and insults, has played the most significant role in creating a rift between the people and the government of the Islamic Republic.*

***Shno Hosseini, a civil and women's rights activist, from Javanrud (Kermanshah):***

*My level of satisfaction with the performance of the state broadcaster, at both national and provincial levels, is very low—it's not much more than zero. In my opinion, the media is not for the people, its content does not cater to any single ethnicity, and its programmes are not geared towards serving ethnic groups.*

The press is another active media at the national level. Unlike the IRIB, which is considered national and has a specific ruling ideology embedded in it, the press atmosphere is such that each of the different currents can write articles based on their own intellectual space. But regarding the issue of the activities of the press, two points are of note. The first point relates to the issue of obtaining a license from governmental institutions, which some have criticised. They believe that the granting of a license by the government, and who is allowed to cover a piece of news and who is not, has a meaning and concept beyond a license, and that this law has been mostly implemented in order to control these media. The second point also relates to the concepts of 'observance of Islamic standards' and 'the interests of society,' which are mentioned in the press laws. In this criticism, it is said that these two concepts are ambiguous concepts that any individual may have a definition of and may define different indicators for. Consequently, it has always provided the grounds for various misunderstandings and has brought about specific restrictions such as the suspension or closure of publications on the press community.

***Rahmatollah Hemmati, an economic activist, from Semnan:***

*My trust in the national media is zero. Because of the lies and hypocrisy I have seen from it.*

***Mowlana Abdolhamid Esmail-Zehi, Sunni Friday Prayer Leader of Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*We are very dissatisfied, and the people are dissatisfied. The state broadcaster does not take ethnic groups into account as it should and it discriminates. The state broadcaster is a national media outlet, but it doesn't belong to everyone. It is run for a specific class. Unfortunately, we cannot speak our minds. In Iran, they don't even grant a licence for anyone to have an ethnic television channel; there isn't enough freedom for everyone to be able to broadcast in their own language. We have a website, 'Sunni Online', which they have filtered. My own website is also filtered.*

The media related to the virtual space, such as blogs and various types of social networks, are other important media spaces that have gained an increasing importance in today's communication world. In this field too, although the ruling apparatus has less control over it compared to the IRIB and the press, in practice we see that many of these communication currents have faced filtering in recent decades. Internet filtering in Iran did not have very clear legal frameworks and rules; but with the approval of the Computer Crimes Law in 2009, some of its ambiguity was reduced. Based on Article 22 of this law, a committee named the Committee for Determining Instances of Criminal Content was formed at the office of the Attorney General. The members of this committee are 12 people, and its head is the Attorney General. This committee, after determining the criminality of a piece of content and deciding to filter the specific content or a specific website, will proceed to issue an order to the hosting service provider, and the provider will be obliged to remove or block the said content. If the provider violates the committee's order, they may be sentenced to dissolution, temporary closure, or a cash fine. Of course, this committee, based on the law, will only have the ability to issue an order to filter it in cases where the internet content is criminal (Computer Crimes Law, Research Centre of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, 2009). The application of supervision and control over internet activity is a global activity that is applied by most countries and related supra-national and international organisations and institutions. But the fundamental point of this law in Iran is the concept of 'criminal content' and

the determination of its instances, which turns this law into a legal tool in the direction of restricting and applying pressure on freedom of expression and the free circulation of information, news, and views.

***Basem Hammadi, a researcher of Arab ethnic rituals and music, and a university lecturer, from Ahvaz (Khuzestan):***
*In television and the national media, little attention has been paid to the culture of the Arab people. When we want to broadcast a programme on television, we must consider the target and local community. However, in the national media, this issue is not given much attention, and if it is, they insult and disrespect ethnic groups. We have witnessed many instances of disrespect and insults towards ethnic groups, especially the Arab people. The film 'The Bride of Fire' hurt the feelings of the Arab people, and people even threatened to set cinemas on fire.*



*Image 3-18. Interview with Bassem Hamadi*

The findings of this research show that the country's domestic media do not pay much attention to the issue of ethnic groups and their culture and customs, and usually, in those places where ethnic issues are raised, the different ethnic groups consider them to be contrary to their own values and norms. In this regard, every year we witness the dissatisfaction of different groups of Arabs, Azeri Turks,

Kurds, and other ethnic groups with the content of some television programmes.

An investigation and content analysis of these statements shows a kind of overt and covert dissatisfaction of the different ethnic groups regarding the active media in the country. According to the statements of the interviewees from the different ethnic groups of Turk, Kurd, Baloch, Arab, and Bakhtiari, the domestic audio and visual media act in the direction of the assimilation and homogenisation of the Iranian ethnic groups, and they are not paid attention to as they deserve. The perception of these ethnic groups is that in those places where they are discussed, mostly stereotypical and destructive formats are displayed, which provides the grounds for their greater displeasure. Contrary to the ethnic types discussed, the Persian-speakers have a relatively greater satisfaction with the performance of the IRIB. This shows that their culture and customs have a greater manifestation in these media.

The provincial audio and visual networks also do not have a better performance than the national IRIB. There, too, there is a kind of dissatisfaction of the ethnic groups regarding the performance of these networks. It is said that the form and format of most of the programmes of this media also tend towards the centre, and just as the national media disregard the customs, religion, language, culture, and luminaries and poets of these groups, these media also do not pay much attention to these matters. In addition, in these media, a type of shadow state also exists. For example, in Sistan and Balochestan, the Baloch believe that the media current of the province is in the hands of the Sistanis, and they do not have much of a position in it. In the province of West Azarbaijan, which is composed of the two ethnic groups of Azeri Turk and Kurd, the Kurds believe that they have no position in the provincial media. Also, in the province of Khuzestan, where many Bakhtiaris live, they believe that the media culture of this province does not pay much attention to their customs.

The lack of quality of national programmes, the restrictive policies contrary to the standards of freedom of expression, and the lack of attention to ethnic groups in the programming are the main factors of dissatisfaction with the IRIB. The results of the present research show that not only the elites but also the general public have a deep dissatisfaction with the quality of the IRIB's programmes. This dissatisfaction is even greater among the ethnic groups of Iran. In areas such as Kurdistan and Balochestan, ethnic issues are pursued with a security-oriented view, and the IRIB also takes steps in the direction of the homogenisation and

elimination of ethnic culture and is in a way accused of cultural homogenisation. This is because the official media of the ruling establishment, with the IRIB at its core, always try, on the one hand, to reduce ethnicity to a collection of social customs and traditions and cultural and artistic elements, and to prevent the manifestation of its political and legal dimensions, or in other words, to suggest it is an unnecessary matter and a factor of division and conspiracy. At the same time, to achieve this goal, in the media policy of the regime, along with the promotion of the Iranian nationalism desired by the discourse of the Islamic Republic, ethnicity and ethnicism are portrayed as a traditional, non-modern, inefficient phenomenon and a sign of social backwardness.

Charts 10 and 11 show the level of satisfaction with the IRIB's programmes in the provincial and national sections. Among the elites, 62.5 percent are not at all satisfied with the programmes, and only 11.7 percent evaluate the IRIB's programmes positively. Among the general public, 41 percent have a low level of dissatisfaction, and 19.3 percent do not like the programmes at all, and only 10.8 percent have complete satisfaction.

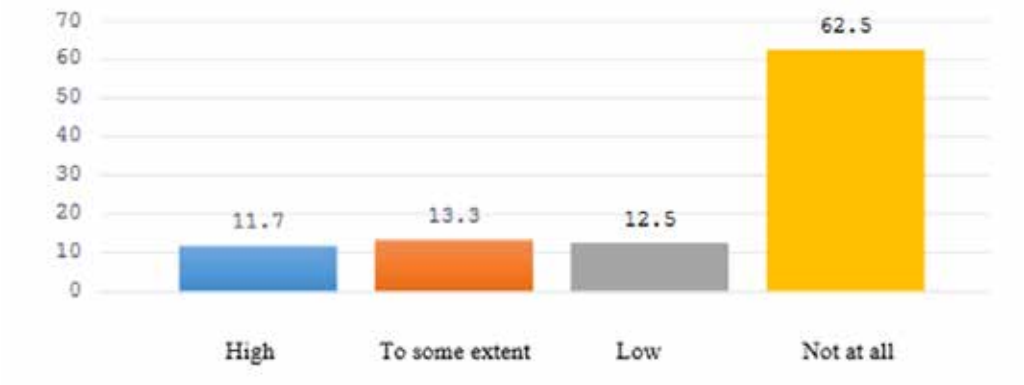



*Diagram 3-10. Elite satisfaction with radio and television*

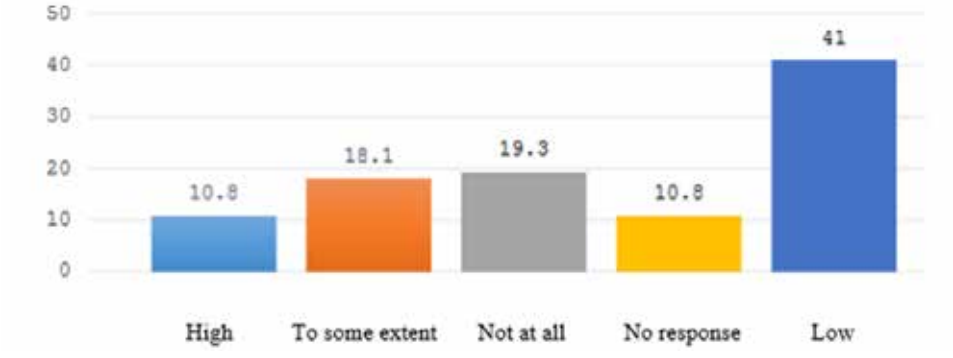



*Diagram 3-11. Public satisfaction with radio and television*

Diagram 17 Public satisfaction with radio and television

In the section on the press and other printed works such as various literary books, novels, and so on, in comparison with the performance of the IRIB, there is a relative satisfaction of the ethnic groups. Especially in the field of publications, apart from the Baloch ethnic group, the rest of the ethnic groups such as the Turks and Kurds stated that they have the right to subscribe to their own linguistic and local publications. Although in the field of printing literary books, the majority of these ethnic groups believed that to nourish their literary needs, they take refuge in the neighbouring countries that have a common culture and language with them.

Finally, in the field of virtual media, in several cases, the interviewees from the Turk, Kurd, Baloch, and Arab ethnic groups stated that their various sites and blogs with ethnic-linguistic and religious inclinations have faced filtering and confrontation from the relevant officials. This is a matter that does not seem to be limited to the ethnic groups inside the country, and in recent years, at the macro-national level, various sites and blogs with intellectual and gender inclinations have also been confronted. Also, the issue of the filtering of many social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram has always been accompanied by the criticism of media activists. The Sunni community of Iran, regarding the censorship and imposition on their virtual activity, believes: 'The few Sunni sites and blogs of Iran, despite observing the country's media laws, have a significant number of filtered sites to their name. This is while the activity of many of the Sunni sites of Iran, which have been diagnosed as criminal sites by the filtering committee and have ultimately been filtered, is within the framework of the country's computer laws and regulations, to the extent that there is no reasonable, logical, and court-admissible reason for their filtering. At the same time, many of the extremist and radical sites that are themselves the source of discord, division, and the creation of factions in society and pursue a policy of nothing but projection, fabrication, slander, and defamation, especially against the sanctities, beliefs, and personalities of the Sunnis, are active without any fear or trepidation from the relevant institutions, especially the filtering committee. And if sometimes one of the Sunni sites tries to respond to their slanders and refute their accusations, it is met with the severe reaction of the filtering committee, which is to block and filter it. The filtering of the 'Sunni Online' website, the official information base of the Sunnis of Iran, and also

the filtering of the 'Information Base of the Office of Sheikh-ul-Islam Molana Abdolhamid', which only includes the Friday prayer sermons and reports of his travels within the province, is a clear example of the dual behaviour of the filtering committee regarding the treatment of Sunni religious sites' (The dual behaviour of the 'Filtering Committee' with Sunni sites, 2012). This dual and hostile behaviour is intensified in a more severe way in relation to the virtual activities of other less populous and non-Muslim sects, as well as the political positions of ethnic groups, and apart from censorship and filtering, they are faced with judicial and security pursuits.

***Zafar Ahmad Didgah, a seminary teacher and social activist, from Sistan and Baluchestan:***

*Because we are religious, we follow Islamic media productions from different countries via satellite.*

***Parvin Zabihi, a civil activist, from Marivan (Kurdistan):***

*I am mostly in contact with Iraqi Kurdistan and I use their news channels and media. I am also somewhat in touch with the women's union of Ms. Rounak Faraj. When the 'Kurdistan Regional Government' was newly formed, I published books on subjects that could not really be mentioned much in Iran because they were taboo, such as women's self-immolation, honour killings, and female circumcision. The books I got from Iraqi Kurdistan had an excellent impact, enabling me to consolidate and organise my thoughts and to progress through study.*

In such a situation, the ethnic groups and their activists do not sit idly by and search for free platforms. One of the characteristics of the new era is the transition from an industrial society to an information society. This transition has caused modern man to witness the emergence of post-print forms of media production, distribution, and understanding and to use digital electronic media.

Audiences, in a situation where they feel that the writings of the printed versions do not meet their needs, quickly turn away from it and gravitate towards other platforms.

***Qasem Al-Kathir, a researcher and ethnic activist, from Khuzestan:***
*We use cultural, cyber, and media products from the Arab world, and it has influenced our lives, from the process of choosing names to our style, clothing, music, and catchphrases.*



*Image 3-19: Interview with Ghasem Al-Kathir*

Today, with the emergence of various social networks and the exit of the flow of information from the geographical borders of countries, many of the media currents and active journalists are present in the virtual space. If the information-providing activity and the domestic cultural and analytical programmes are restricted, one can easily, through a connection to the internet, freely search for different platforms. The less access there is to information and free media, the more inclination the people will have towards foreign media to express their beliefs and theories. Media that are usually at an angle with the ideology of the ruling establishment and are platforms for expressing the views of the opponents of the ruling political apparatus are considered a threatening matter for the national security of a society.

The results of the interviews obtained from the different ethnic groups also confirm this matter. The Turkish-speakers in the interviews stated that they mostly use the various media available in the countries of Turkey and Azerbaijan.

The Baloch showed an inclination towards the Balochi media of Pakistan in their statements. The Kurdish-speakers stated that they mostly use the Kurdish-language media of the countries of Iraq and Turkey. The religious followers of these two ethnic groups, due to their 'Sunni' religious inclination, stated that they are inclined towards the religious media of the Arab countries and also the Persian-language media of the Islamic groups active outside the country. The Arabs of Khuzestan have also taken refuge in the Arab media available in the Arab countries. But apart from these ethnic groups, many of the Persian-speakers were also not very satisfied with the performance of the domestic media, and they also stated that they are inclined towards the cross-border media, and especially the audio and visual media available in the European and American countries. One of the ways to reduce this collective turning away toward domestic media is tolerance and respect for the rights of dissenters and ethnic groups and the provision of suitable grounds and the provision of free platforms to the ethnic groups and domestic intellectuals to express their views and opinions.

## The Economic Conditions of Ethnic Groups

The geographical diversity, climatic conditions, and subterranean resources of the ethnic regions in Iran, alongside the cultural characteristics of the ethnic groups, represent a latent potential. With efficient and localised economic strategies, they could make a significant contribution to the quantitative and qualitative enhancement of various economic sectors in both the country and the ethnic regions, including industry, agriculture, tourism, and mining. By relying on these, an important step could be taken in the development of the regional and national economy. However, due to the inefficiency of the macro-management of a rentier and centralist economy, these rich foundations and high potential have not only not been given the opportunity to emerge but, in the country's economic cycle, have been transformed into less-privileged and underdeveloped peripheral areas with the lowest share of the country's economic benefits. In the following, the economic conditions of a number of Iran's ethnic groups will be described.

> ***Mohsen Soudmand, a psychologist and consultant, from Ardabil (West Azerbaijan):***
> *If our country does not pay attention to the economy, which is our most important issue, and does not bear its cost, and does not create and reform efficient economic planning, there will not be much of a breakthrough in other areas.*

- ***Persians***

The bulk of heavy industry is mainly located in the centre of the country, that is, in the Persian-speaking provinces. In addition to the industrial sector, high-income agricultural products such as pistachios and saffron are cultivated in the central regions of Iran. This has caused the Persian-inhabited regions to have a high share in the gross domestic product. The largest volume of economic revenues is at their disposal, and this benefit is to some extent dependent on a favourable geographical position and control over the political and cultural apparatus of the government.

> ***Amin Nateq, an architect and urban planner, from Isfahan:***
> *The economy has fallen into the hands of the Persian ethnicity, which has made other ethnic groups distrust and discredit this group, and has created the idea that the Persians have everything while other ethnic groups are restricted. We Persians are bearing the brunt of this harsh or negative perception... I want to say that we are not satisfied either. Iran's economy must consider all ethnic groups as a whole and should even pay more attention to the border ethnicities, because it needs to invest more there. Smuggling of goods would also be reduced.*

Despite the relative economic superiority of the mainly central regions belonging to the Persians, the findings show the existence of dissatisfaction among the people of this group as well. Of course, the Persian-speaking people themselves have accepted the relative improvement of their economic conditions compared to other ethnic groups, and in this regard, they support the fair distribution of resources in other geographical parts of the country.

• ***Kurds***

The Kurdish regions of Iran, in terms of job-creating structures such as advanced industries, workshops, and industrial factories, have not developed much. This has created an unfavourable economic situation, and consequently, the unemployment rate for its active population is also very high. Most men are forced to engage in informal jobs such as smuggling and porterage (kulbari) to provide for their families.

The four provinces of Kurdistan, West Azarbaijan, Kermanshah, and Ilam, as the main geography of the Kurds in Iran, collectively comprise about 6.8 percent of the area and 9.3 percent of the total population of the country. This is while, according to the latest provincial statistics of the country's gross domestic product in 2019, these four provinces collectively had only 5.5 percent of the country's GDP. This share drops to 3.8 percent in the country's industrial GDP sector. Dr Ali Hayatnia, an economic researcher, believes regarding the causes and reasons for the emergence of the phenomenon of underdevelopment in ethnic regions: 'Despite the passage of six development plans in the country, the regional imbalance and disequilibrium is still very great, to the extent that if the economic growth of the different regions of the country is examined, one can observe growth with a geometric progression in the developed regions and growth with an arithmetic progression in the less-developed regions, such as the Kurdish-inhabited provinces. This difference in growth rates has led to a deepening of the gap in privilege and income level between the provinces and regions of the country. Due to the centralised planning structure, the achievement of sustainable and balanced development has not occurred in parts of the country's territorial structure. For this reason, the population has concentrated in the large cities and population poles, and these regions have become stations for the absorption of wealth, and the income overflow of many of Iran's small cities has accumulated in these centres. This issue has led to a divergence in the degree of development of the regions and an imbalance in the demographic balance' (Hayatnia, 2022).

***Parvin Zabihi, a civil activist, from Marivan (Kurdistan):***
*Economically, Kurdistan and the Kurdish-inhabited regions are truly among the most underdeveloped areas of Iran. Our youth are unemployed, and this has very negative effects like 'kolbari' [cross-border porterage], because there are either no industrial or production centres in the Kurdistan region, or they are so insignificant that unemployment has pushed everyone towards kolbari, street vending, or working as construction labourers and day workers, without any insurance or future. And very tragically, in addition to the high mortality rate, many also suffer physical injuries. I think Kurdistan is one of the regions that has been greatly wronged in this area!*

The border markets that were established with the aim of economic development have in recent years, due to their informal nature, remained stagnant. Due to high customs tariffs, people do not have the ability to buy, and they do not welcome it much. Also, private sector investors are not willing to invest in the border regions due to security issues, the lack of suitable roads for transporting goods to the centre, and the lack of specialised personnel in these regions. Fields of employment such as stone and metal mines have been formed in these regions, which unfortunately, after extraction, are transferred to other cities for processing. This is while the exploitation of these mines on-site is more economically viable and would lead to the economic development and growth of the region. Kurdistan province, known as the 'mineral jewel of Iran,' is one of the richest mineral regions in Iran, which, due to the lack of industrial infrastructure and the non-establishment of a chain of exploitation and production from the mineral reserves, has not benefited much from these underground reserves (Kurdistan; The Mineral Jewel of Iran, 2023), to the extent that even the bank accounts of the mining companies active in the province are located in banks outside the province (The mineral and industrial units of Kurdistan…, 2023). Therefore, the only achievement of this natural wealth for the people, alongside the few, often arduous, job opportunities of working in the mines, is the pollution and its environmental consequences.

***Mehdi Keyvan, a historian, Isfahan expert, and history lecturer, from Isfahan:***

*If you see something today and it is perceived as a cultural grievance, it is, in fact, an economic grievance that has taken the form of political and cultural grievances.*

Employment and unemployment are among the fundamental issues of any country's economy, to the extent that an increase in employment and a decrease in unemployment are considered one of the indicators of the development of societies. Therefore, the unemployment rate is one of the indicators used to assess the country's economic conditions. Economic fluctuations, the improper distribution of income and facilities, the lack of absorption of the labour force in production and industrial centres, the lack of proportion between the rate of population growth and job opportunities, the weakness of laws and regulations, the adoption of some wrong policies, and the lack of training commensurate with the needs of the labour market are among the most prominent factors. In recent years, not only has the educated population in Iran not been able to obtain suitable employment, but due to the economic conditions of these years and the issue of sanctions, a large number of the employed population have also become unemployed.

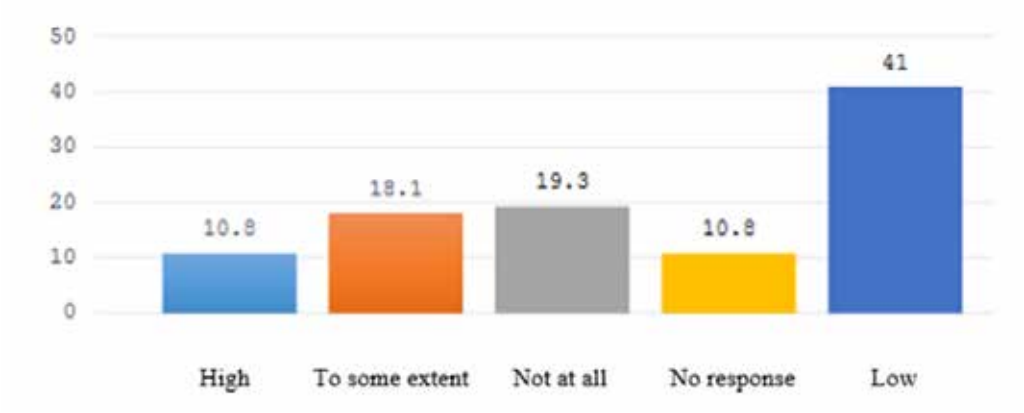



*Diagram 3-11. Equal employment opportunities for ethnic groups according to elites*

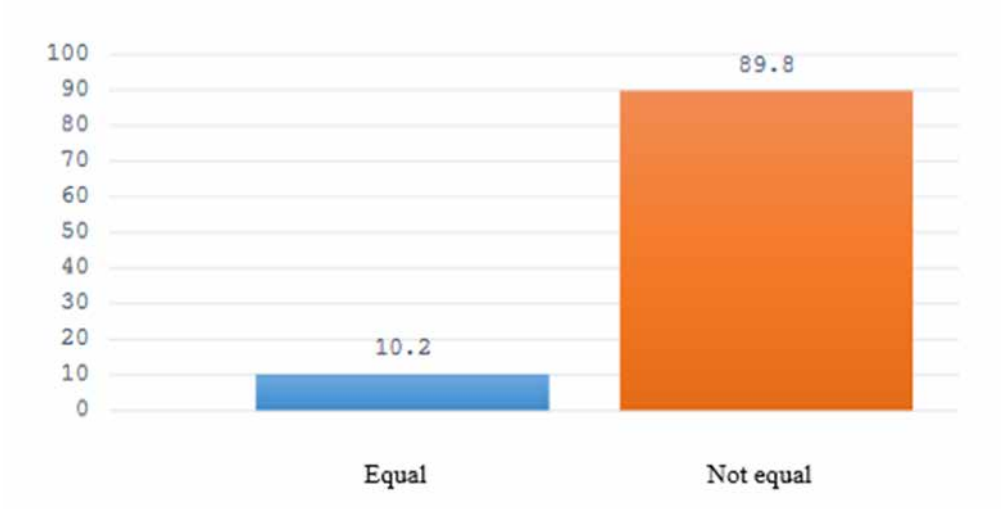



*Diagram 3-12 equal employment opportunities for ethnic groups accroding to general public*

Diagrams 13 and 14 show the employment opportunities of the ethnic groups, which is one aspect of economic inequality. Accordingly, 89.8 percent of the elites and 81.9 percent of the public believed that job opportunities are not distributed equally among the ethnic groups, and only 10.2 percent of the elites and 8.4 percent of the public believed that in the field of employment, there is an equal opportunity among the ethnic groups.

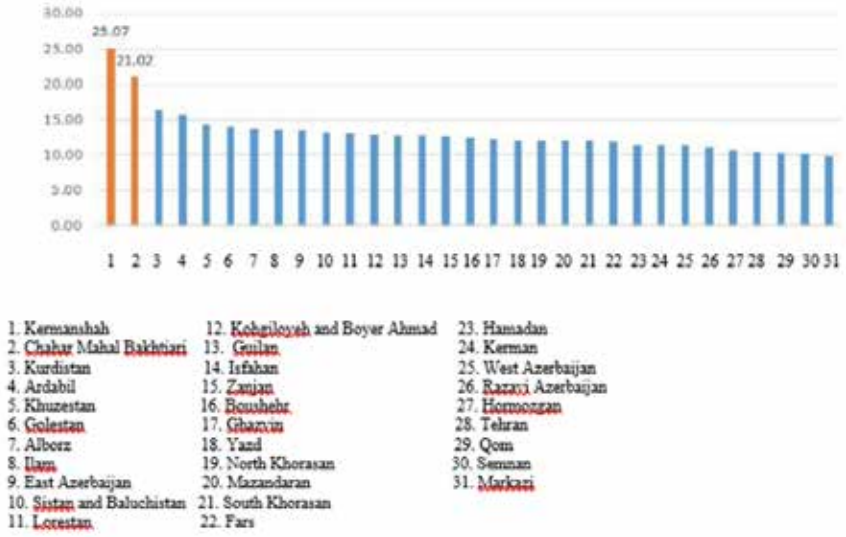



*Diagram 314. Unemployment rate (Statistics Centre of Iran)*

The data from Diagram 14 quoted from the Statistical Centre of Iran, shows the rank and percentage of unemployment in the thirty-one provinces of the country. Accordingly, the left half of this chart includes provinces that are the centre of residence for various ethnic groups from the Kurds, Turks, Arabs, Baloch, and other ethnic groups. The right half, where the percentage of unemployment is lower, belongs to provinces that are mainly located in the centre of the map of Iran and from which the high-ranking officials of the system have been chosen during the forty years of the Islamic Revolution. The policy of centralism, the economic and political crisis in Iran, wrong economic policies, financial and administrative corruption, a lack of attention to entrepreneurial values, and a security-oriented view of ethnic groups are the main factors of unemployment in Iran.

• ***Azeri Turks***

The economic situation of the Azeri Turks is relatively favourable, and their job opportunities and welfare facilities are better than in other ethnic regions. But despite this relatively favourable economic situation, the people of this ethnic group are also not very satisfied with the government's policies in this area. They believe that if the economic situation of their regions is favourable today, this improvement is not the result of the government's policies after the Islamic Revolution. The majority of what they have today is, in the first place, related to the historical past, and in the second place, is the result of the efforts of the people of this region themselves and their capitalists and elites.

> ***Esfandiar Haji, a history researcher and writer, from Urmia (West Azerbaijan):***
> *Our economy has stagnated and has not progressed; it has become a plaything for others and for powerful countries. There is economic inequality among the ethnic groups, and for our group, it is worse. If people could use the potential of their own region and it didn't all go into the pockets of the centre, people would be in a better situation.*

In general, the economic situation of the Azeri regions does not follow the dominant pattern of underdevelopment of the peripheral ethnic regions, and Azerbaijan is considered one of the industrial poles of Iran. In Azerbaijan,

large and infrastructural industries such as machine manufacturing, automotive, cement, oil and petrochemicals, pharmaceutical and chemical industries, and food industries are located around the large cities. A few examples of the largest industries in this region are: Tractor Sazi Tabriz, Tabriz Machine Manufacturing, Tabriz Refinery, Tabriz Petrochemical, and the Artawheel Tire Industrial Complex in Ardabil. The concentration of factories and large industrial centres in Tabriz is so dense that this city has become famous as the 'City of Industry.'

***Ali Hamed Iman, a journalist, from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan):***
*Since the 1960s, there hasn't been a single major factory established by the government, and only the private sector, with its own high capabilities, has been able to stand on its own feet.*



*Image 3-20. Interview with Ali Hamed Iman*

• ***Arabs***

The settlement of the Arabs in the south of Iran is the richest and most fertile geographical region of Iran, which supplies the bulk of the country's national production and economic income. But the inhabitants of this region have no share in this God-given wealth and natural gift, and the situation of the general Arab population is at a low level in economic terms. This is because, without the slightest share accruing to them, it is transferred to provinces outside this region, especially Tehran, and the share of the native people is only pollution and deprivation.

***Basem Hammadi, a researcher of Arab ethnic rituals and music, and a university lecturer, from Ahvaz (Khuzestan):***

*I am in a province where there is water, oil, and gas. Here, the issue of unemployment should be meaningless, and poverty should be very low, but we see that deprivation and poverty in the villages and on the outskirts of cities are horrifying. Perhaps this exists in other provinces too, but our perspective is that we are sleeping on a bed of wealth and oil, yet we are suffering from poverty.*

***Ya'qub Mousavi, a sociologist and academic staff member at Al-Zahra University, from Tehran:***

*Ethnic groups do not have an appropriate place in the hierarchical levels, such as the Arabs who are absent from management levels.*

Khuzestan province is considered one of the most important oil-rich regions of Iran. Oil and gas, which are the most important natural resources of the country, were first discovered and extracted in this region about eighty years ago. Since then, numerous oil fields have been discovered and exploited in this province, the most important of which are the Ahvaz oil fields. The Abadan Refinery, and the Bandar Imam and Mahshahr petrochemical plants are examples of the oil-dependent industries in this province.

In general, the industry of Khuzestan is divided into two groups: handicrafts and machine-based industries. Factory-based industries can be divided into two

main categories of heavy industries and light industries based on the amount of raw material consumption and the quality of production. The existence of the high-water rivers of Karun, Dez, Karkheh, Arvand, and Gotvand in Khuzestan province has led to the prosperity of agriculture in this land, and currently the largest project for the production of sugarcane and its subsidiary industries is underway. Agriculture is of particular importance in all regions of Khuzestan, especially in the plain areas, which is why this province is called 'golden-soiled.' The plain of Khuzestan is a continuation of Mesopotamia, and for this reason, it has a very suitable soil and climate for agriculture. Among the most important agricultural products of this province are wheat, barley, rice, sugarcane, dates, and citrus fruits.

In the livestock sector, the breeding of livestock and poultry is of great importance after agriculture. Among the types of permanent livestock are sheep, goats, cattle, and water buffalo. This province, also due to its proximity to the Persian Gulf and the existence of large and high-water rivers, has a favourable ground for the breeding and fishing of fish.

- ***Baloch***

This group lives in the east of Iran, speaks the Balochi language, and, like some of the Kurds, is of the Sunni sect. They have a common border with Pakistan and Afghanistan and have a cross-border continuity with Pakistan and Afghanistan and even in Tanzania. Their co-provincials in Sistan and Balochestan are the Shi'i-sect Sistanis, who mostly reside in the city of Zabol. In this region, the economic situation is very weak, and no factories or investment have been seen in recent years. The border has been closed, and economic and cultural interactions with the other side of the border do not take place. Due to the closure of the borders, border markets have not been formed, and most people are engaged in jobs such as smuggling goods and diesel fuel, and there is widespread poverty in the province (Qobadi, 2020). In the past, Sistan and Balochestan was the granary of Iran, but today, due to the special climatic conditions, water scarcity, and severe drought, agriculture has faced many problems, and many agricultural lands have been left fallow. o.

***Mohammad Bahari, a university literature lecturer, from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*Our economy has become zero or below zero. All Sistanis have been reduced to zero. The economy is built on animal husbandry, agriculture, and industry, but we have nothing called industry in this province. The plan was for Zabol to become an agricultural centre, Baluchestan an industrial centre, and Zahedan a university centre. Zabol has nothing now. You come and tell me if a single factory has been built for Zabol in these forty years, and I'll be quiet. Our people used to earn something from selling diesel and petrol. A border wall has been built, and they can't even do that job anymore. Now we are stuck behind the wall, and we can't go to either side.*

According to economic and social evidence and documents, Sistan province has the lowest economic and social indicators. In the field of cultivation and agriculture, too, despite the suitable capabilities, no very desirable progress has been made. The traditional method of production has made the villagers vulnerable to natural factors. For this reason, factors such as water, the state of agricultural lands, and the traditional economy have for many years always created many problems for the development of agriculture in the region.

Cultivation in Sistan and Balochestan has numerous forms. In the Sistan region, cultivation is only irrigated and is dependent on the Hirmand River and is under the influence of its water fluctuations. The most important product of the Sistan region is wheat, which has allocated a significant percentage of the cultivated lands to itself. After wheat, barley has the largest cultivated area. Among the other agricultural products of this region are alfalfa, tobacco, sesame, and cucurbits and vegetables.

In Sistan and Balochestan province, the industrial sector has not grown much, to the extent that at present, the people of this province supply most of their consumer and industrial goods from other provinces or from Pakistan. The social fabric of the province, its remoteness and lack of access to technological resources, the shortage of specialised individuals, cultural poverty, and the inattention of the government in the years before the victory of the Islamic Revolution are the main factors of the industrial deprivation and backwardness of this province. The existing industries in the province are divided into two groups: machine-

based and handicrafts. Among the tribes and nomads of the province, handicrafts have an important economic position and, in terms of providing income, are ranked third after agriculture and animal husbandry. The discovered mines of the province also consist of a copper mine in the northwest of Zahedan with a reserve of more than 15 million tons, a chromite mine in the areas of Khash, and a manganese mine in the Kutij region. Among the other important mines of the province are marble, limestone, travertine, and silica sand and gravel mines. In fact, the Sea of Oman is one of the very rich sources of salt. The extraction of salt from seawater has always been common in the coastal villages, and there is a very cheap and suitable ground for its expansion. The fishing and fishery industries are also common on the coasts of the Sea of Oman in Sistan.

The economic challenge of Iran is the redistribution of capital between the different regions of the country. The bulk of the political demands of the ethnic groups of Iran, which sometimes also lead to violence, is rooted in this very issue. Centralised economic policies have led to the formation of a periphery, and the further the regions are from the centre towards the border, the more the economic and livelihood gap becomes apparent. Although some of the economic policies are rooted in the view of the centre towards the periphery of Iran (the Iranian ethnic groups), the livelihood and income boundary cannot be precisely calculated based on agriculture and animal husbandry, because the economy of the peripheral ethnic groups to some extent plays the role of a labour force for the centre. Consequently, although agricultural and livestock products may exist in these regions, these products will be exported to the centre and abroad, and in reality, their profit will accrue to the centre and the government, not the peripheral-dwelling people.

According to a report by the High Institute of Education and Research of the Presidency, in some rural areas of Sistan and Balochestan province, the poverty rate is between 75 and 90 percent. According to this report, of the 20 regions with the highest poverty rate in Iran, 14 are related to the rural areas of the counties of Sistan and Balochestan province (The poverty line is rampant in Sistan and Balochestan, 2020).

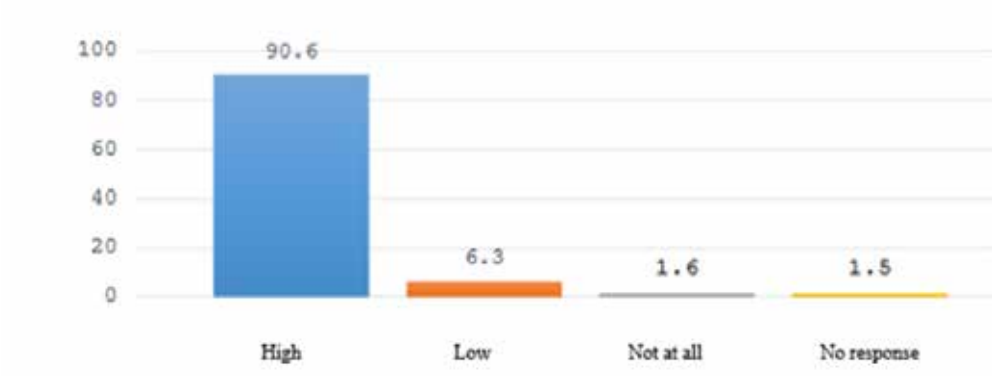



*Diagram 3-15. Sense of economic gap and discrimination according to elites*

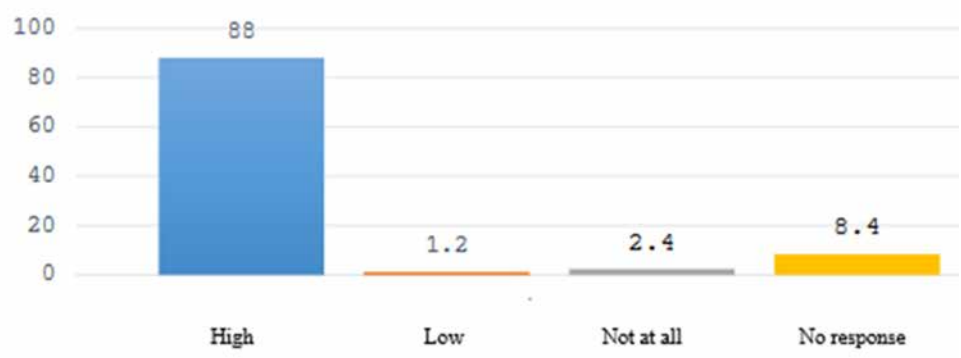



*Diagram 3-16. Sense of economic gap and discrimination according to general public*

Diagrams 15 and 16 show the level of the feeling of economic inequality among the ethnic groups. According to the numbers obtained, 90.6 percent of the elites and 88 percent of the public believe that the ethnic groups in Iran suffer from economic inequality, and only a very small percentage of both groups believe that the level of the economic gap and discrimination in the country is low.

Economic inequality is a term used to refer to the difference and inequality in the distribution of income, inequality in the distribution of wealth, and inequality in the distribution of consumption and the level of benefit among individuals and groups at the micro local and limited scales to the macro national and international scales (Ventura, 2023). Despite the unemployment, inflation, and centralist policies of Iran, it has been transformed into peripheral, semi-peripheral, and central points, in such a way that the Iranian ethnic groups are located in the peripheral and less-privileged regions. This sense of economic discrimination is expanding among the ethnic groups day by day and has also created a kind of

social dissatisfaction. The continuous social inequalities point to the structural nature of social tensions and the potential for social dissatisfaction among the members of ethnic groups, which leads to the deepening of social distinctions and cleavages. The lack of construction and economic investment, the absence of factories and employment conditions in the less-privileged regions such as Kurdistan and Sistan, in addition to extensive migrations, have also created a kind of violence towards the centre. In recent years, the embezzlements of the white-collar officials of the government and the centre have also intensified these crises.

In sum, the findings of this section showed that each of the regions studied, in proportion to its position, has rich and unique resources such as abundant water, a suitable climate for the cultivation of various agricultural products and livestock and poultry breeding activities, the existence of rich and diverse metallic and non-metallic mineral reserves, especially gold and ornamental stones, the possession of natural areas and landscapes and cultural, historical, and tourism attractions, the capability for constructing small hydroelectric power plants given the surface water resources and suitable topography, the existence of a young, efficient, and committed human force interested in new technologies, suitable conditions for creating free trade zones, the lack of a policy for water containment, storage, and transfer, and so on, which have the potential for development and prosperity in the various fields of agriculture, industry, and services. But development is not something that happens overnight. Development has its own specific process, and the necessary grounds and conditions must be provided for it. One of these grounds is the creation of security for investors, encouraging them to invest, and providing the necessary facilities to increase the motivation for investment. In this regard, the state plays a fundamental role in the start and continuation of development, especially in activating productive investments and investments that should be formed in the shadow of infrastructural facilities. Without the activation of the state and the implementation of large projects, the backwardness of the different regions of the country will not only not be compensated for in another hundred years with this trend, but the gap between them and the other developed regions of the country will become even greater.

## Ethnic Groups in the Context of a Regional Crisis

Each of the sub-cultures studied in this research possesses its own unique

exigencies. Environmental conditions, as an objectivity formed over the course of a long history, provide the greatest context for these differences. This gives rise to an economy, a polity, and other social pillars specific to each of the ethnic groups. This means that the existing social, economic, political, and other realities in each of the sub-cultures can be discussed and examined within a context of intertwined factors. Nevertheless, at the level of Iran, the Middle East region, and perhaps beyond, they have played a role in many phenomena.

The United Nations Development Programme, in the years 2002-2003, stated that the Middle East faces numerous problems in the spheres of cultural structure, education, political issues, democracy, and the economic category (UNDP Annual Report 2002, 2015).

September 11th and the events related to the year 2001 in America set in motion a series of events, the outcome of which for the people of the Middle East was the launching of battles known as the 'war on terror.' These took shape in the region with the support of Western countries and with the direct presence of their military forces (Barker, 2003). Alongside the full-scale military wars of the Westerners, and especially America, in the Middle East region, news is published daily of the sporadic battles of the Saudi security police, the Pakistani military forces, the Iranian security forces, the Lebanese army, and other militaries with terrorist groups. In addition, the widespread wave of daily urban battles in Iraq and Afghanistan, for which casualty statistics are published on an hourly basis, and Turkey's conflict with the Kurds can also be added to this list. All of these reveal signs of an important but neglected issue regarding the daily life of the people of the Middle East. It seems this issue is nothing other than the fact that war has become a normal and everyday phenomenon in the lives of the people of this land. The findings from the present study also show the critical nature of the political situation in this region.

> ***Raouf Azari, a civil and religious activist, from Sardasht (West Azerbaijan):***
> *Politics in Iran, and in the geography of the Middle East in general, is almost as critical as the economic situation.*

The country of Iran, during the Islamic Republic era, has not been immune to these wars and military threats. In the revolutionary transformations of the Arab countries, including Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria, what was clearly

observable by any external observer was the prominent presence of the young generation in the creation and continuation of the uprisings. In this regard, Ragui Assaad emphasizes, regarding the reasons for the dissatisfaction of the youth, that the Middle East region is facing a demographic bulge in which young people aged fifteen to twenty-nine constitute the largest part of the population. These youths, frustrated with the socio-political conditions, are the vanguard of the anti-government protests (Assaad, 2007: p. 4).

The following factors can be considered important in why the riots and movements in the Middle East were formed: economic stagnation and low growth, the rapid expansion of higher education, the lack of a democratic political system, the expansion of urbanisation, the intensity of ideological repressions, and the growth of legal awareness among women, adolescents, and youths.

The findings from the interviews of this research show that the respondents, regarding the internal conditions of the country, also pay attention to the role of the neighbouring countries. As was stated in the lines above, the Middle East region, over the last century, has had its own specific conditions in the sphere of war and peace. This region has always been faced with a warlike atmosphere, such as war with the Western colonialist countries, war between the countries of the region, civil wars, and other warlike conditions.

> ***Zafar Ahmad Didgah, a seminary teacher and social activist, from Sistan and Baluchestan:***
>
> *Our political situation is influenced by the world, the situation we have alongside our neighbouring countries, all of which are insecure, like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Our relations with Saudi Arabia, which is, after all, an influential country among Islamic nations, are not very good, and this naturally affects our interactions. Our situation is not very stable, and people feel worried about the current state of affairs.*

One of the most important theatres of war in the Middle East region in the last decade was not related to international wars but to the riots and turmoil that flared up within the geographical framework of a single country. These were riots that started in the country of Tunisia and its circle quickly expanded, reaching Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, and other countries. The peoples, and especially the youth, of these countries began to protest against the

ruling system—protests that were named the 'Arab Spring.' In cases such as what happened in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, these protest movements bore fruit and led to a change in the ruling current and to revolution. In cases like the country of Bahrain, the protest movements were nipped in the bud, although many believe this situation will not last long and the situation of this country has taken on the state of a fire smouldering under the ashes, and in the future, its flames will be kindled. The turmoil in the country of Syria still continues, and at present, this country has lost its territorial integrity, and each part of it is administered by a different current.

Using the theoretical basis of the youth bulge, it can be said that because the countries of North Africa and the Middle East are among the youngest countries in the world and have the highest unemployment rates among different countries, and due to causes such as economic recession and their political structure and rigid institutions, they have not been able to absorb the predominantly young populations into their political and administrative structures. The youth have had many opportunities and motivations to confront the governments of the Middle East, and therefore, these countries have, over the past years, for various pretexts, always been exposed to riots and terrorism.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran, too, during its forty-plus years of life, apart from the wars resulting from an external power such as the Iran-Iraq war, has also faced cases of unrest and protest at the domestic level. The despair of society regarding the possibility of change and the formation of structural reforms has been one of the causes of the internal unrest. The people of Iran gave the ruling current more than one opportunity for reform and change, but a rigid and conservative current always stood against the will of the people and the gradual reform of affairs and brought the efforts to failure. In the end, a specific group that has been present in the power structure from the beginning of the revolution until now, with the same thoughts of four decades ago and by preventing the rejuvenation of the spectrum of politicians and the revision of policies based on new field data, by blocking the existing paths for a peaceful transition to new conditions, left no way for the people of Iran but the unrest of the streets. Some of this unrest was carried out by armed political parties based on the western and eastern borders, and a number of them, such as what happened in the years 1999, 2009, December 2017, and November 2019, happened by the hands of civil citizens residing inside the country. Although the cases of 1999 and 2009

were mostly formed through the student movement and the protest of a number of people against the presidential election process and mainly occurred in the central cities, the case of December 2017 and 2019 was a movement of youths protesting the economic and social atmosphere of the country, and its scope reached cities that until that time had no history of dissatisfaction, which had made the possibility of protest movements there close to zero.

## The Instrumental Use of Ethnic Groups

Iran is a country one of whose prominent characteristics has been the coexistence of different linguistic and religious groups alongside each other throughout history. This coexistence also continued with the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, and the different ethnic groups have always tried to exalt the name of Iran. An important and visible manifestation of this was the eight-year war of Iraq against Iran, in which different ethnic groups, including Persians, Turks, Kurds, Baloch, Bakhtiaris, Arabs, and other ethnic groups, were dispatched to the war zones to defend the country's territorial borders. In the meantime, many of the ethnic groups believe that the ruling current, in return for the service they have rendered to the governmental structure, has not paid attention to their rights as they deserve. They believe that many of these rights, such as the right to read and write in the mother tongue, the freedom to hold ethnic and religious rites and behaviours, the employment of experienced and knowledgeable native forces to manage local affairs, participation at the political-administrative levels, and so on, which are mentioned in various articles of the constitution, have not yet been implemented, and they do not enjoy these basic rights. Their feelings and demands have always been used instrumentally to obtain their electoral votes.

***Parvin Zabihi, a civil activist, from Marivan (Kurdistan):***

*Throughout all the years of my life and in all the election periods I have witnessed and observed, I just feel that we have become a means for others to reach power, without any of the demands that were raised during those times, or the promises made by the people, or the promises from those who are supposed to come to power through elections, ever being met with a positive and clear response—at least 90 per cent of those demands. I am just a tool, an instrument.*

***Mowlana Abdolhamid Esmailzehi, Sunni Friday Prayer Leader of Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*We are partners in the elections, but only to that extent. In the rest of the country's decision-making, we have no participation or role.*



*Image 3-21. Mowlana Abdolhamid Esmailzehi*

***Formal Statement of Dr. Hassan Rouhani***

*All of Iran is My Home*

*Declaration No. 3: The Rights of Ethnicities, Religions, and Sects*

*In the name of the God of life and wisdom*

*Great Nation of Iran, esteemed brothers and sisters,*

*With greetings and respect,*

*Our dear country, Iran, is a fragrant garden of diverse climes, languages, religions, and sects. Now that the fateful eleventh presidential election has provided this historic opportunity, I am committed and determined, should I win your vote of confidence and establish the Government of Prudence and Hope, to transform a part of the 'Rights of the Nation' chapter of the Constitution—which has been and remains one of the*

*most important goals of the sacred system of the Islamic Republic—from slogan to action, by implementing the ten points below, so that we may witness a free and prosperous Iran with the participation of all Iranians:*

*1. To draft the necessary laws for the full implementation of the Constitution, especially Articles 3, 12, 15, 19, 22, etc., in the Government of Prudence and Hope, in order to eliminate discrimination.*

*2. To ensure public participation, irrespective of language or creed, in the country's senior management, and to implement the principle of meritocracy at all political-administrative levels, such that all citizens and compatriots have an equal opportunity to participate and hold office at all levels, up to and including cabinet membership.*

*3. To appoint competent local individuals to management positions in different regions of the country, and to support, strengthen, delegate authority, and entrust local and regional executive affairs to them within the framework of the government's general policies.*

*4. To teach the mother tongues of Iranians (Kurdish, Azeri, Arabic, etc.) officially at school and university levels, in full implementation of Article 15 of the Constitution.*

*5. To strengthen the culture and literature of Iranian ethnic groups and prevent their decline, in order to preserve and maintain this ancient Iranian heritage.*

*6. To respect the rights of followers of other religions and sects and to refrain from interfering in their religious and sectarian affairs, by ensuring freedom of religious and sectarian belief and creating the possibility for them to perform their religious rites and duties under equal conditions.*

*7. To conduct scientific studies and draft long-term and short-term programmes in the infrastructural, developmental, economic, and socio-cultural sectors in deprived and border regions, especially the provinces affected by the Imposed War, by allocating accelerated budgets to compensate for their backwardness.*

*8. To eliminate unjust discrimination in all its dimensions and forms.*

*9. To change the security-focused perspective on Iranian ethnic groups and cultures and to transform political-*

*security structures and methods into a scientific and efficient management system, in order to make optimal use of the pristine and abundant material and human resources of these regions.*
*10. To assign the responsibility for the necessary planning and coordination to one of the Vice Presidents for the realisation of the nine points above.*
*Your servant,*
*Dr Hassan Rouhani*
*Candidate for the Eleventh Presidential Term*
*Ninth of Khordad, One Thousand Three Hundred and Ninety-Two, Hejri Shamsi [30th May 2013]*

One of Hassan Rouhani's promises in his ten-point statement, known as Statement No. 3, was public participation regardless of language and religion in the macro-management of the country and the implementation of the principle of meritocracy at all political-administrative levels. On this basis, different ethnic groups such as the Kurds, Baloch, Arabs, and also the Sunni religious group became hopeful that individuals from the ethnic groups would be chosen at the levels of minister, vice president, governor, and other managerial positions (Statement No. 3 of the Hassan Rouhani Campaign: The Rights of Ethnic Groups, Religions, and Sects, 2013). But the results obtained from this research showed that the interviewees believe that this promise, like the promises of past presidents, has not been fulfilled and has remained at the level of a slogan.

***Abdolsalam Bozorgzadeh, a radio and television producer, from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*People voted for Mr. Rouhani, and the Sunni community was influential in his victory; he was standing on a knife-edge. But he acted very dishonourably, and there is a God above who has disgraced him right here, in this world, and will disgrace him even more. I was a senior advisor to his campaign. The day he came to power, he didn't even consider a single empty chair for a Sunni cleric just to sit there. For the Sunni community, his fate was sealed then. I myself am still embarrassed to walk down the street because I campaigned for Rouhani. I'm too ashamed for people to see my face. Anyone who sees me says, 'Sir, weren't you the one giving speeches for Rouhani!'*



*Image 3-22. Interview with Abdolsalam Bozorgzadeh*

Another of Hassan Rouhani's promises was the teaching of mother tongues in schools and universities. In this field too, the teaching of mother tongues at the school level was never realised, and only in the two universities of Kurdistan and Tabriz was a field of study named Kurdish Language and Literature and Turkish Language and Literature established. As was previously stated, since the goal of many university entrance exam candidates in choosing a field of study is to be able to guarantee their future career, and this space has not yet been created in the country's employment structure or at least in the ethnic regions, this opportunity was not much welcomed. [1]

***Gholamreza Jafari, an environmental activist, from Naqadeh (West Azerbaijan):***

*Where are Articles 15 and 19 of the Constitution being implemented? Which school teaches in the Turkish or Kurdish language? They have prevented it in many places. For example, they issued a circular that nurseries must speak Persian.*

1. In this regard, the Baloch and Sistani ethnic groups have been deprived of even this choice of university field.

***Riyadh Ali Farhani, a social activist, from Khuzestan:***

*All the programmes being implemented regarding ethnic groups have become mostly slogans. As long as the groundwork for implementing programmes is not ready, the execution of any programme in this time and place becomes a counter-programme. The President's Charter No. 3 on the rights of minorities and ethnic groups has unfortunately remained a mere slogan due to the lack of a necessary foundation. On the other hand, we see that the President, towards the end of his previous term, abandoned that slogan and raised the issue of citizenship rights, this time appointing an assistant or deputy for citizenship rights to escape the tense atmosphere that had formed in various places.*

The demand of the ethnic groups in the field of education in the mother tongue still remains, and the findings also show that since the goal of reading and writing in the ethnic language should have a practical aspect, the creation of university fields of study has not realised such a goal. The view of the interviewees is that in order to achieve this goal, education in the mother tongue should be done at the school level.

Many of the elites of the ethnic groups believe that their demands are only 'used instrumentally' for the purpose of collecting votes. Apart from this electoral level, they believe that other governmental and state promises regarding the equality of ethnic groups, such as holding conferences for the proximity of sects and choosing a week by the name of unity, holding local festivals, and other plans and programmes, have had a purely symbolic aspect and have been for the purpose of their instrumental use.

In sum, and contrary to the existence of Articles 12, 15, 19, and other articles of the constitution that are about the necessity of respecting the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, unfortunately, the position of their rights and entitlements has been so degraded that today it can be used as an electoral tool for the purpose of winning votes and gaining power. Candidates for important posts like the presidency always, by publishing various statements and interviews or by travelling to regions such as Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, Balochestan, Khuzestan, and other regions, by saying a few words in the language of the local people and

also with numerous promises in the ethnic, religious, and economic fields, and regarding the youth, the environment, and so on, try to align the votes of the people of these regions with themselves. The results obtained from the interviews with the numerous ethnic groups studied also showed that the government, in none of the existing fields, has been able to fulfil their demands as befits the ethnic groups.

## Political Militarism

Militarism or militaryism is an ideology that believes that military capability is the source and origin of all security. Militarism, in its mildest form, believes in the proposition that 'peace through military strength' is possible and that military preparedness is the best or only way to achieve peace. Militaristic governments, due to their excessive reliance on military power and the allocation of the largest share of the national income to strengthening the police and security institutions, become completely alienated from their own people. In a confrontation with an external threat, they lose national support, and unfortunately, the people, while being indifferent to the threat, also help the threatening factors (Militarism, 2022).

It is debatable why states or nations, instead of flexible political structures, take on a harsh military direction. In other words, as long as the possibility of dialogue exists, what need is there for tension and war? Has the door to dialogue been closed? Are the democratic methods of governance not responsive in non-Western societies? Do the owners of power lack democratic capacities? And many other questions that have nurtured numerous theories in the humanities.

The main characteristic of the first Pahlavi period was Reza Shah's deep sense of militarism. During his twenty-year period as minister, prime minister, and monarch, he insisted on strengthening the army and propagating militaristic thought. The Shah believed that a modern absolute state could only be realised by establishing a centralised and powerful state, and the realisation of this goal was solely dependent on the militarisation of the state and society. On the other hand, achieving national integration and unity was dependent on the establishment of a national and powerful army that could eliminate the local rulers. Reza Shah, on the verge of taking power, used a demagogic policy, and after establishing himself on the throne of monarchy, he brought militaristic action and thought to the scene in all dimensions. Perhaps his militaristic actions and behaviours

were acceptable for a limited period for the purpose of consolidating power and eliminating rival centres, but his mistake was that he expanded the theoretical and behavioural foundations of militarism. This caused the level of solidarity and the people's inclination towards him to decrease day by day. The Shah increased the sphere of his power every day and deprived the people of any kind of participation and the right to any kind of expression. In such a situation, the people lacked any kind of agency, and for this reason, they did not feel any kind of responsibility towards the state (Beigdeli, 2006).

In September 1941, when the Allies threatened and occupied the country, not only did the body of the army easily collapse, but the people, without expressing any kind of defensive reaction, stayed in their homes, and it seemed they were pleased with what was happening. The Shah also ignominiously left the homeland. This has been and will be the fate of all totalitarian and militaristic regimes.

His son, Mohammad Reza Shah, also, on 19 August 1953, by overthrowing the national government of Mossadegh in order to preserve himself, relied on the military, although he could not trust all of them. The Shah, whose father had sent him to a military academy in Europe for his education, from the time of his return to Iran, was always in military uniform, and those who had gone to Europe with him or had joined him on his return to Iran quickly rose through the various ranks and reached the highest national and military positions.

In the post-revolutionary era, many of the military personnel and Revolutionary Guards, such as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Ali Larijani, Mohsen Rezaei, and others, took over the important political posts of the country. Many of the forces of the IRGC and the Basij were chosen as governors and district governors, and a large number also found their way to the legislative assembly. The above issue shows the presence of the military in the political arena and the interference of the IRGC in the politics, economy, law, and culture of the country.

One of the militaristic currents in this era is the groups known as the Basij, which, apart from their so-called cultural activities, in many regions of the country also have military power and the right to use weapons, to the extent that by virtue of this, they intervene in many of the country's affairs, and the general public is also forced to pay attention to their wishes.

Many of the government's policies are also, intentionally or unintentionally,

in the direction of their greater empowerment. In this connection, Sardar Pasha Mohammadi, the head of the Basij of the Nomadic Organisation of Iran, in an interview in April 2018, announced the arming of the nomads of the northwest and east of Iran and stated: 'The Basij is arming the nomads with domestically produced weapons that are supplied through the Ministry of Defence and the special weapons that it places at the disposal of these dear ones, so that in addition to ensuring the security of their own territorial domain, they can also contribute to the overall security of the country… In the east and northwest of the country, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has implemented sustainable popular security on the foundation of the nomadic community and the native and local people of the country. In other words, our security bases have been founded with the centrality of the heads of the tribes, clans, nomads, and natives of the region, both Shia and Sunni, and today we can claim that on the eastern and northwestern borders of the country, we have a sustainable popular security' (The country's nomads are being equipped with domestically produced weapons, 2017).

***Abdolqader Savari, a researcher, from Khuzestan:***
*In terms of political structure, we are witnessing a militaristic dictatorship.*

***Mehri Pakzad, a lecturer and academic staff member at Islamic Azad University, from Mahabad (West Azerbaijan):***
*I have a PhD student who, by virtue of coming from a certain organisation, admits himself that he knows nothing, and yet I am forced to give him a passing grade.*



*Image 3-23. Interview with Mehri Pakzad*

The result of such a situation will be that the police and security forces will be climbing the walls of the city. Wherever you turn your head, you will see the police and security forces; the alley, the street, the university, the school, the office, the hospital, and everywhere is full of law enforcement and security agents. The closed-circuit cameras, with their sharp eyes, monitor all the movements of the people and intervene in various political, sports, religious, cultural, social, and economic affairs and take action against ethnic and religious programmes and rites.

***Saber Rostami, a social activist, from Oshnavieh (West Azerbaijan):***

*I remember on Chaharshanbe Suri [Festival of Fire], I was going to school; there was intense surveillance. Suddenly, two guards, as if they had caught a criminal, searched me. I said, 'Tell me what you want, I'll give it to you.' That was their approach. And I had nothing on mem. I said, 'If I had something, how would I have passed by you!'*

> ***Ali Sahebi, a psychologist, from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan):***
> *Power is so multi-referential that a large part of the country's economy is in the hands of forces that have no competitor, and as the president said, this sector has both weapons and force.*

Despite the emphasis of Iranian statesmen on the necessity of adhering to democracy (religious democracy) and legitimate freedoms in society, many of the behaviours on the part of some officials still indicate a kind of interest in militarising or, in other words, turning Iranian society into a garrison. This militarism, in many cases, has also entered the political space, and many of the individuals whose past life has been militarism and presence on the war fronts, at the time of political elections, enter as candidates and want to be present in institutions such as the executive and legislative branches. These individuals also, in other cases and at the time of various political and civil movements, express their opinions and offer solutions. All these cases show the existence of a kind of militarism in the internal structure of the country, and the ethnic groups consider the existence of these hidden military forces, such as the Basij and the plainclothes forces, as a factor for the control and dominance of a security-oriented view against them. The harm that militaristic thinking does to a country and a system is not solely confined to domestic policy and the garrisoning of the country, but also challenges foreign relations. The way the statesmen of the Islamic Republic deal with international relations indicates a dogmatic and black-and-white view of issues, which is one of the characteristics of a garrison culture. In the world of politics, what determines policy is the interests of nations, and therefore dynamism and flexibility are its constant necessity. However, the stasis and dogmatism governing the behaviour of the politicians of the Islamic Republic in cases such as the nuclear file, the FATF, human rights and women's issues, the right to choose one's type of dress, relations with America, and the like, indicates the blocking of the possibility of negotiation and diplomacy, the non-priority of the nation's interests, and the dominance of an ideological view.

## Cultural Monopoly

One of the important characteristics of the twenty-first century is the

homogenisation of taste and preference, customs and rites, and in general, the sameness and uniformity of the lifestyle of different human beings. At another level, this sameness and uniformity can also include ethnic groups, and different ethnic groups can be melted and assimilated into a single ethnic culture, and a dominant cultural style can prevail.

> ***Ashkan Zehtab, a political-social activist, labour activist, and writer, from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan):***
> *Ethnic demands operate in line with the government's hegemony. The function of ethnic demands is to foster emasculation and disunity.*

A dominant and exclusive cultural style tells us that the world is uniting by virtue of the fact that soon everyone will be able to direct their inherent human desires towards a Western, consumerist, and urban way of life. The West is the best, and joining this festival of achieving a balanced unity among peace-loving, rational, and democratic consumers brings it ever closer. According to this worldview, the chaotic and jumbled diversity of cultures, values, and beliefs is a stimulus for a clash with the past, and if these differences are resolved, the disagreements between us will also be settled. In this type of worldview, those who discuss identity and ethnicity are attacked, and the belief is instilled in the mind that this type of discussion is a ground for ethnic riots and a lack of national unity. Governments try, as much as possible, to break the limited identity circle of ethnic groups and to gather them all in a larger circle.

As a result of such an attitude, traditional societies that have preserved themselves for hundreds of years gradually fall into disarray.

Regarding the factors that shape this uniformity and sameness, modern states play a fundamental role. Theoretically, the multi-ethnic character of the majority of countries causes the institutions and territories of the modern state, in most cases, to elevate the base of one ethnic minority to the level of representing the national state, and consequently, to discriminate against other ethnic minorities and to marginalise them, and to take a monopoly on all cultural elements themselves. In Iran, only a collection of the components of the 'central ethnicity' is presented as the characteristics of national identity, which, as a rule, does not reflect the really existing diversities in society. In other words, it places all the semantic elements of Iranian culture in the monopoly of the Persian-speakers

(Alavi, 2018). Therefore, it can be said that cultural monopoly means taking control of all the cultural products and productions of the other ethnic groups of Iran in the service of this group. The main effort of the country's officials is also for the preservation and dissemination of the culture of this group, and other linguistic groups are not paid attention to as they should be, an issue that has resulted in the dissatisfaction of the minority ethnic groups.

> ***Shahin Sepanta, a veterinarian, writer, and civil activist, from Isfahan:***
> *I have even said and written letters many times that the Academy of Persian Language and Literature should change its name to the Academy of Iranian Languages, so that it is not just the Persian language that receives attention.*

In fact, a process has existed in Iran, and still exists, that tries to make the culture of Iranians uniform. The final years of the Qajar and Pahlavi rule, especially the policy of cultural and social homogenisation of the Reza Shah era under the banner of homogenising nationalism, was the peak of the application of these policies, which, despite a change of face and approach, has continued more or less to this day.

> ***Asad Ardalan, a history researcher and international lawyer, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***
> *Reza Shah's policy in 1925 and 1937 led to signs saying 'Speak Persian' being installed in schools in Kurdistan.*

In 1928, the parliament outlawed the old clothing of the Iranian ethnic groups and compelled all men, with the exception of registered clerics, to wear Western clothes and to put on the 'Pahlavi hat.' Eight years later, this hat gave way to the European homburg. Reza Shah chose this hat not only to erase ethnic identities but also to interfere in the rite of prayer in Islam, which requires placing the forehead on the ground. In addition to this, he changed the names of many cities (Law on the Standardisation of the Clothing of the Subjects of Iran, 1928).

With the coming to power of the Islamic Republic in 1979, contrary to the principles of the constitution which have permitted the right to read and write in the mother tongue at all educational levels for the ethnic groups, in practice, and

with the emergence of the discretionary behaviours of the relevant officials, this right has still not been operationalised.

> ***Hamid Hammadi, a university lecturer, from Khuzestan:***
> *Our child speaks Arabic at home, but when they go to school, they speak to them in Persian, and this is an injustice. If we say their talent is 100 per cent, and only 50 per cent of it is used, this becomes a factor of academic backwardness for the student. We see our children, even though it's not their language, are shining and succeeding; meaning, if they were taught in their own language, I don't think we would be in our current position; we should be more advanced.*

The findings also show the existence of two fundamental problems in this field. First, the space for writing in the ethnic languages is not very favourable, and the books of the ethnic groups are mostly printed in the neighbouring countries that have an ethnic group similar to that inside the country. The second issue also relates to the audience of these ethnic languages, who, due to the lack of teaching of their own linguistic alphabet, cannot read these books.

> ***Abdolrashid Terriz, a religious Mowlavi, history researcher, and political-social activist, from Sistan and Baluchestan:***
> *The Baluchi language has not been addressed as it deserves, and our generation can rarely read Baluchi books, which are mostly published in Pakistan. Very few are published in Iran. We believe it is a right for ourselves and for other ethnic groups that children, in addition to speaking their language, should be able to learn it formally and be able to write and read it.*



*Image 3-24. Interview with Abdolrashid Teriz*

Another of the important matters that was discussed in the interviews of this research with the different ethnic groups in the field of cultural monopoly was the naming of the cities, thoroughfares, alleys, and living places of these groups. They pointed out that the governmental institutions are trying to change the local names and to replace them with Persian names.

In this regard, the results obtained from the interviews show the existence of a resistance from the ethnic groups who, contrary to the official namings, in their colloquial literature, still use the native and local names. This matter contains an important point, which is that language policies will only be effective if they are in harmony with the public opinion of society. It is rarely possible to impose a language or terms on people against their will. Can one support a language that its speakers no longer want? The issue is not just the language itself, but the importance that its speakers attribute to it is also at stake. Languages mainly disappear because people decide to abandon them and do not transmit them to their children. The term 'language war' is a suitable metaphor, but languages in themselves are not capable of waging a war. It is the people who strive to fight, to war, or to agree with each other. One can, by looking at the relationship between the languages of the people, discern their conflictual relationships (Calvet, 2000).

***Sardar Fotouhi, a consultant for public and private research projects, from Saqqez (Kurdistan):***

*The current square is Helo (Eagle) Square. But now it is known as Islamic Republic Square. The language or culture resists here; it is still called Helo Square. Language flees from power.*

The contemporary history of Iran has shown that as a result of the educational reforms of Reza Shah, the traditional religious schools (maktab-khānehs) were replaced with modern primary schools. The books of the new schools were all in Persian and were printed in Tehran. These books replaced the classical and Qur'anic texts that were formerly taught informally by the religious and local scholars. In this era, the teaching of other languages used in Iran was forbidden. Persian was not only the national language of Iran, but all other minority languages in the country were forbidden. The printing of books and newspapers in a language other than Persian was prohibited. In 1935, Mohammad-Ali Foroughi introduced his cabinet to the parliament and had the opportunity to announce the establishment of a new academy. The duty of the academy was to purify the Persian language by introducing new Persian words to replace Arabic and foreign words. In such a situation, all the native and local languages and cultures were placed in the monopoly of the Persian language and culture. In the post-revolutionary era, most of the cases of cultural monopoly still continued, but their intensity and severity were not to the extent of the Pahlavi period. Another point is that in the Pahlavi era, this cultural monopoly was not of much concern to the ethnic groups, because many of their cultural manifestations, customs, and folklore were still transmitted orally from person to person to the next generations. But in recent years, with the importance that the issue of education and writing has found, the reactions to the inattention or little attention to the literature and culture of the ethnic groups and the cultural monopoly of the Persian culture and literature have intensified, to the point that some use the term 'ethnocide' in relation to this situation. Ethnocide is one of the consequences of the inability to acculturate and the tendencies of cultural monopoly, as a result of which, over time, the identity and ethnicity of a social group is destroyed and gives way to a collection of superficial appearances of culture (Breton, 2017: 189). In this way, the cultural and social life of that ethnic group is destroyed, and gradually the sublimity and balance of its human society is also disrupted.

## The Synergy of Political and Social Crises

A pathological reflection on the structural and functional pillars of Iran's political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental order reveals the emergence and persistence of a critical situation. Its crises, in a horizontal and vertical synergy, have encompassed the very fabric of the entity known as Iran, confronting its existence and survival with a vital challenge. The crisis in foreign relations and the fragile, unstable engagement with the world; the extra-legal role of 'deep states' in the formal power structure; gender issues and constraints; extreme social despair; the suppression of ethnic culture; the emergence and intensification of ethnic extremism; and social collapse are the major manifestations of this intertwined critical situation. These have been identified among the findings of this research and are described and explained in this section.

Iran's foreign policy has consistently faced criticism from various experts. These individuals believe that the current political system has not been able, as it should, to enter into engagement and dialogue with different countries, either at the global or the regional level. During important campaigns, such as the debate over sanctions and the enmity of some powerful world countries, there are no friends who can stand alongside the Iranian nation. This viewpoint holds that even at times when governments have been in power that have striven to create this engagement and friendship, extremist ideas from within the country have prevented their success. Consequently, the belief has arisen that the country's foreign policy lacks a single voice, and the power of groups under the title of the 'deep state' in this field is no less than the power of government officials. The result of such a situation will be that different groups, each based on their own group and individual interests, will take actions that sacrifice the public good and interest for individual and ideological interests.

In recent years, the women's movement has also become a fundamental social issue, in which women protest against the gender constraints imposed upon them. They believe that, intentionally, efforts are underway within the country which, as in the past, seek to eliminate and sideline women from the heart of society. These have been largely unsuccessful efforts which, instead of homogenising the country's ethnic and gender structure, have led to the spread of dissatisfaction and the intensification of the demands of the people of these groups, especially in the last few years. These gendered decisions and policies, which entail restrictions

against women, are recognised as one of the most prominent and controversial of state policies.

In such a situation, there have also been individuals from ethnic groups who, by highlighting the inequalities that exist in the various economic, social, political, and cultural spheres in the country, have engaged in demand-oriented actions. This same negative individualism and the formation of a competitive atmosphere can also be witnessed in other arenas. One of the most important of these is the ethnic and religious sphere. On this basis, the followers of ethnic minorities such as the Turks, Kurds, Baloch, Arabs, and other ethnic groups believe that over the past few decades, many efforts have been made to destroy and eliminate the basis of their identity. The reality is that in all of the aforementioned cases, there are fundamental flaws which, if the country's political officials do not strive to resolve, may lead to social and structural collapse.

## A Fragile Engagement with the World

In today's intertwined world, the development of countries without one another is not possible, and overcoming various crises without mutual help appears very difficult. Economic and political relations with other countries create significant opportunities for a country and, in addition to the economic sphere, will also improve the conditions of other sectors.

Iran's relations with other countries in contemporary history must be viewed at the regional, civilisational, and global levels. In the formation and continuation of these relations, the variables of religion, economy, and the exigencies of international politics have played a role (Sariolghalam, 2009: 28).

After the Islamic Revolution, Iran's foreign policy, with the slogan 'Neither East, nor West, Islamic Republic,' was shaped on the basis of the ideological value-judgements of the Shia rulers, with enmity towards Israel and America placed at its core. Iran, after the revolution and the establishment of the government, moved in the direction of adopting an independent security policy and tried to define itself outside the strategies and approaches of the Eastern and Western blocs. Iran's relations with the Islamic countries of the Middle East region and its neighbours have also experienced ups and downs. The temporary severing of relations with Saudi Arabia after the Hajj incident of 1987; the dispute with the United Arab Emirates over the ownership of the three islands of Greater and Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa; the darkening of relations with Bahrain following

Bahrain's accusation of Iranian support for the country's dissatisfied Shias; the severing of relations with Egypt following Iran's support for Khalid Islambouli's action in assassinating Anwar Sadat; the darkening of relations with Kuwait on account of the Iran-Iraq war; the darkening of relations with Jordan; and the protest against the repressive behaviour of the Yemeni government towards the Shias of Yemen, which ultimately led to the Yemen conflict, are examples of Iran's relations with Islamic and regional countries in these years. The ideology-centred and Shia-promoting foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, by creating extensive conflicts in relation to major regional actors (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Israel) and global ones (America and some Western countries), has, whilst causing Iran to face isolation on the international stage, also fanned the flames of the successful emergence and expansion of the Iranophobia project and has created the ground for the erosion of Iran's power in the economic, military, and political fields (Rahimi and Simbar, 2022: 4255). In reality, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, due to its being ideology-ridden, does not have a correct understanding of Iran's national interests or, to put it more eloquently, it prioritises the interests of the regime and the promotion of the regime's ideology and teachings over the national interest and has established its diplomacy on that basis.

Given the general conditions of Iran, and since the economic situation of the lower classes is deplorable and the economic and job-creating enterprises lack the minimum dynamism to create a hopeful impetus for the country's economy and society, it can be said that the political, economic, and international conditions of Iran require that the path of engagement with the world be placed at the priority of the foreign policy of governments. Evidence such as the very high rate of the dollar as the global reference currency and the unprofitability of domestic production activities marks the disjunction of the domestic economy from the global economy. With the emergence of the global crises resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, this matter is further strengthened, and in the meantime, the lower and even middle strata of society suffer the most harm.

The evidence of this research also indicates such emphases, as often, the most important solutions for the country's economic development, and especially the resolution of the problem of recession and employment, have been stated as attracting foreign investment. But it is self-evident that the attraction of foreign investment will not occur unless extensive and comprehensive engagement with

the outside world and with foreign countries and companies for investment in the country's economic foundations takes place.

In this regard, other research participants have expressed that from an economic perspective, the export of goods that are produced better and the import of high-quality goods is to the benefit of all the countries of the world. Also, when economic relations expand, political relations also become stronger. The isolation of a country in the arena of international politics and economics causes its connections to be limited.

***Seyed Abdolsalam Mahmoudian, a cleric and religious activist, from Sardasht (West Azerbaijan):***

*Wanted or unwanted, we are getting into conflicts with many countries in the world, and that understanding and compromise that should exist among humanity is absent. We are being threatened from many places, and well, a country that becomes isolated, the result is that it suffers damage in every aspect.*



*Image 3-25. Interview with Mamosta Abdolsalam Mahmoudian*

Furthermore, for its economic development and to compensate for its backwardness, the country is compelled to engage with the world to import advanced technologies. The reality is that today, advanced technologies are

not at the disposal of developing countries. Even some industrial countries of Europe are not technology producers. For example, some countries may have made progress in the field of armaments, but in other production and economic sectors, they have benefited little from modern technology, and for this reason, they are not among the major economic powers of the world and are forced to engage with the outside world. The fact that Iran is not a technology producer and does not have the necessary resources for it is a reality. Therefore, for economic development and to compensate for its backwardness, it is compelled to engage with the world to import advanced technologies.

> ***Mohammad-Taqi Sheikhi, a demography lecturer at Al-Zahra University, from Tehran:***
> *It is necessary to have a softer contact with the outside world and to seek help. A place like China had its doors closed until recently, but they came to their senses and opened the doors, and now they have relations with one hundred and twenty countries, and their economic value increases every day.*

One of the tools for creating an international consensus against Iran and for its isolation is the project of Iranophobia and the validation of the threat of Iran. Before the nuclear agreement, Iran's confrontational and adventurous policy and its lack of engagement and negotiation with the outside world, and in a way, the drawing of a wall around the country, greatly helped the advancement of the Iranophobia project. Engagement with the world and the exchange of views on resolving the mutual regional and global challenges will not only make the world believe in and aware of Iran's international participation and responsibility towards regional and global peace, but will also nip in the bud the project of regional stability and security accompanied by Iranophobia and the isolation of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran has not been able to act well in this field either.

The effort to acquire nuclear weapons, the claim of destroying Israel, the support for Shia paramilitary forces in the countries of the region, terrorist and destructive activities, anti-Western discourse, the widespread violation of human rights, and the extensive ideological propaganda and media activities of the regime in conflict with the values of the free world and democratic principles are the main factors in the formation of a dangerous and threatening image of

Iran that have fanned the flames of the Iranophobia project. It is a project that, as a result of the foreign policy of countries and international organisations critical of and opposed to Iran, including America and Israel, with recourse to the vast media and propaganda institutions of the Western world, has been exaggerated beyond its real size and scope. As such, Iranophobia has not remained limited to official policy and international relations but is represented in a comprehensive way in the film and cinema industry, the press, and even in academic spaces and works. Being called an 'axis of evil' and a 'sponsor of terrorism' by America and Israel, and Hollywood films such as Argo, 300, The Stoning of Soraya M., Not Without My Daughter, and others (Ghasemian et al., 2018) are manifestations of the Iranophobia project.

> ***Karim Bakhsh Kordi Tamandani, a political-social activist, from Iranshahr (Sistan and Baluchestan):***
>
> *Every country and government must prioritise its national interests above all else, and we feel that our national interest is not being considered. We seem to be pursuing specific religious interests and particular ideologies in the world. If we had considered our national interest, we would not have so much tension with the world. We see countries that once fought each other—America nuclear-bombed Japan and inflicted the most damage, but now they are friends. We have been sending messages of death to the whole world for forty years. The slogan 'Death to a country' on our missile turns all eyes in the world against us, isolates us, and portrays us as a warmongering nation.*

After the JCPOA, Iran's undeniable and important role in regional stability and the resolution of existing crises and challenges has been emphasized and demanded by many of the foreign delegations that have travelled to Tehran. The welcoming of Iran's influential and stabilising role in the region by many countries, in a situation where America and its regional allies are trying to sanction Iran and push it into isolation on the pretext of destabilising actions in the region, is very important. This issue shows that extensive engagement with the world and the region, and Iran's serious will and goodwill through negotiation to resolve regional crises and challenges, especially the globalised challenge of terrorism, will neutralise and render ineffective the efforts of Iran's

opponents in presenting it as a factor of instability and tension in the region. According to the country's political officials, the countries of Saudi Arabia and the UAE—which are among Iran's powerful regional neighbours—have been attacked by the country's politicians over the past few years. The reason for this enmity and division goes back to the events of the last decade in the countries of the region, such as Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, where each side considers the other to be the factor of insecurity and itself to be the real supporter of the people of those countries.

***Habibollah Mostofi, a retired teacher, from Kermanshah:***
*In foreign policy, interaction and dialogue are the best solutions.*

The leadership of the Shia front in the Shia-Sunni conflicts of the Middle East and the Islamic world by Iran, and the basing of its strategy on the ideological export of the Islamic Revolution and the promotion of the Shi'i ideology of the Islamic Republic in the region and the world, coupled with some conflicts arising from territorial and land disputes—including the disputes over the three islands with the United Arab Emirates and incompatibility with the economic and political positions of some countries in the region, especially in relation to America and Israel and, in recent years, the Western world—has caused Iran, at the level of regional relations and with its surrounding countries, especially the countries on the shores of the Persian Gulf, to experience limited and challenging relations. As in some sensitive situations, these relations have been accompanied by explicit threats and even indirect practical actions, of which the proxy attack on the oil facilities of Saudi Arabia in the Yemen war is one example (Brian Hook on the Iran attack…, 2019). The numerous statements by the heads of the Arab countries and the Gulf Cooperation Council in condemnation of Iran (The large gathering of Arab countries…, 2019) are a clear manifestation of Iran's conflict-based relations with the Arab countries of the region.

***Amir Sajjadi, a history teacher, from Saqqez (Kurdistan):***
*Not only has Iran failed to build alliances in the region, but its security buffer has been eroded. There is a regional consensus that Iran is a threat to the Middle East.*

***Hadi Naghdi, a consultant and psychologist, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***

*Unfortunately, because our macro-policy has not been based on compromising in line with national interests with all these parties, and has been in a way that we were with one group and not with another, this has caused us to be pressured by the group we are not with. Like America, which sanctions us, casts votes against Iran in various places, and puts pressure on both the government and the people of Iran in different ways. And on the other hand, other countries have taken advantage of our bad relationship with America, to whom we have been forced to turn for refuge, such as Russia and China.*

No country can be found in the world that enjoys a high prestige and status on the international stage and, at the same time, is not disposed to engagement and shies away from having extensive and deep relations with the global community. Increasing international prestige and enhancing the strategic status of countries greatly helps them to acquire and preserve their national interests. This important matter manifests itself through the invitation of that country to be present in important international forums, the desire of different countries to be present in summits and meetings hosted by that country, the desire to establish and develop relations with that country, the attraction of foreign capital, and the desire of the people and elites of the world to know more and more about the economic, social, and cultural potentials existing in that country, and it helps to enhance national interests. Therefore, another of the necessities of extensive engagement with the world is the reconstruction and enhancement of the country's international prestige and strategic status. In this field too, the country's officials have not been able to provide the standing and prestige for the Iranian nation as it deserves.

In the end, it must be said that an emphasis on engagement with the world for a logical confrontation with the problems ahead can be inferred from the findings of the participants. According to Nouralivand (2017: 17-18), these requirements are: internal cohesion and a single voice in foreign policy, the employment of skilled and educated diplomats, the holding of international meetings and the observance of their diplomatic standards, and the strengthening of economic diplomacy.

## Deep States

'Shadow Cabinet,' 'shadow government,' and 'deep state' are common concepts in contemporary political literature that refer to the presence and political role-playing of informal bodies and quasi-governments alongside the official cabinet and the incumbent government. However, these concepts do not have the same meanings; rather, they have completely different semantic connotations. 'Shadow government' and 'shadow cabinet' can be interpreted from two different perspectives. The first is a positive definition based on the political experience of parliamentary systems, according to which, parallel to the incumbent government formed by the ruling party, the largest opposition party forms a cabinet and appoints ministers. This is so that, given the possibility of changes before an election in these systems, on the one hand, an alternative cabinet to the ruling cabinet is ready to take power, and on the other hand, the shadow cabinet and its chosen ministers will have the duty of criticising and challenging the incumbent government. This experience is rooted in the political tradition of the British monarchy (Shadow Cabinet, 2024). The second perspective is a negative and pejorative definition inspired by conspiratorial approaches (conspiracy theory), according to which real political power is not in the hands of the governments elected by the people but is with individuals who are dictating their views from behind the scenes, and no democratic institution has the ability to review and evaluate the activities of these individuals. According to this belief, elected governments are subordinate to shadow governments, which are the holders of real power. The concept of the 'deep state,' which is also referred to by the titles of secret state and profound state, is used to refer to a state that acts beyond the elected state. The deep state is an actual but secret state that, using governmental facilities with an unknown identity in the official structure of the system, is active in an organised manner and for purposes other than the national interest. This form of extra-legal political intervention in the official affairs of politics and governance is in reality a political mafia that emerges in the form of a state within a state and, without commitment to legal principles and the acceptance of responsibility, uses governmental facilities and public interests in the direction of its own group and factional goals. Deep states have a vast network consisting of political parties, intelligence services, military personnel, political leaders, and economic actors in both the public and private sectors, and they have significant resources of wealth, power, and influence under their sway (Farid,

2012). The increasing trend of the extensive and deep interventions of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the vast network of ideological and political institutions under its command in the internal affairs and foreign policy of the country, especially in the regional sphere, which takes place with the agreement and guidance of the Leader's office, is an eloquent form of the deep state on the political scene of Iran. In many economic, cultural, political, and diplomatic fields, they have repeatedly forced the incumbent and legal government into complete passivity and unconditional surrender and have taken full initiative, without any commitment to accepting the legal and juridical responsibilities for it. A re-reading of the challenges of Iran's governments with the IRGC and the institutions under its command, from the time the first reformist government came to power (1997) until the second term of Hassan Rouhani's government, is full of confrontations and interventions that are considered clear examples of the actions of a deep state. The deep state, in 1999 by suppressing the student movement and in 2009 during the Green Movement, displayed its tendency to use violence. The deep state also had an active role in the suppression and quelling of protesters in the subsequent protest movements in 2017, 2018, and 2019 (protests against the rise in petrol prices) and continues to send a message to Hassan Rouhani—the president—and the people regarding the defence of the system and resorting to the use of pressure and intimidation in this path. The first, and in other words, the most important, goal of the deep state is to ensure the survival of the regime. This deep state, in the direction of protecting the integrity of the system and keeping it from change, has made it its watchword to defend its influence and power through the application of a paternalistic authority and to protect the Shi'i identity of the system, which is crystallised in its regional influence and anti-American positions. The preservation of this superiority and dominance has been made possible by the grace of the deep state's mastery over the economic and security system. Some experts, despite emphasizing the central role of the IRGC, consider the circle and inclusiveness of the deep state in Iran to be a network that goes beyond the IRGC. Rasam and his colleagues, in a discourse entitled 'Iran's Deep State,' write in this regard: 'The deep state in Iran is composed of a mixture of security, intelligence, and economic superstructures, and its goal is to protect and preserve the revolutionary nature and worldview and to ensure the security of the Islamic Republic.

Some analysts believe that this state is formed by the Islamic Revolutionary

Guard Corps of Iran and consider the significant and increasing presence of the IRGC in the economic and political institutions of the country as a clear reason for the correctness of this view. In our belief, the scope of the deep state goes far beyond the borders of the IRGC. The deep state includes essential institutions such as the Leader's office, the intelligence and security services, the judiciary, the religious bureaucracy, the foundations and quasi-private institutions and their affiliated institutions such as the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order (EIKO), the Astan Quds Razavi economic organisation, the IRGC Cooperative Foundation, and finally the Mostazafan Foundation. This network, consisting of numerous institutions, is formed by the deep state with the goal of protecting and stabilising the Islamic Republic. The deep state has not been content with a mere monopoly on power and has also made the monopoly on wealth its own. According to 'Springboard', in order to understand the nature of Iran's deep state, one must understand the communication resources that, consisting of formal and informal links, connect the deep state on the one hand to the official institutions and on the other hand to the political and civil institutions, which also includes the economy. The access of this deep state to money and other resources to ensure the functioning of its support networks and to control the spheres of employment, loyalty, and the survival of the regime is of vital importance. Therefore, understanding and mapping the resources and reserves of the deep state is essential for understanding the scope of its influence and also the challenges ahead in shining a light on it' (Rasam et al., 2021).

The findings of the present research report the existence of various stances among the heads of the Islamic Republic during the decision-making process in the country and the manner of engagement with the outside world. As in some cases it has been observed that upon the arrival of a foreign official in the country, instead of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, other individuals from other institutions go to welcome the foreign guest—a matter that, in some cases, has been followed by the protest of the country's Minister of Foreign Affairs and has even led to the announcement of his resignation. In other cases, and at the time of the dialogue of foreign policy officials with Western countries, individuals inside the country, by taking actions, try to sabotage it. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the principlist president, in July 2011, at the 'Specialised Conference on New Strategies in the Prevention and Fight against Smuggling of Goods and Currency,' in an insinuation, while calling the senior commanders of the IRGC 'smuggler

brothers,' spoke of the connection of the smuggling networks to the owners of power and influence (The accusations that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made against the IRGC, 2021).

> ***Mojtaba Ghestouni, a journalist and cultural heritage activist, from Khuzestan:***
>
> *Overall, we have failed in politics and have not been able to interact with the world. In a country where the ruling establishment is in the hands of one party and the government in the hands of another, shadow governments emerge. Now, not only do we not have one government, but we have multiple shadow governments that make decisions, and we can feel this contradiction.*

> ***Nasser Amoli Moghaddam, a journalist and reformist activist, from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan):***
>
> *Last year, a French team came to Iran to negotiate with the Ministry of Industry, and at the same time, several missiles were tested, and everything went up in the air.*

Hassan Rouhani repeatedly complained and lamented the sabotage and disregard for the foundations of the constitution in the dealings with his government, and his foreign minister, Javad Zarif, in explicit remarks, explained the reality that the initiative for regional and even nuclear diplomacy was in the hands of the IRGC and the Leader's office, with the centrality of the person of Qasem Soleimani, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the government lacked independence of position and action, as Zarif had spoken of the precedence of the 'field' over diplomacy (Zarif's audio file; Qasem Soleimani was an obstacle to diplomacy, 2021).

***Abdolsalam Bozorgzadeh, a radio and television producer, from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*We have two sovereignties in our province: the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic and the sovereignty of the Sistani Republic. They've made me promise not to say this 'Sistani Republic' anymore, but I'll say it. Within a stratum that makes up 2 per cent of the province at most, there is a republic of these arrogant, totalitarian individuals who, due to their religious affiliation and the specific conditions after the revolution, have taken control of the political, economic, administrative, and everything else in this province. We Baluch people loathe them. Why do I say the Sistani Republic? Because they have all ganged up to crush the other 98 per cent, create divisions, sideline the poor Baluch people as counter-revolutionaries, and discourage their capitalists in the administrative offices—which are in their own hands—by not even returning their greetings.*

In the country of Iran, provinces such as West Azarbaijan, Khuzestan, and Sistan and Balochestan have a composite ethnic and religious fabric, in such a way that peoples from different linguistic and religious groups live in them. In these provinces, administrative power is usually in the hands of one of these groups, which is mainly aligned with the ruling establishment in terms of religion. In such a situation, according to some individuals of the minority ethnic group in the province, many of the privileges and budget lines that are allocated to these provinces by the statesmen to be distributed fairly among the different cities, in practice, the largest share goes to the counties that are aligned with the distributors in terms of language and religion. Also, at the time of holding the ceremonies and occasions of the isolated ethnic and religious group, they are dealt with in a discretionary manner, and while there is no legal prohibition on their performance, their ceremonies are prevented from being held.

In any case, apart from the elected pillars of power such as the presidency and its executive body (the government) and the representatives of the parliament, currents and individuals have always had the power and determination of policies, appointments, budget allocations, and so on. This very matter has also caused that in the view of a large majority of the people, any kind of election has

been stripped of its real function and lacks legitimacy.

The duality of the position and behaviour of the official institutions towards the ethnic groups, in the provinces and regions that have two or more ethnic inhabitants, apart from its negative consequences on the relationship of the discriminated ethnic groups with the governmental institutions, will also intensify the inter-ethnic conflicts and hostilities and will add to the scope of ethnic strife. This situation, which in the Islamic Republic is generally due to the religious commonalities of the ethnic group closer to the state with the official religion, provides the ground for their presence in the various pillars and posts of the government, and this very matter causes their relative advantage in benefiting from governmental privileges and resources. This unequal and tension-creating relationship has a concrete and tangible manifestation in the relations of the Azeri Turks and the Kurds in West Azarbaijan province and the relations of the Sistanis and the Baloch in Sistan and Balochestan province.

In these provinces, the state functionaries, who are of the country's official religion, keep the ethnic and religious minorities deprived with a security-oriented view and are complicit in their underdevelopment. Contrary to the legal clauses and the common discourses of equality and justice, this group still, in an informal way, does not allow the growth and progress and the realisation of the rights of the non-aligned group (especially in terms of religion).

## The Conflict between Individual and Collective Interests

Individualism, in the sense of preferring individual profit and benefit over the good and interests of the collective, is considered a conspicuous behavioural and moral characteristic of the people of Iran. According to many sociologists and researchers of the social history of Iran, it has historical roots[1] and has been established for many centuries in the moral and behavioural system of Iranians. The prevalence of a large spectrum of proverbs and historical anecdotes with themes of prioritising individual interests, such as 'Death is good, but for the

1. See: Vosoughi, Mansour, Mirzaei, Hossein, & Rahmani, Jabbar. (2005). 'Individualism and Collectivism of Iranians from the View of Foreign Travellers.' Cultural and Communication Studies, 1(2-3), 303-322. & Nabavi, Seyyed Hossein (2022), Individualism and Collectivism in Iran, Centre for the Cultural Observatory of the Country, pp. 35-36. & Farasatkhah, Maghsoud (2016), We Iranians: A Historical and Social Contextualisation of Iranian Dispositions, Tehran: Ney Publishing.

neighbour,' 'The pot that doesn't boil for me, let a dog's head boil in it,' 'Pull your own rug out of the water,' and 'On these three, move not your head / Of going, of gold, and of your creed,' all of which emphasize the necessity of securing individual interests even at the price of loss and harm to others and society, are examples of the prominent historical model centring the collective behaviour of Iranians.

This form of individualism, which is equivalent to personal profiteering and self-interest and is sometimes secured by inflicting damage on collective interests and the public good, or at least by disregarding it, is fundamentally different from individualism in the sense of the 'primacy of the individual,' which is the product of the humanist thoughts of the Renaissance era and the philosophy of liberalism, and in some aspects is even in conflict with it. Homa Katouzian writes in this regard: 'Individualism in the West means a vision and method that the liberal European thinkers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were pursuing.

This type of individualism was a reaction to the mercantilist and monopolistic governments and their severe restrictions on individual trade, and also a reaction to the power of the church. But in Iran, this type of individualism did not exist; rather, what existed was 'personalism,' which is based on the foundation of kinship. In personalism, individuals who are not related to each other are strangers and aliens to each other, and there is no feeling of social cohesion among them. The other side of this personalism is that Iranians give great value to personal profit and to family members and relatives' (Katouzian, 2012: 21-24). The current society of Iran also suffers from a type of 'interest-oriented individualism' or, in Katouzian's term, 'personalism.'

The spirit governing Iranian society is such that everyone seeks and obtains their own individual and personal interests. The prevailing culture among the various sections of the people and a part of the administrative system considers the search for and attainment of individual benefit to be their right. This culture does not shy away from any effort or trick to achieve individual benefit. Achieving individual benefit in such a cultural and social context is considered a type of success and gratification. So what has taken root under the layers of the culture and is not officially recognised but in practice even the official ideology is entangled in its web, is a collection of actions that stems from a single attitude, and that is that from everyone and everything, even from sacred and respected

matters, one can and must make instrumental use in order to gain various kinds of personal and individual benefits (Nabavi, 2022: 8-9).

> ***Ya'qub Mousavi, a sociologist and academic staff member at Al-Zahra University, from Tehran:***
> *We are suffering from a type of pseudo-individualism and immature self-belief. The individualism present in Iran is a great affliction. Individualism in the sense of prioritising personal interests must be suppressed.*

> ***Raouf Azari, a civil activist, from Sardasht (West Azerbaijan):***
> *If we look at the macro-structures of the country, when the CEO of the most important bank in the country can easily embezzle and prefers his personal gain over the public interest; when our politicians, when our Members of Parliament, unfortunately, forgo public interests for the sake of some personal benefits; when a representative of the people of a city, solely for his own personal benefit, ignores and disregards many of the fundamental principles that could have benefited his people, it is certain that individual interests strongly outweigh our national, ethnic, and religious interests. In our Iran, unfortunately.*

> ***Masoud Binandeh, a lecturer at Sanandaj University:***
> *A kind of negative individualism has grown, where everyone is striving for themselves and considers their individual benefit. This, in fact, reduces the level of participation in social affairs, the daily participation in public interest matters, in NGOs, in issues related to the common good*

Dr Maqsoud Farasatkhah, a sociologist, says about Iranian individualism: 'Individualism in Iran, due to the structural, social, cultural, and environmental conditions and our specific social fabric, has usually not been institutionalised. That is, it has usually not been the type of individualism where the individual wants to maximise their own interests by bringing public good to society. There is a time when we have an individualism where the individual wants to maximise their own utilities, which is rule-based, and they know that this maximisation of individual interests has rules and must bring public good to others. When you

bring good to others, then you can also upgrade your own interests and utilities in a sustainable way. These interests are not just for once but are permanent. This issue in Iran, due to the specific conditions that prevailed, is different; for example, Iranian society is short-term. When in Iran instability is a very dominant and chronic matter, in this unstable and precarious society, it is natural that everyone pulls their own rug out. So here a type of self-centred individualism is created, that is, the individual, in a self-centred way, pursues their individual interests and just wants to temporarily pull their own rug out of the water and does not see much opportunity to pay attention to public interests and issues because society is so short-term that in this society, they can only maintain their own interests' (A conversation with Maqsoud Farasatkhah: Iranian individualism is self-centred, 2016).

In the scientific works of sociology, psychology, and cross-cultural studies, we have a type of 'horizontal individualism' and a 'vertical individualism.' Horizontal individualism means maintaining a relative independence with respect to others. That individuals have their own specific identities and each has a dignity, that is, an independent individual who has a relative independence in interaction with others and of course also has their own responsibility. 'Vertical individualism' is also a type of striving for superiority and a type of ego-seeking. In a sense, perhaps it can be stated that 'horizontal individualism' is a type of moral individualism and 'vertical individualism' is a type of selfish individualism (The causes of individualism in Iran…, 2013).

The situation in which the society of Iran is today is an individualistic situation based on the rejection of the collective-oriented model. The dominance of the individualistic view and the pursuit of maximum interests in the individual sphere has imposed heavy costs on Iranian society. Even this situation has manifested itself in the political and economic apparatus of Iran and has created widespread administrative and political corruption. Administrative corruption, embezzlement, rent-seeking, and the like are clear examples of the precedence of individual interests over collective interests and are also the result of the existence and prevalence of the precedence of individual interests over collective interests among the public (Bauzon, 1992). In the sphere of public health, many of the problems that exist in Iranian society are due to the selfishness of individuals in gaining more profit, and consequently, they have endangered the collective interest and have been willing to sell the collective interest for individual interest.

In societies where citizens, in the event of a conflict between the best option for individual interests and the best option for collective interests, give precedence to the satisfaction of the best individual option, they are diagnosed with attributes such as selfish, insecure, fragmented, inefficient individualism, and so on. And if it is asked, 'Why, in a situation of conflict between individual and collective interests, do citizens prefer the path of the precedence of individual interests over the path of collective interests?', the occurrence and prevalence of various kinds of disorders at different levels and phases of the social body can be identified as possible influential factors.

The atomisation of society is one of the reasons that has helped the growth of negative and self-serving individualism. This is because in an atomised and fragmented society, the individual does not find a reliable community to pursue their goals and interests through the channel of the collective good, and inevitably takes refuge in the embrace of individualism. Therefore, a dynamic civil society and an exit from a mass-like and populist state is a necessary solution to overcome this social affliction.

Another influential factor that has affected the prevalence of this phenomenon is the historical experiences full of instability and a collective life always exposed to the ups and downs of Iranians, which has deprived them of the possibility of establishing and continuing a continuous and institutionalised historical life. It has led to a situation that is termed a 'short-term society,' and in the collective culture, it has helped the formation of attitudes of 'seizing the moment' and seeking isolation from the collective and from collective activity. The institution of the state and government has also, for several reasons, been involved in increasing the scope of this phenomenon. This is because in the absence of a government based on law and committed to the public and national interests, which is itself a ground for the abuse of the institution of power and political clientelism,[1] individuals also, in various forms, try to achieve the maximum amount of personal profit in the absence of binding laws and the lack of structures for securing individual benefit through the channel of collective interests.

1. Clientelism is a structural relationship between a patron and a client. Patron is taken from the Spanish word patrón, meaning superior or a person of power. Client or agent means the subordinate factor and someone who serves their patron and in return receives economic and political benefits. Dehghani, Khosrow, Political Dictionary: Clientelism, Vista Magazine website, Link: https://vista.ir/w/a/16/bpba2

***Sirus Shafaghi, a geographer and lecturer in urban planning, from Isfahan:***

*In our country, personal interests have overshadowed everything, and the material abuses that take place in our country, which the media have repeatedly reported, show that personal interests take precedence over national ones.*

***Mohsen Goudarzi, a sociology lecturer and researcher, from Tehran:***

*On the stage of society, we are witnessing the emergence and growth of the self-interested individual, who measures every social issue by the yardstick of their own desires and interests.*



*Image 3-26. Interview with Mohsen Goodarzi*

The characteristics of the current situation of Iran all indicate the formation of vicious circles in the relationship between the individual and society and between power and society. The external manifestation of this situation can be observed in the erosive process of morality and the spread of social anomaly. In the same vein, the lack of an institution of a rights-bearing, participatory, and questioning

citizenry has led to the concentration of power in the state. The concentration of power, backed by an income independent of the economic activity of the members of society and backed by ideology, has caused the greater dependence of social and economic institutions and the members of the citizenry on the state. The ruling structure in the current order not only does not represent the will of the people but, backed by its apparatus of repression, has turned into a totalitarian power that, Leviathan-like, does not recognise any form of difference and seeks to build a 'whole' that dissolves all the 'parts' within itself in order to perpetuate its own existence by negating them. The results of the findings of the present research show that the state itself is taking steps in the direction of intensifying individualism.

***Jabbar Rahmani, academic staff member at the Research Institute for Cultural and Social Studies and an anthropologist, from Tehran:***

*We do not have a system in Iran that can link national and individual interests. Our national interests have come into conflict with personal interests, and this is dangerous. This may also be one of the secrets of our backwardness: that we have always thought individually and not collectively and nationally. We were not taught this, and in our culture, in our games, and in our speech, individual thinking has always prevailed over collective thinking, and this is a dangerous trend.*

In the research conducted, a prominent sentence that was heard from most of the respondents was that individual interests in Iran have priority over collective interests. In such a way that in the macro-governance of the state, individuals must be subject to orders that the collective interest dictates, but at the stage of implementation, it is the interests of individuals and a specific minority that are determinative. This has created a kind of social indifference among the people, which has itself fanned the flames of the prevalence of administrative and economic corruption, and so on, as well as the lowering of social capital. Man, as a civil being, in order to meet his biological, psychological, and social needs, requires attention, cooperation, collaboration, and participation with his fellow human beings in society. The extent of humanitarian attentions, efforts, and aids

can range from a kind look, a peaceful solace, manual assistance, and financial help and support to self-sacrifice. The social nature of man and the necessity of cooperation and collaboration in the form of the formation of a social division of labour to meet primary human needs has caused social indifference to be considered an unacceptable matter. In individualistic societies, 'I' instead of 'we' guides the behaviour of individuals. This is while the basis of any social order is formed by emotion and commitment to collective goals. But a phenomenon like individualism and social indifference is an expression of emotionlessness and pessimism. Pessimism about the macro-policies of the country and the different ethnic discriminations are among the fundamental factors of social indifference and individualism in Iran. Therefore, it cannot be expected that individual and collective interests will be aligned.

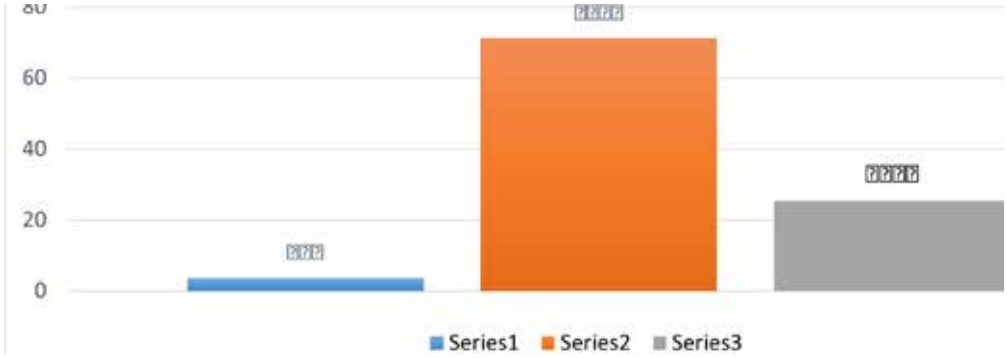



*Diagram3-17. Alignment of Individual and Collective Interests - Public*

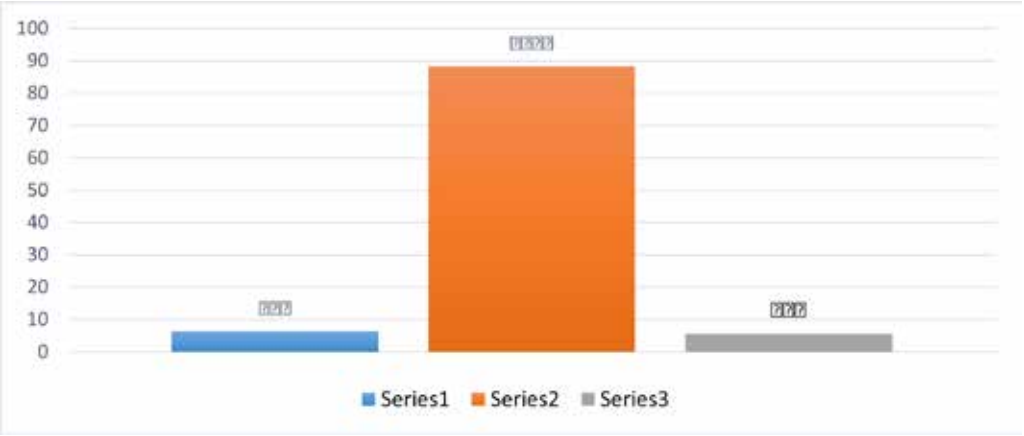



*Diagram 3-18. Alignment of Individual and Collective Interests - Elites*

Diagrams 17 and 18 show the attitude towards the alignment of individual and collective interests. Accordingly, 88.2 percent of the elites and 71.1 percent of

the public believe that there is no alignment and harmony between individual and collective interests.

The preference of collective interests over individual interests is undoubtedly one of the essential requirements for development and progress. This is a matter for which, based on the findings, its absence and the preference of individual interests over collective interests has been shown. If such a trend continues in the future, the country will be caught up in many issues and problems.

## Gender Constraints

What is meant by gender constraints is any type of restriction, bias, deprivation, harassment, violence, insult, and verbal and behavioural discrimination that takes place on the basis of an individual's gender. This issue, which is referred to by titles such as sexism and gender discrimination, includes various types of gender-based hatred such as misogyny, misandry, homophobia, and others, which are exposed to direct, indirect, and compounded discrimination. The conspicuous and influential aspect of this on the social situation and political relations in Iran is the constraints on women and girls. The emergence of discriminatory conditions against women and girls in Iran is rooted in Iran's historical patriarchal culture, the traditional beliefs and teachings of the religion of Islam, and the dominance of a religious-jurisprudential government over the pillars of power and politics. Collectively, through the subjugation of femininity and female gender in Iran in an organised and institutionalised manner, using propagandistic, legal, punitive, and persuasive tools, they strive to impose their reading of women and femininity on women and the entire society. This very matter is the source of a diverse range of discriminations and gender constraints for women and girls in Iran. Apart from the fact that it to some extent deprives society of the effective presence and optimal utilisation of this great social capacity, the modern and feminist demands of women and girls have confronted the ruling establishment and the established order with a serious challenge in both its discursive and governance aspects.

In Iranian society, the family is one of the important social forces in this field. From the beginning, families train girls to achieve their role as a woman and prepare boys to accept the masculine role as the head of the family. In this way, the separation of responsibilities and occupations is instilled in children by the family from the very beginning of life, and they are brought up for future social

role-playing according to whether they are a girl or a boy. The educational system and the school are other important institutions in the formation of gender models. In textbooks, hero characters like the 'Devoted Peasant' and 'Petros' are male, and in contrast, 'Kokab Khanom,' as a devoted and kind mother, and a girl named 'Kobra,' who is forgetful and does not know where she has put her books, are introduced as symbols of women. In the media sphere, and especially the audio and visual media, during commercial advertisements, women are used to advertise household appliances and cooking, and men are used to play managerial roles, advertise mobile phones, driving, and other such things.

Although one of the concerns of the current political system is the preservation of the institution of the family and marriage and its functions, it still insists on the separation of men and women and identifies the mixing of women and men as a moral threat. In the ideology of gender segregation, the family is forgotten, and men and women are considered as two opposite and different sexes and a threat that must be kept away from each other. No attention is paid to the point that in the case of gender segregation, where will the position of the family in the public sphere be? With gender segregation, the assumption is that morality and security will return to society, women will become invisible, therefore the religious rites will be observed, and society will take on a desirable appearance. However, a review of the results of gender segregation in the past decades shows that none of these goals have been achieved, and the resistance of citizens against such decisions continues in a serious and daily manner. The necessity of a modern society is that men and women be present in the public sphere together, and women, as half of society, cannot be made invisible and hidden. Decisions like the gender segregation of the public sphere, because they do not correspond to the realities of the time and the needs of society, are doomed to failure.

***Maulana Abdul Hamid Ismail Zehi, Sunni Imam of Zahedan, Sistan and Balochestan***

*Women are not equal in all of Iran and they complain. This is naturally the case here as well.*

***A young girl, Semnan***

*In state TV shows, you never see a woman reading a book, exercising, or doing art.*

***Jila Hesami, Literary Activist, Naqadeh, West Azarbaijan***

*There are some jobs I can do, but society doesn't like it. When we consider women, the distribution of employment and wealth and dignity all through the country is not fair all. When a woman marries, when she doesn't have the right to divorce. what is equality?! When a woman works in a store, her salary is half that of the man who works there. A man's salary in the same job has always been higher than women's.*

***A young Kurmanji Kurd boy, sociology student at Ferdowsi University***

*Women don't have the same opportunity as they should have. Aside from education, they are not considered as equal anywhere. Women in our society don't want 70 percent of themselves, our university professor said about the hitting of the Ershad patrol in the classroom, saying that in my opinion, women should not read more than a bachelor's degree and should not work full-time. Now our class is 45 with only three boys. Of the girls, 37, eight said we accept the master's word. The pain is here!*

Apart from these cases, at the level of society, the prevalence of propositions such as 'a daughter belongs to others,' 'a son is the breadwinner of the house,' 'the family's surname is only continued by the son,' and so on, are considered stimuli for the creation of gender biases and constraints. It is self-evident that in such a situation, the identity of each man and woman will be defined based on the image of these notions in the real self of the individual.

The findings of the present research also show that based on the formation of the notion of considering women to be weak, many injustices are done to them at the social level. The work environment that exists for the female workforce in society is in no way comparable to the workforce available for men. Apart from this inequality, regarding the work environment, in the section on salaries and benefits, there is an even more severe inequality against the female workforce. This inequality also continues at the time of a woman's marriage, and in marriage, a woman is deprived of having the right to divorce, the right to custody

of children, the right to continue her education, the right to travel abroad, and so on, under normal conditions, unless at the time of the marriage contract, she demands such rights from her husband, which also rarely happens.

At the level of Iranian society, when discussing the gender gap or gender constraints, four factors are important and fundamental, and in all four factors, a structural inequality between women and men is seen. First, education, which includes the level of primary, secondary, and university education and apprenticeship courses. Second, economic participation, which includes the opportunities and abilities of the men and women of society, the rate of participation in the workforce, the type of job, and income. Third, political power, which includes the number, position, and capability of men and women in political posts. Fourth, health and well-being, which includes diseases, access to treatment, life expectancy, and the quality of health of men and women.

***Mohammad Ramezani, English teacher, translator and storyteller, Bukan West Azerbaijan***

*Women suffer from painful sexist phenomenon or gender inequality. Low salaries for women with better work and more than men, they are more oppressed in society. When the woman is her father's house, she is oppressed by the parents, then in the husband's house, and then by her male children. In fact, women are oppressed both in their families and on the larger scale of the society.*

***Abdul Rashid Tariz, History researcher And sociopolitical activist, Sistan and Balochistan***

*In general, we Iranians grow up in a patriarchal society with a patriarchal subjectivity, and the patriarchy which emerges, is multiplied in a place like Sistan and Balochistan.*

According to the annual report of the World Economic Forum in 2020, Iran, among the 153 countries surveyed, is almost at the bottom of the table, in 148th place. This is while in 2006, Iran was in the much better rank of 108th. In this report, the gender gap in various fields, including economic participation, political empowerment, health and well-being, and access to educational facilities, has been examined (Iran fell to 148th rank, 2019).

The results obtained from the interviews with the different ethnic groups also confirm the importance of eliminating gender inequality from the perspective of the interviewees.

> ***Mohammad Jamaluddin Vazhi, a religious researcher and sociologist, from Pasveh, Piranshahr (West Azerbaijan):***
>
> *Patriarchy is an ancient, complex, and resilient system that reproduces itself in new ways each time. In recent years, the situation of women has seemingly changed, but in reality, no fundamental change has occurred for the benefit of women, and even women's perception of their own abilities has not changed much. Women are oppressed in the family and society; a large portion of women never receive their financial entitlements and remain dependent on their brothers, sons, and husbands for their entire lives. Laws regarding divorce, custody, permission to travel, mandatory hijab, etc., are faced with incorrect religious interpretations, which sometimes provoke women to the point of suicide. The political arena also systematically excludes women, and the allocation of high-level administrative and political management to men is the cause of the constant reproduction of patriarchy. In a society where the word 'woman' is considered an insult and a sign of disrespect, it is unlikely that women's rights will be secured, and they are undoubtedly the second sex.*

In other cases, it is not the law, but the custom of society in the form of religious, traditional, and cultural values that creates inequality in the relations between men and women. In societies where religious attitudes are accompanied by extremism, women are restricted, both in terms of dress and in terms of activity and studying.

> ***Javad Tariri, a barrister, writer, and political activist, from Khuzestan:***
>
> *I have seen many murders that resulted from a woman's lack of desire for her husband because she was not allowed a divorce. Issues like child custody, the right to choose divorce, the right to permission for travel—these show in our law that opportunities are not equal for women.*

Also, in traditional families, apart from the fact that girls and women are not allowed to be active outside the home and within the community, in many cases, they are also deprived of the right to education, and they are married off at a young age. In terms of job opportunities, in cases where job opportunities are provided for women, inequality occurs in terms of salaries and benefits. This issue is another of the matters that was emphasized by the interviewees, in which, apart from the micro level, they were also dissatisfied with the creation of inequality at the macro and managerial levels. Among other matters that were emphasized by the interviewees in this field was the not entrusting of high managerial responsibilities such as minister, governor, district governor, mayor, and other senior positions to women.

The discriminatory approach of the heads of the government of Iran towards women is the outcome of a reactionary reading of Islam and is not in proportion with modern beliefs about women. This issue has caused the gender gap in the Islamic Republic period to continuously deepen. For example, Ali Khamenei, on 20 March 2017, in his speech to a group of panegyrists, called the phrase 'gender equality of women and men' a Western concept and considered 'managing the home and raising children' to be the priority of women's work in Iran. Cases such as encouraging or forcing women into housewifery, instilling the idea of the inferior status and inability of women compared to men through propaganda and the misuse of traditional and Islamic beliefs, encouraging women to have children without creating sufficient foundations for eliminating gender inequality in society, the non-approval of protective laws for women, and other such things all confirm the discriminatory approach of the Islamic Republic government towards Iranian women over the past four-plus decades (Abbasi-Tavallali, 2023).

***Ya'qub Mousavi, a sociologist and academic staff member at Al-Zahra University:***

*We have a problem at the national level, and this is compounded at the level of ethnic groups. In the sphere of women, there are also many problems. It should be noted that due to global developments and the revolution, changes have occurred; from a sociological perspective, a revolution is an explosion of awareness and expectations. These expectations were created among ethnic groups and were accompanied by global transformations and media development. A segment of women also evolved in this way, although these developments were not planned. We have a growing number of women poets, writers, professors, and so on, among minorities, but relative to the population and historical capital, the economic situation of women is, in some places, a disaster. Thanks to communication, we receive photos and news showing great deprivation among ethnic groups, especially among women and girls.*

In fact, one of the issues that women face in society and which affects their social positions is the feeling of gender inequality. The difference between the members of a society has a very wide range, which begins with natural characteristics and ends with socio-economic characteristics.

Despite the improvement in the social situation of women in recent decades and the increase in their presence, especially in the scientific and academic spheres, society is still a long way from reaching a desirable position for women.

Diagrams 19 and 20 show the opportunities for women in comparison with men. The findings of the research indicate that 93 percent of the elites and 57.8 percent of the public believe that the opportunities for women in comparison with men are unequal.

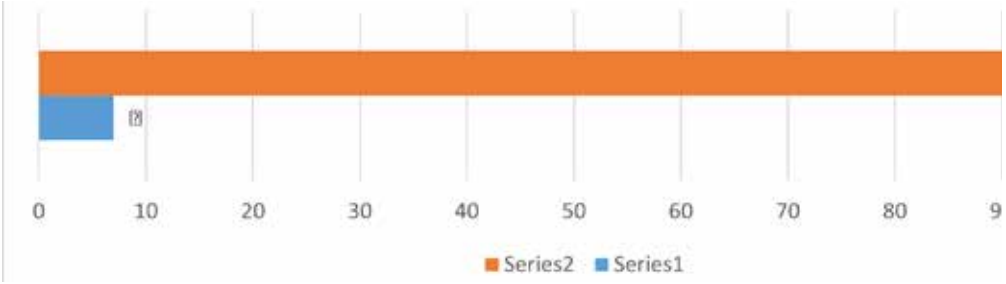



*Diagram 3-19. Equal opportunities for women, according to the elites*

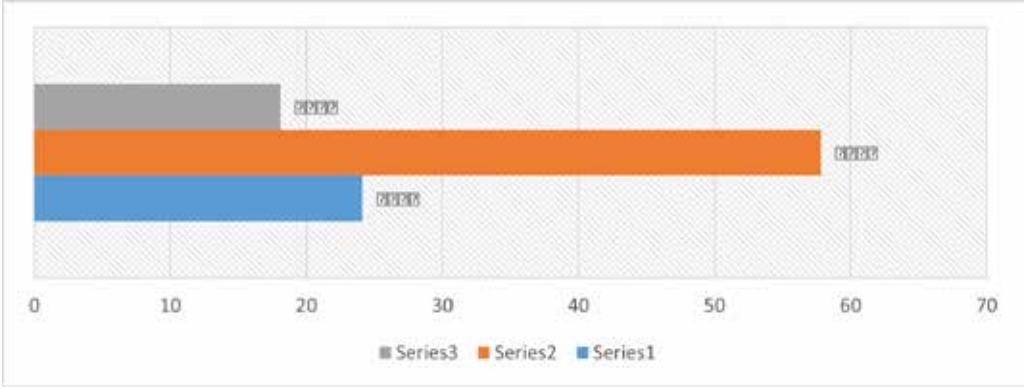



*Diagram 3-20. Equal opportunities for women, according to the public*

Gender constraints and bottlenecks, when they overlap with other forms of ethnic, linguistic, and religious discrimination, cause a very convoluted and multi-faceted discriminatory situation that the women and girls belonging to the subjugated ethnic communities face. For this reason, the community of the women of the ethnic groups can be considered the most deprived and most pressured stratum of Iranian society, who are deprived of many of their primary and basic rights.

In sum, it can be said that reducing gender constraints requires attention to various components, such as attention to the empowerment of women in various dimensions, changing discriminatory laws, helping the legal enlightenment of women and men, increasing the awareness of managers and society, and the growth of non-profit organisations and efficient women's movements, among other things. In this regard, by reforming the culture and tradition in educational and pedagogical institutions like the family, which have a prominent role in this respect, and also the legislators and individuals who are at the head of affairs,

steps must be taken in this direction with various culture-building initiatives. Also, women should step forward in this direction with self-confidence, and women's movements should act in a coordinated and aligned manner to eliminate this discrimination.

## The Spread of Social Despair and the Intensification of Dissatisfaction

The security and stability of any country depends on its people, that is, those who have the right to vote and to protest. The despair of the people regarding the possibility of change and the improvement of the general situation leads to the emergence of protest and unrest. Dissatisfaction in Iran, like any other society, has existed in an overt and covert form over the past decades, and in the last decade, it has acquired an increasing intensity. In particular, many of the places where no protest movement had occurred during the life of the Islamic Revolution also joined the ranks of the protesters. In regions such as Khuzestan, Lorestan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad and their nomads, who were always famous for being aligned with the ruling establishment and had a fundamental role in the country's security, extensive protest movements were formed.

**Amir Nabavi, a university lecturer and political science researcher, from Tehran:**

*Regarding the protests of January 2018, we had disturbances in regions where, if you look at the security atlas, we had never witnessed political incidents or events in their history.*

Another important point about these protest movements was that apart from the ethnic, religious, and student groups from whom most of the previous protests had been carried out, guilds such as workers, porters (kulbars), merchants, truck drivers, teachers, retirees, bank deposit holders, and other groups also joined the ranks of the protesters. The voice of protest of these groups and guilds is still heard from time to time, a matter that indicates the spread of dissatisfaction and its becoming widespread among the various ethnic, religious, and guild groups.

Regarding the causes of the formation of these gatherings, various reasons have been put forward, all of which can be summarised under the title of 'the existence of a gap between the expectations and the possessions of the people' at all economic, political, cultural, social, religious, and environmental levels,

and the lack of a clear prospect for the future and the spread of social despair about the reform and improvement of conditions. In fact, if the level of the government's performance falls behind the level of the needs of its subjects, dissatisfaction is created, which can manifest in the form of instability or divergence (Mohammadi-Lord, 2014: 63).

> ***Nasser Bagheshi, a cultural activist, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***
> *In the current situation, no sector or guild is satisfied. Even within the body of the establishment and the so-called 'insiders', there are dissatisfied people. This dissatisfaction is also seen among the more privileged ethnic groups.*

The closure of factories and the unemployment of workers, unprecedented inflation and the decrease in the purchasing power of the people, especially employees and teachers, the increase in the dollar rate and the decrease in imports and the recession of the market, the recession in housing, the excessive price of basic goods, the high price of cars, hoarding, the water crisis, political suffocation, the disregard of women's rights, centralism, the closure of the borders, the shooting of porters, the wattle-and-daub schools in Sistan and Balochestan, the environmental crisis, public despair, academic corruption and fraud, financial corruption, hypocrisy and lies and social indifference, addiction to the internet and virtual space and the increase in related crimes, the increase in permanent singlehood and divorce, the increase in suicide, the increase in prostitution and debauchery, and other problems are among the crises that have led to public dissatisfaction.

Eghtesad News, in a statistical-analytical report on the economic situation of Iran in 2019, referred to the grounding of the Iranian economy. This report states: 'The year 2019 was a special year for the Iranian economy. In this year, a host of economic problems and constraints simultaneously put the country's economy under unprecedented pressure. The preliminary statistics of the Statistical Centre of Iran show that the economic growth of the first 9 months of the current year was equal to minus 7.6 percent, and the economic growth without oil was also a negative figure and close to zero. The growth of fixed capital formation (at constant prices), also based on the statistics of the Statistical Centre of Iran, during the 9 months of 2019 was equal to minus 6.2 percent. Also, private final consumption (at constant prices) in the 9 months of the year had a growth equal

to minus six percent. On the other hand, the inflation rate (the average of the 12 months ending in Bahman) was also, based on the statistics of the Statistical Centre of Iran, equal to 37 percent. Regardless of the degree of accuracy and reliability of the statistics of the Statistical Centre of Iran, various evidence, including the production statistics of selected items from the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Trade, also confirms the decrease in the production of many selected items compared to the previous year. On the other hand, based on the statistics published on the information base of the Central Bank, the rate of growth of liquidity at the end of Azar of the current year compared to one year before was equal to 28.2 percent, which, in comparison with the statistics of the previous year (22.1 percent), shows a significant increase. Also, based on the statistics published by the Central Bank, among the constituent components of liquidity, the growth of money (49 percent) is significantly more than the growth of quasi-money (25 percent). Regarding the financial performance of the government, the monetary statistics show that the debt of the government sector to the Central Bank at the end of Azar 2019 had a growth of 33 percent compared to the same month of the previous year. The main economic indicators indicate that the Iranian economy in 2019, in comparison with the long-term trend, has faced a significant decrease in the level of gross domestic product, a decrease in per capita income, a decrease in investment, an increase in the inflation rate, an increase in the rate of growth of liquidity, and a decrease in household welfare. With the publication of the detailed statistics, the transformations of the economic indicators of 2019 can naturally be examined and analysed with greater accuracy. If we summarise the main challenges of the economy in 2019 in general as recession, inflation, and a decrease in welfare, the root of these challenges can be categorised at three levels: 'structural factors,' 'the intensification of sanctions,' and 'policymaking errors'' (Azarmand, 2020).

Structural corruption is another of the sinister economic and financial phenomena of Iran, which in recent decades has acquired astronomical and staggering dimensions and figures, to the extent that in a period of less than a decade, the amount of embezzlements in Iran has risen from a few billion tomans to several thousand billion tomans. Today, in the public space of Iran, the disclosure of embezzlements of tens of thousands of billions of tomans is considered a normal phenomenon. In the 8-year period from 2011 to 2019, nearly 10 cases of discovered embezzlements ranging from several thousand billion

to several tens of thousands of billions of tomans were registered (Financial embezzlements in Iran, Persian Wikipedia), which, this figure, compared to other forms of financial abuse and rent-seeking outside of supervision that constitute other dimensions of financial and economic corruption in the Islamic Republic system, is perhaps only the tip of an iceberg, the greater part of which is hidden from public view. According to the report of Transparency International in 2020, Iran, in terms of financial corruption and its spread, is ranked 146th among 180 countries in the world (Announcement of the annual ranking of corruption; Iran in 146th place in the world, 2020).

A scientific research entitled 'The Political Economy of Corruption in the Islamic Republic of Iran' in its investigation concludes that: 'There is a suitable ground and conditions for the emergence and growth of economic corruption in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This means that the structural, institutional, and agential causes of corruption exist with a cohesive and synergistic internal relationship, which leads to the formation and continuation of economic corruption in Iran. Based on the experience of the past few decades, an important conclusion that can be drawn is that any purely ex-post measures to combat corruption will not be a suitable solution for this problem and security-sovereignty threat. This is because dealing with and combating the effect of corruption, that is, the instances of economic corruption that have emerged and manifested from a collection of political and economic causes and factors, especially the lack of transparency in the administrative system and the economic system of the country (the lack of a free flow of information in the decision-making and executive centres), a rentier political economy, and a rentier state, will not prevent the expansion of the scope of economic corruption in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is because the suitable environment and structure for the formation of corruption exists, and simultaneously with dealing with one of the instances of economic corruption that has been discovered or revealed, other economic corruptions are in the process of occurring.

The most fundamental component of the formation of corruption in the Islamic Republic of Iran is the type of political economy governing it, of which the most important indicators can be mentioned as the lack of administrative and economic transparencies, such as the lack of transparency in the circulation of money and goods, the lack of transparency in the reporting of the activities of banks and other financial institutions, a vast and complex administrative system, the intervention

of governmental (sovereign) apparatuses in the economy, supervisory weakness, and on the other hand, the prolongation of legal proceedings and the cases becoming subject to the statute of limitations, circumspection and the lack of a decisive dealing with some of the economic corruptions of the statesmen, the lack of priority and concern for combating corruption in the legislative branch, along with the growth of a rent-seeking spirit in economic activities, each of which, in a synergistic way, are among the factors that create economic corruption in the Islamic Republic of Iran' (Jamali-Osgouei et al., 2020: 55-56).

The way poverty is measured in Iran is essentially based on the measurement of purchasing power. What goods one can buy and to what extent becomes determinative for the individual's position on the axis of privilege. This very matter allows for numerous statistics to be given, and perhaps the class character of the issue and the connection of the problem to the overall structure of the system is not seen. If we take the ability to solve basic life problems as the criterion, we will be faced with a more accurate picture. In this way, poverty goes back to a dual deprivation: political deprivation and economic deprivation. If we put all these together again, we see poverty as the product of a class system in which the centre of power acts from the interests of authority, and the nature of authority in it necessitates the establishment and consolidation of gender and ethnic discrimination.

***Sirus Shafaghi, a geographer and lecturer in urban planning, from Isfahan:***

*Regarding economic corruption, one of the major flaws in our laws is that the person or people who engage in financial abuse are not punished.*

The tendency towards authoritarianism in the domestic policy sphere of the Islamic Republic system has always, with the widespread violation of the political and civil rights of citizenship, in practice created an unfavourable political environment that has diminished the satisfaction of the middle class with the improvement of their standard of living. Assuming the ever-increasing spread of various communication technologies, which seems inevitable, the continuation of neoliberal policies in the national economy sphere and the international economic sanctions in the foreign diplomacy sphere, and authoritarianism in the domestic policy sphere will certainly bring with it a far greater flood of

dissatisfaction from the people in the middle class with their standard of living, and from the lower class with the entirety of the system (Sadeghi, 2020).

The lack of punishment commensurate with economic criminals is one of the problems that fans the flames of the spread of corruption. Since most of the mentioned cases are economic, social, and other phenomena, and their intensity and weakness will be different among the different ethnic groups, they are placed alongside the political demands of these groups, and the dissatisfaction acquires a compounded intensity and turns into a crisis. These crises are the result of a lack of management and the inefficiency of social policies in Iran, which has led to a public mistrust between the state and the nation, to the extent that many are not optimistic about the temporary and transient nature of these crises and the hope of the state to solve them.

***Tafgeh Hassanpour, a civil activist, from Baneh (Kurdistan):***
*I am not optimistic about seeing social order, progress, and social trust and solidarity in the country. To the extent that the feeling of insecurity for myself and for others living around me is palpable and evident to me, because I feel that the situation that creates this prediction in my mind has taken deep root.*



*Image 3-27. Interview with Tafgeh Hassanpour*

The ruling ideology, which was supposed to bring social justice, equality, a classless society, and the rule of the oppressed, has today, under the banner of

religion, imposed various kinds of inequality, injustice, and poverty on the people. A government that insists on guaranteeing its legitimacy not by relying on the power of its own people, but by referring to a sacred and divine source, has only fanned the flames of public revulsion towards the existing 'sacred matter.' The discriminations and suppressions that have been applied in the name of religion against other religions have in their own turn added to the problem (Arab, 2022).

So far, and despite the warnings and the presentation of special solutions by university professors, social activists, political elites, and clerics, not only have no changes been made to reform matters, but the unfavourable situation has intensified and become widespread. The officials still speak of scientific, economic, technological, and other progress and ignore the crises and deal with them in a confrontational manner. This is while the political apparatuses must bear in mind that social movements are not considered inherently destructive phenomena, but are typically considered to be expressive of social demands and problems. If they are looked at from a functional perspective, they will increase the adaptability and durability of the political-social system and will cause a redistribution of opportunities (Shafiei, 2003: 657).

As can be seen, both the elite and public groups believed that they do not have much hope for the reform of the numerous crises in Iran, neither in the short term nor in the long term. The vast volume of despair, the trend of migration from the country, social harms, and crimes and delinquency have accelerated the psychological and spiritual harms. Although the people, in the Constitution of Iran, are the main subject of sovereignty, the application of the popular will depends on its conformity with the divine authority of the Supreme Leader, and divine authority, more than democratic rights, is the condition for the legitimacy of the popular will in the political process. From the perspective of establishing justice and a minimum of welfare, what is a reality in present-day Iran is that a great distance is seen between the existing situation and the goals stated in the constitution. Given the intensification of privatisations and the dominance of neoliberal policies in the sphere of the key institutions of the Islamic Republic, the realisation of economic justice seems difficult (Saeidi, 2021). Crises such as the water supply crisis, unemployment, the air pollution crisis, the disregard of basic and civic rights, the destruction of biodiversity, the issues of forests and animal species, academic corruption and fraud, continuous embezzlements, the inefficiency of the judicial institution, the suppression of dissenters, the

consequences of climate change for Iran, substance abuse, the challenges of the health system, administrative and financial corruption, politicisation, centralism, the health problems resulting from a new lifestyle, urban marginalisation, the issues of marriage and the family, the move towards an aging population, ethnic challenges, the spread of sexual risk-taking, and other issues, in addition to the internal and external political crises such as international sanctions and intervention in the political and military affairs of the countries of the region, have caused an increasing despair. On the other hand, the lack of proper management of the crisis and the inefficiency of the managers have caused the general public and the elites not to be very optimistic about the reform of affairs in the short and long term, and even to be pessimistic.

## Ethnic Extremism

Extremism generally refers to radical attitudes, strategies, and positions that make use of unusual and violent procedures to achieve goals (Coleman & Bartoli, 2003: 3-4). Extremism can be rooted in two different origins. One type of extremism is inspired by extremist ideologies, which stem from a specific system of belief and doctrine and have hard, radical, violent, and intolerant positions. The second type is a form of extremism that does not arise from ideological foundations, but has a reactive nature and, according to environmental exigencies and its conditions, chooses to resort to radical positions and actions. Ethnic extremism, as the adoption of radical and violent approaches in expressing ethnic positions and demands, may be rooted in one of the two aforementioned origins.

Iranian society, like other societies composed of various ethnic groups, nationalities, and linguistic groups (Persians, Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Lurs, Baloch, Turkmen, and other ethnic groups) and religious groups (Shia, Sunni, Christian, Jewish, Assyrian, Armenian, and other sects), each of which has its own specific culture, has owed the durability and continuation of Iranian cultural identity throughout history to all of these groups. This is because each, by adding layers of cultural identity, has enriched and magnified it. This historically established situation, in the last hundred years, with the beginning of the modernisations of the Reza Shah period and his nationalist policies for the establishment of a new Iranian nation based on the idea of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic homogenisation, changed. This strategy of cultural and social modernisation created a turning point in the ethnic relations of Iran, according to which the ethnic groups saw

their cultural, linguistic, and identitarian existence exposed to assimilation and destruction and, to the extent possible, reacted to it and tried, by resorting to various solutions, to protect their ethnic identity. The continuation of the strategy of homogenising ethnic policy and the idea of Iranian nationalism with the centrality of the Persian language in the Pahlavi era and the continuation of some of its fundamental components in the period of the Islamic Republic of Iran, provided the ground for an inclination towards a type of extremist behaviour among the ethnic groups that saw their existence in danger. At junctures, in the form of armed resistance and the application of violent positions and actions, it manifested in the form of extremist ethnic behaviours, which can be interpreted under the heading of ethnic extremism.

In the present era, there are still pan-ethnicist groups that, by highlighting logical principles and just demands, such as the existence of economic inequalities (the low economic and industrial development of the ethnic regions and the lack of industrial factories in those regions), political inequalities (the non-appointment of ethnic elites to high political ranks such as minister, deputy minister, head of an organisation, and governor), and also social and cultural inequalities (the enjoyment by some specific groups of more privileges and the marginalisation of other ethnic groups), are in pursuit of advancing their own ethnic and nationalist goals. This is a matter that can be a negation of national unity and social cohesion, and its expansion can even be a ground for social hatred, terrorist approaches, and war and bloodshed.

> ***Mansour Rahmani, an activist in Kurdish literature, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***
> *If the trend does not move towards democratisation and attention to people's demands, the atmosphere will become anomic, and naturally, the serious voices of reason will be heard less and will be marginalised, and dialogue will give way to violence.*

Therefore, from the perspective of the typology of extremist ethnic approaches, it can be said that the reasons for the formation of this extremism go back to the contextual factors and the behaviour and ethnic policy of the ruling establishment in its encounter with the ethnic groups, and it lacks the ideological foundations of ethnic self-superiority and the idea of a chosen people, and so on. The lack of

democratic relations in the relationship between the state and the nation on the one hand, and within society on the other, alongside the neglect of ethnic rights, are fundamental factors in the emergence of extremist ethnic behaviour.

By examining the conditions of the different regions of the country, a type of inequality (especially in the economic dimension) is seen among those regions. The bulk of the country's factories and conversion industries are located in the central regions and in provinces such as Tehran, Semnan, Markazi, Isfahan, and so on, and regions such as Kurdistan, Balochestan, and the south of the country have been deprived in this field. Regional deprivations and the false and malicious propaganda of the ruling establishment about the security of the deprived regions have led to the reproduction of socio-economic deprivations in these regions.

> ***Mehdi Keyvan, a historian and retired university lecturer, from Isfahan:***
> *Security is the engine of economic development. Deprived and troubled areas lack security. Capitalists will not go there, but they will go to Kashan and Yazd because there is security.*

> ***40-year-old man, self-employed, from Saqqez (Kurdistan):***
> *I do not see the distribution of employment and wealth as fair compared to other ethnic groups; it has become more centralised now. Iran's resources are stockpiled in the centre of Iran, while other regions like Kurdistan and Baluchestan have been kept deprived. This is a policy that has been pursued for a long time, and I think it is to the detriment of the whole of Iran and the country.*

Inequality in economic benefit and status creates prejudice. Prejudice and discrimination reinforce each other. Discrimination produces prejudice, and prejudice legitimises discrimination and causes a feeling of hatred for the ruling group and aggression against it (Goodarzi, 2006: 217).

Given the state-owned nature of the country's economy, the factor of the existence of these inequalities can be considered mainly the result of the incompetence of the country's political officials. The findings of the present research also confirm such a view, a matter that can become a fundamental factor

for the creation of violent and extremist behaviours among the people residing in these regions.

The two important religious groups in the country are Sunni and Shia. The common origin of these two religious groups is the religion of Islam, but the root of the disagreement between these two sects goes back to 1400 years ago and the time of the death of the Prophet of Islam, when each of these two groups, based on a number of historical traditions, considers different individuals to be deserving of the leadership of the Islamic ummah.[1] This disagreement continues to this day. The results obtained from the present research show that the followers of these sects are sensitive to the performance of different specific religious ceremonies in this type of view, and in some cases, they have shown an extremist reaction in this field.

> ***Amin Miri, a director of social documentary theatre, from Sistan and Baluchestan:***
>
> *In Chabahar, which is the most secure point in Sistan and Baluchestan, there has never been any [terrorist] operation. The only person who carried out a suicide attack there was Abdolmalek Rigi, who did it on the day of Ashura, and that was because in the same year, Eid al-Ghadir was celebrated in Chabahar in the most magnificent way, and he did the opposite.*

Regardless of what effect religion and religious beliefs have on the prejudices of individuals, a part of ethnic prejudices has always been the result of a religious type of view. Therefore, the mere experience and perception of an individual of which group they are in can increase their intra-group tendencies and discriminations; that is, it strengthens the tendency in the individual to consider the characteristics of their own group to be desirable and agreeable, to take pride in their own group, and to loathe the out-group. Sometimes this discriminatory atmosphere manifests itself in the media space, in which, by insulting the people of a religious group and disrespecting their elders, the ground is provided for the performance of extremist reactions.

1. A group of the followers of the Sunni sect believe that the Prophet, in the last days of his life and when he was on his sickbed, indirectly suggested Abu Bakr as his successor.

***Karim Bakhsh Kordi Tamandani, a political and social activist, from Iranshahr (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*When we feel that the official religion does not accept us and insults our beliefs and promotes negative propaganda about us in its media, a feeling of hatred is created in us. When I feel that the pulpit and platform available to that religion, instead of promoting its own religion or Islam, attacks my religion and portrays it negatively, this creates hatred in me, just as much as it promotes hatred.*

***Hadi Naghdi, a consultant and psychologist, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***

*We do not want to fan the flames of our own cultural identity, as if there is some superiority that we want to propagate. But when you are faced with the cultural propagation of dominant cultures, a defensive behaviour naturally and unconsciously forms in us. And what I see, not only in myself but in many Kurdish cultural and civil activists, is mostly a reaction rather than an action; a reaction to imposition from above, the imposition of other cultures, and the fear of destruction. Perhaps 'destruction' is not the right word; the fear of cultural assimilation, the fear of losing cultural frameworks that are, in fact, suitable and valuable for a modern human life.*

Of course, the different ethnic groups believe that if an extremist behaviour is committed on their part, the main reason for it pertains to the opposing group, which is trying to eliminate and exclude them from various cultural, linguistic, social, and economic aspects, and they are in a defensive position against the assimilationist policies of the opposing group.

Michael Hechter, by extending colonial relations to within countries, emphasizes the existence of unequal cultural relations between the dominant culture and the subordinate cultures within multi-ethnic societies (Ramezanzadeh, 1996: p. 7). Hechter believes that the existence of ethnic cleavages in any state, democratic or non-democratic, is a reflection of the imperialist domination of one ethnic group over other groups, which is consolidated through the institutions of bureaucracy

and the state. This domination fans the flames of the unequal distribution of wealth between different areas and social injustice. This very inequality leads to an increase in intra-group communications and the intensification of ethnic solidarity, which brings with it an ethnic awareness of the situation of the central and dominant regions and the subjugated and peripheral regions. In this situation, the ethnic differences between these regions strengthen the feeling of ethnic identity and will be accompanied by the emergence of ethnic movements (Ibid, p. 28).

## The Suppression of Ethnic Cultures

In Iranian society, all manner of cultures and diverse intellectual voices exist, which have endured in this land for a long time. The historical record of Iran indicates a relative mutual respect between cultures, and the sense of belonging of different social, ethnic, and religious groups is a product of the cultural pluralism existing within it. Some of these cultures, however, have not been able to adapt to the contemporary world and consequently have either been assimilated into another culture or have been entirely forgotten. Yet it is the sum of these very cultures that has brought the country's existence to its current form. Every society, every ethnic group, and every class, at every stage of the civilisational process, is still evolving, and no society, ethnic group, or class is free from weakness, error, and deficiency. Therefore, cultural attitudes must be free from ethnocentric prejudices of superiority and inferiority.

***Asghar Izadi-Jiran, a sociologist and lecturer at Tabriz University (EastAzerbaijan):***

*Speaking Turkish in state media programmes is made to look ridiculous, and the representation of Turks in series is accompanied by humiliation.*

***Khaled Sheikhi, a social sciences teacher and cultural activist, from Saqqez (Kurdistan):***

*A year or two ago, we proposed in a city council meeting to hold the Nowruz ceremony in an open area, like in southern Kurdistan, and to invite people to come to an open space and start the Nowruz ceremony with local dress and song. This was met with opposition.*



*Image 3-28. Interview with Khaled Sheikhi*

The country of Iran, with its history of several thousand years, needs the growth of such an attitude in its cultural and managerial body. Unfortunately, over the last century at the public level, we have witnessed a kind of confrontation, suppression, or ridicule of the cultural manifestations of different ethnic groups, especially during particular occasions. One form of this suppression can be observed in the programmes of the state broadcaster, which sometimes, in the broadcast of its programmes and series, provides grounds for the protest of different ethnic groups, including Turks, Lurs, Baloch, Kurds, and others. Another form of suppression occurs during the performance of ethnic and religious occasions and rites, where permission to hold these ceremonies in a group setting is not given. The people of these ethnic groups believe that there is a current that tries to make cultural-ethnic manifestations seem contemptible in the eyes of the youth and to lead them to rejection and suppression, and in contrast, to valorise a specific cultural form in their minds in order to make them all alike, with the goal that their control and management will become easier.

***Zhila Hesami, a literary activist, from Naqadeh (West Azerbaijan):***

*In the field of artistic and cultural ceremonies, we have faced prohibitions. We had an association; it was shut down. The Erfan Literary Association was shut down. There were even some events where we invited poets from surrounding towns, and there was no problem, but it was prevented.*

***Abdolrashid Triz, a religious Mowlavi, history researcher, and political-social activist, from Sistan and Baluchestan:***

*In the state media of this province, where 70-80 per cent of the population is Baluch, there is minimal programming in the Baluchi language. There is no investment in the folklore and popular culture of Baluchestan, and activists are not given a platform.*

Another type of cultural suppression that was given much attention and was discussed by the ethnic groups in the present research relates to the issue of the mother tongue. In this field, Article 15 of the Constitution, on the surface, has recognised the rights of ethnic minorities. In practice, however, by making the Persian language official, it has cast a shadow over this right, and the authoritarian central state, with its security-oriented perspective, does not allow the flourishing of ethnic languages. In another way, in clause 9 of Article 3 of the Constitution, under the title of removing undue discrimination and creating just opportunities for all, it considers all material and spiritual spheres to be among the rights of Iranian citizens. But what has happened in practice is an inattention to the cultural identity and the rights of ethnic minorities, which ultimately causes cultural suppression. The closure of civil and cultural associations and organisations; being sensitive about the dress and appearance of artists; the intense supervision and political viewing of the performance of cultural activists in cultural and official magazines; the non-allocation of suitable time for the display of the customs and culture of ethnic groups in the national and local media; and numerous other cases can be considered examples of behaviour based on the 'suppression of ethnic cultures.'

The right to hold cultural, ethnic, and religious ceremonies and rites has been

given attention in many human rights documents. Among them, one can point to the 'Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities,' which in the second clause of its Article 2 has stated that persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate fully in the cultural, religious, social, economic, and public life. The fourth clause of Article 2 of the said Declaration also obliges states to take measures for persons belonging to minorities so that, by virtue of it, individuals can develop their own culture, language, traditions, and also customs, except in the case of specific practices that violate national laws and are in conflict with global norms (Declaration on the Rights of Persons…, 1992). Also, according to Article 27 of the Constitution, the holding of gatherings is free on the condition that they are not contrary to Islamic standards and are not armed. The prevention of the holding of religious and ethnic rites is a type of violation of civic rights.

***Jabbar Rahmani, academic staff member at the Research Institute for Cultural and Social Studies and an anthropologist, from Tehran:***

*The official religion, due to its totalitarianism, creates problems both for its own evolution and dynamism and for other religions.*

Iran is a country with ethnic and religious diversity, in which restrictions are imposed on ethnic groups in some ceremonies and rites. For example, in the holding of religious rites such as Eid al-Adha or Eid al-Fitr, where Sunnis and Shias generally have a difference, the Sunnis, based on their own jurisprudence and according to the sighting of the new moon in regions that are in specific geographical areas, declare the Eid. In this rule, political borders are not taken as the basis for action, and therefore, many times their Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha coincide with those of the Arab countries. But, by the Council of Clergy and the security institutions, a warning is given to the Sunni clerics that they do not have the right to make a public announcement, and this issue is repeated every year and causes tension between the clerics and the security institutions.

Restrictions are created on the holding of ceremonies such as Nowruz in public environments and in a group manner. In some cases, there are sensitivities on the part of the government in holding cultural ceremonies such as 'International Mother Language Day' (21 February) and 'International Baloch Culture Day' (2

March). International Baloch Culture Day—which in Pakistani Balochistan and in Afghanistan is celebrated officially and very prominently by the Baloch—is not held inside Iran due to a lack of public information and governmental sensitivities. But apart from these ceremonies that have a festival-like and group character, the various ethnic groups residing in Iran do not face much restriction in holding their customary ceremonies of celebration and mourning. In almost all ethnic regions, wedding ceremonies are held based on regional culture and values. In cases like Kurdistan, without the imposition of an environmental space based on gender segregation, women and men gather in one hall and hold their ceremony—a matter that, although contrary to the religious values of the government, has not been prohibited so far. In mourning ceremonies, in the same way, each of the ethnic regions, based on its regional culture and norms and far from external policymaking, performs its own specific rites.

Anthony Giddens (2006), in order to examine the trend of transformations in multi-ethnic countries, discusses three types of models. One of them is the assimilation model, in the sense that the initial customs and traditions of the ethnic groups are set aside, and they shape their behaviours in the framework of the values and norms of the majority. The second model is the melting pot. In this model, instead of the ethnic traditions being effaced in the dominant values, they are all mixed together to form new and evolving cultural patterns. The third model is the model of cultural pluralism. In this model, the most suitable path is to help the development of a multi-ethnic society in which the equal validity of multiple sub-cultures is recognised.

It seems that the country's political apparatus, from among the three models of assimilation, the melting pot, and cultural pluralism, has chosen the model of assimilation and the dissolution of the cultural forms of the ethnic groups into the central culture as its solution for confronting the diversity of ethnic culture in Iran. This is while the most important model for the current conditions of Iranian society would be the model of cultural pluralism. In this model, each group has a distinct religion, beliefs, customs, attitude, and general ways of life, but also has other commonalities with other ethnic groups. In other words, cultural pluralism emphasizes the preservation of different cultural systems and does not accept the superiority of one culture over other cultures. The acceptance of pluralism as a necessity for cultural interaction in the age of globalisation brings with it synergy and cultural richness.

The result of the non-acceptance of cultural pluralism and, instead, the effort for the systematic assimilation of ethnic groups has led to the growth of dissatisfaction and the intensification of demands. Therefore, the concepts of local/provincial cultures and languages that are used in the constitution are nothing more than a legal facade that suppresses non-ruling identities and eliminates them from the political process. These cases are the effects of the foundational violence of power within the framework of the structure of the dominance of the sovereignty of the Islamic regime. From this perspective, the partial recognition that is shown by the concept of the ethno-linguistic minority is a discursive strategy that preserves the unity and indivisibility of the ruling identity in the official discourse and, on the other hand, forms the liberal-democratic facade of the constitution, which is praised by virtue of the concept of equality contained in the concept of citizenship in the text of the Iranian constitution (Vali, 2021).

## Social Collapse

History has witnessed the continuous formation, growth, and collapse of various governments and states—governments that collapsed under the influence of different trends, causes, and factors. The findings of the research show that the country of Iran has not been able to have a proportionate engagement with the world in its foreign policy. The reasons for this lack of success have been identified as an ideological approach, the absence of a diplomacy based on national interests, and the lack of a single voice in this field. On the other hand, it was stated that a negative individualism has overtaken the country, which has triumphed over any kind of collectivist spirit and participatory cooperation. According to the findings, the state has not been able to act very appropriately in the field of engagement with ethnic groups and, instead of listening to their demands and statements, has mainly sought to suppress and assimilate them. The result of such a situation has been the adoption of an extremist path on the part of a number of the people of these ethnic groups. The peoples of the different ethnic, religious, and guild groups, when they see that their demands are not given a legitimate response, the balance between their goals and aspirations is upset, and society is set on a path of anomie.

***Amir Nabavi, a political science researcher and university lecturer:***

*Iran's situation is a combination of political, economic, and environmental crises, each of which involves complex issues on its own.*

Many thinkers and experts in the field of social sciences believe that the current condition of the country is an anomic condition and speak of a loosening of the social order and a disintegration of social cohesion (Abazari, 2014). For the first time, Abbas Abdi (2006), in the 2000s, seriously addressed the issue of social collapse. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Abdollahi, 2018) and his sympathisers are among the other people who have recently raised the issue of the social collapse of Iranian society. According to these individuals, collapse has occurred in the various economic, social, political, cultural, environmental, and other fields. Activists in various fields consider the current conditions of the country to be unfavourable, which could entail dangers and crises for the future of the people and the country of Iran. The findings of the present research also confirm the existence of such crises.

***Mehdi Feizi, a lecturer in economics at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan):***

*We have a series of crises and challenges, in fact, 'mega-challenges' in the country, which are like time bombs ready to explode. From the issue of banks to pension funds, the water crisis, unemployment, divorce, and other problems. Each of these is dangerous, and when they are placed side by side, they become even more dangerous; the explosion of one can detonate the others. It's frightening.*

The assumption is that the factor of these inefficiencies is the state, and the finger of blame is always pointed towards it. In Iran, the ruling government, as a political institution, supervises many other institutions such as the family, education, religion, the economy, health and treatment, and other institutions, and the strength and weakness of each of these institutions is directly related to this political institution.

No country can claim absolute political stability and to have an atmosphere full of security. This important matter, despite the political growth of societies, for various reasons including a shortage of resources, the actions of the ruling power, competition for power, and the conditions governing the country throughout the history of human life, has had many ups and downs. Depending on the temporal and spatial conditions, with a particular intensity or weakness, it has caused governments and societies to undergo transformation. The problems that the mass of the people and even the state face can be due to crises of identity, legitimacy, participation, distribution, and penetration. Which of these crises has had an effect on the process of political development can be interpreted and evaluated according to the temporal and spatial position of governments and the specific conditions of society. Sometimes political crises are the result of one of the mentioned cases, and sometimes they can be a combination of all of them. In this situation, the worst type of crisis has taken hold of society and is accompanied by the overthrow of governments or organisations, or at least a change in the ruling body and the organisational managers.

The system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, after the revolution of 1979, has faced a wave of domestic and foreign opponents. The lack of relations with America and, at junctures, European countries, as well as the inefficiency of the country's domestic political management in solving the economic, social, and environmental crises and widespread corruption, has turned every movement into a political crisis. Also, the lack of free media, the lack of freedom of expression, the non-adherence to the constitution in cases such as the legitimacy of the mother tongue, the absence of elites on the scene of the country's political management, and the lack of free and independent parties are among the cases of the country's political crises.

In sum, it can be said that the central government, from the Pahlavi period until now, has taken less practical action in the direction of attracting the public trust of the ethnic groups, and its strategy for confronting the ethnic groups has been to hold them back in economic terms or to use coercive force. Even if in cases such as the dispatch of a delegation to regions like Kurdistan in the years after the revolution and negotiation with the Democratic Party, or negotiation with the elders of the Sunnis in the framework of the Central Council of Sunnis (SHAMS), a dialogue has taken place, it has been accompanied by failure. In most of these cases, the negotiators of the ethnic and religious groups have been sent to prison

or exile. In fact, the central governments during this period, contrary to all the promises and pledges they express, are still insistent on preserving their own ideologies and do not take practical action to achieve unity, so that in this way they can attract the trust of the different ethnic groups. In reality, it must be admitted that the internal borders, more than the external borders, have produced cleavage, discrimination, and inequality.

Diagrams 21 and 22 show the views of the elites and the public on the political situation of the country. Accordingly, 81.3 percent of the elites and 74.7 percent of the public believe that the country's political situation is critical.

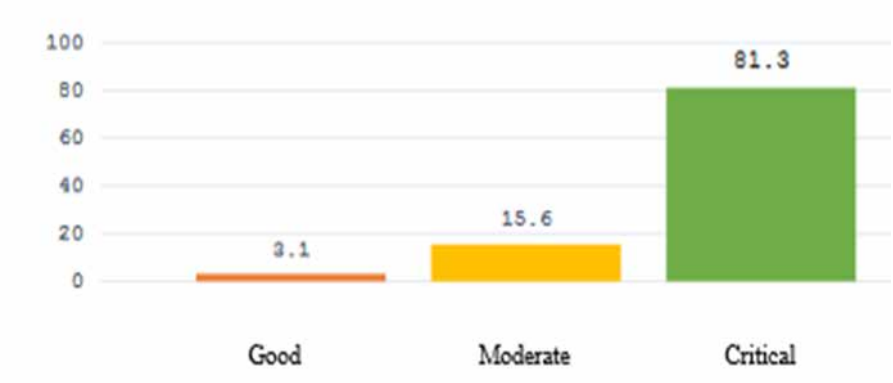



*Diagram 3-21. The political status of the country according to elites*

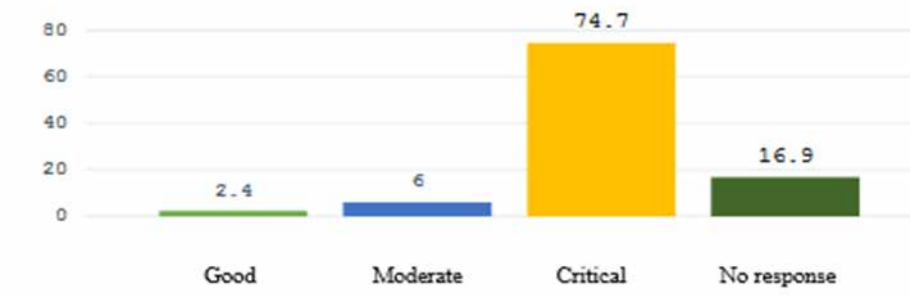



*Diagram 3-22. The political status of the country according to the general public*

Diagram 28 The political status of the country according to the general public

Apart from the political dimension that was discussed, religion, as an influential social institution, has also had many ups and downs in the history of Iran. In the history of Iran, with the officialisation of the Shia sect in the Safavid era, the element of religion became an important variable in the politics and society of Iran. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, this institution has presented itself more strongly

than at any other time, and with the establishment of a religious government, the rulers consider themselves to be the agent for the implementation of religion and the religious leadership of the political society; religion enters into every matter.

The country of Iran, in religious and sectarian terms, has been a pluralistic society. After the coming to power of the Islamic Republic in 1979, by making the Twelver Shia sect official, discriminations have been practiced against some minorities. The Sunnis are one of these minorities, and based on the interviews conducted, the respondents feel a kind of cleavage between their own sect and the official sect of the country, which could have consequences for the cohesion and integration of the country. Restrictions on holding religious ceremonies, not having a special mosque for Sunnis in cities like Tehran, pressure on religious clerics to perform religious rites based on the absence of ethnic and religious minorities in the power structure, political and administrative corruption, the inefficiency of the government in political affairs by individuals who describe themselves as religious, and other such things are among the important issues mentioned by these minorities.

***Seyed Abdolsalam Mahmoudian, a cleric and religious activist, from Sardasht (West Azerbaijan):***

*In Iran, we hear a lot about 'unity'; that is, theoretically, there is no problem. But when we enter the field of practice, perhaps the freedom that Shias have to propagate their beliefs, we Sunnis do not have, and we are often interrogated. There are some red lines for us that do not exist for the official state religion. I wish they didn't exist for us either, and everyone could enjoy these freedoms and rights equally!*

The bureaucratisation of religion and its propagation by individuals whose personal lives, in some cases, have had fundamental deviations (especially in the economic and sexual spheres) published in the virtual space, has caused the institution of religion in Iran to face a functional disorder. On this basis, the voice of intellectual schools such as atheism, secularism, Marxism, and other schools is heard more than in the past in public and private circles. In this regard, we see that in recent years, in the media and especially in the virtual space, insults to religion have become more frequent than in the past, mosques have become emptier, and some people, in an extremist way, see all the economic

and social problems from the perspective of the individuals who, with the claim of religiosity, are at the head of political, social, and economic affairs. Assaults and severe attacks on clerics have increased, and sometimes they are attacked in the streets, because some people consider the clerics to be the cause of the existing situation. This anomalous situation, which is the result of a disorder in the function of religion, is indicative of a type of social collapse resulting from the disorder of the institution of religion in society.

On the other hand, the intervention of the institution of religion in the affair of politics and the lack of balance between the religious and modern society has caused the emergence of inefficient supervisory institutions, such as the approbatory institution, which has created a problem for the circulation of elites in society and has created a functional disorder in the government and the management of the country. In high-level managerial and governmental posts, generally, ethnic minorities, and especially religious minorities, are not chosen. These are matters that cause many individuals with high knowledge and specialisation not to be able to achieve what they deserve.

Hassan Mohaddesi Gilvaei, a sociologist of religion, in an analysis of the fate of religiosity under the banner of the Islamic Republic of Iran, referring to some field research in this regard, writes: 'The immediate goal of this Islam that has been created by the religious protectionists in present-day Iran is to cast a religious appearance over the body of Iranian society and to make society religious by using any method (authoritative and non-authoritative). But since the favourable and suitable conditions for the realisation of the religious rulings desired by the religious protectionists do not exist, from their performance and method of management, an Islam of ‘repulsion’ has been born. The apparent goal of this type of Islam is the realisation of Islamic rulings, but in reality, its hidden but practical and realised goal is the weakening and discrediting of religion itself and the destruction of all its spiritual credibility. With the ever-increasing destruction of the dignity of religion in the eyes of the people of Iran, the institution of religion is weakened in an ever-increasing way and loses its social authority and credibility in an ever-increasing way, and social morality becomes secular in an ever-increasing way. In the same way, the religious functionaries, also affected by this process, lose their status and position in our society more than ever before' (Mohaddesi Gilvaei, 2022). According to the latest official data published by the 'Cultural Observatory Centre of the Country,'

clerics, in two national surveys conducted in 2000 and 2002, in terms of the people's level of trust, have become the ninth reference group in Iranian society. This report also correctly speaks of the relationship between the social position of the clerics and the existing social and political transformations of the country: 'The position of some groups or social statuses such as the clergy is directly tied to social and political transformations. The clergy, until just one or two decades ago, had an unparalleled role in the political mobilisation of many groups and strata of society. According to the findings, this position has been continuously weakened' (Fallah, 2022: 32).

> ***Hadi Naghdi, a consultant and psychologist, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***
> *The 'approbatory supervision' [of the Guardian Council] prevents elites with electoral inclinations from entering the arena of power in Iran. Therefore, we see that those who are known as political managers are not those who are competent for that position.*

Approbatory supervision has become a factor for the division of individuals into insiders and outsiders, and the ground for holding open and free elections with the centrality of the people has not been provided. This inefficiency of the decision-making institutions and the entry of individuals affiliated with a specific faction causes information rent-seeking. The handing over of the macro-management of the country and the middle management and even the management of the most detailed parts to individuals whose qualification is conditional on having a commitment and allegiance to a specific faction and beliefs leads to the destruction of meritocracy, intellectual blockage, the growth of hypocrisy, and the creation of discord among managers and the appointment of unworthy individuals to the head of affairs. In this situation, many individuals with high knowledge and specialisation, instead of being attracted, are repelled and see themselves as distant from the ruling current, and a kind of cleavage is created between the elites and experts of society and the governmental system. This issue is true not only in the political sectors but also in the economic sectors of society. The lack of circulation of elites has caused the inefficiency of this institution and has provided the grounds for the emergence and appearance of an economic crisis in Iran. The worthlessness of the Iranian currency, the lowering

of the people's purchasing power, the rise in the price of foreign currency, and the lack of economic, monetary, and banking policies resulting from the inefficiency of the Iranian economy are among the most important factors of economic collapse. Among these issues, the issue of the economy, due to its tangible nature and its direct impact on people's lives, is given more attention than other types, and the reactions to it are faster than the rest.

> ***Reza Savari, an economic activist in the agriculture and poultry sector, from Mahabad (West Azerbaijan):***
> *When the banks offer 18 per cent interest, they are forced to take that much profit from us (merchants and factory owners). Our banking policy must change. In the whole world, if your money is in the bank, they charge you for it. Everyone is in debt to the banking system.*

> ***Saman Rahnama, an economic activist and city council member, from Mahabad (West Azerbaijan):***
> *Three months ago, my friend sold his house for 270 million tomans; now he can't buy one for 600 million.*

In the last few years, the economic pressure in the country has increased severely. A number of banks and financial institutions have gone bankrupt. The government not only cannot be a helper to the factory owners and merchants in the prosperity and development of business, but also prevents the growth and development of factories and has set up a system of enterprise-holding, in such a way that most of the factories and workshops have gone bankrupt, or, in order to compensate for their illogical and un-Islamic loans, they have confiscated the factories. The state economy of Iran not only seems inefficient, but unfortunately, corruption has also gradually been added to it. Such a situation clearly shows the disorder of the economic institution, the inevitable consequence of which, in the social dimension, is an increase in financial crimes, a decrease in the feeling of security of the members of society, the weakening of public trust, the spread of anti-social behaviours, psychological pressures, and so on. If it is not reformed, it will have no result other than social and political collapse.

***35-year-old man, from Mashhad:***

*Our country is really in a state of ruin. On one hand, multi-billion embezzlements happen, and nobody can stop them. On the other hand, a group of people are being trampled underfoot. The economic pressure is crushing the majority.*

***Ahmad, a carpet seller, from Urmia (West Azerbaijan):***

*With all this discrimination, Iran will disintegrate. In the short term, people's resentment will increase, and in the long term, it will lead to collapse and fragmentation.*

Most of the criticisms that are made against the government as the executive, both at the public level and at the level of the members of parliament, are related to this very field.

Another of the facets of social collapse is the disintegration of national-territorial unity. In the land of Iran, various populations have always lived alongside one another; many competitions and struggles have existed between these different manifestations of Iranian ethnicity. In every period, a specific group has taken control of the government, and the gaining of power by one group has never meant the elimination of others. The main issue in these competitions and struggles has not been over being Iranian or non-Iranian, in which one tendency or ruling power, by gaining power, tries to completely purge the other groups and to call into question their existence as an Iranian. But the reality is that in all of this historical period, ethnic discriminations have existed in the economic, political, cultural, social, and other dimensions, which is a threat to the disintegration of national-territorial unity.

In a country like Iran, which is ethnically plural, if the state divides the ethnic groups into first and second-class citizens and considers them subordinate to a central authoritarian system, in practice, this view will lead to the separation of the Iranian ethnic groups and the growth of centrifugal approaches. This is because this vast and fertile land belongs to all its inhabitants, and it is only with the participation and mobilisation of everyone that it can be protected from the harm of any kind of threat and incident. But central authoritarianism and a specific ethnic-sectarian attitude has caused policies such as the suppression of

cultures, which has created results such as extremism among the Iranian ethnic groups—a matter that, in the belief of the interviewees, can portray something similar to what happened in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen in recent years.

> ***Rouhollah Eslami Shabjareh, a political science lecturer at Ferdowsi University, from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan):***
> *The situation is not at all favourable, and we are on a fault line that could destroy everything... The possibility of Iran becoming like Iraq, Syria, or Afghanistan is not at all far-fetched.*

In this view, collapse does not pertain to social disorders, but it is said that given the existing dissatisfactions among the Iranian ethnic groups (such as the Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Baloch, and Turkmen), cultural, economic, and political discriminations, as well as the new possibilities for identity-finding in the globalised situation for the excluded ethnic groups, have caused the continuous international and human rights pressures on the government to intensify and accelerate the possibility of the growth of crisis in the mentioned regions. In other words, collapse in this sense is the very ethno-national disintegration of Iran.

When the relationship between the components of society becomes non-functional, a disorder is created and the necessary space for the socialisation of the individual is destroyed, and individuals more or less do not grow in the natural position of society and, under the pressure of the ruling political power, experience a superficial interaction with each other. This view considers the survival of the country's governmental structure, despite the belief in the existence of social collapse, to be in the regulations of the political institution and the use of its power. This is while the glue of political power has the ability to maintain such a situation only to a certain extent, and such a maintenance also has its own specific consequences. An occlusive political structure, by closing the space of society, causes a communication disorder and a disorder in the matter of socialisation. The deeper and wider the occlusion created by the government, the deeper and more dangerous the disorder becomes. What is meant by the depth of the occlusion is the extent of the despotism and the behavioural and participatory prohibitions for the people, and what is meant by the extent of the occlusion is the social aspects that the occlusion includes. Therefore,

collapse generally afflicts ideological systems that intervene in all aspects of society, and when the depth of the occlusion in such systems becomes great, even the reform of the political structure will not be possible (Abdi, 2006: 16). Therefore, the formulation of national oppression and the appropriate collective practical reaction to it belongs not to the distant future but to the here and now. The struggle against national oppression and its correlate, Iranian nationalism, is a collective, all-encompassing, and perilous struggle that requires the unity of all the democratic and oppressed forces of Persians and non-Persians (Dialectic Workshop, 2023).

> ***Mohammad Jamaluddin Vazhi, a religious activist and sociologist, from Pasveh, Piranshahr (West Azerbaijan):*** *Cronyism, political and economic corruption, catastrophic inequality in the educational and judicial systems, and injustice against ethnic and religious minorities, as well as women, have brought the Islamic Republic to a dead end and have guided the entity known as Iran towards chronic and deep social crises, even bringing it close to collapse. If one day these Iranian minorities, as a result of the lack of freedom and justice, move past the territorial unity of Iran and become separatists, the country's officials should only have themselves to blame.*

In sum, it can be said that according to various evidence, ethnic issues are considered among the most important and, at the same time, most influential social and political issues in the contemporary world. According to some signs and evidence, it seems that the intensification of identities and ethnic campaigns will be one of the most prominent manifestations of the political and social dynamism of Iran in the near future. The factors of this issue are: the intensification of the cleavage between national and ethnic identity, the increase of social, status, economic, political, and cultural demands, the increasing growth of ethnic organisations, institutions, associations, and centres, the formation of extremist ethnocentric feelings among some of the elites, intellectuals, and political parties, the increase of political alienation and the creation of a distance between the ethnic groups and the political system, and the emergence and appearance of ethnic demands in opportunities of political expansion such as

national and local elections (Karimi-Malleh, 2014: 388).

## Overcoming the Crisis

The concluding section of this research addresses the imperatives and guidelines for moving beyond the current intractable ethnic situation in Iran. It explores how to navigate the pervasive crises that, if they persist, will inevitably lead to the collapse of the country's political and social pillars. In their interviews, respondents articulated their views on the future of the nation and identified several prerequisites for a successful transition away from this critical state. These include the acceptance of ethnic plurality, a concerted effort to preserve the identity of all ethnic groups, the alignment of ethnic and national interests, a revision of existing orthodoxies, the utilisation of the affirmative potential of the constitution, the upholding of civil rights, the separation of religion and state, and a commitment to moderation, national reconciliation, and sustainable peace.

The most crucial element in overcoming this crisis is to support the preservation of ethnic identity within a framework of cultural pluralism. Another vital consideration is the need for a fundamental and structural revision of prevailing orthodoxies and dogmatic attitudes towards ethnic groups. The country's constitution contains provisions which, according to the research findings, could address some of the demands of ethnic and religious groups. Indeed, many members of these communities state that the full implementation of its existing articles would represent the ultimate fulfilment of their demands. It is therefore essential that this positive potential within the constitution's legal framework is properly harnessed to navigate the present crises. Furthermore, a belief in and respect for civil rights is another factor that can contribute effectively to resolving these socio-political challenges. A related and equally important issue is the adoption of a moderate approach, avoiding all forms of extremism in relation to ethnic groups and pursuing a middle path. Adhering to these principles will not, as some might fear, set the country on a path to disintegration; on the contrary, it will guide it towards national reconciliation and a lasting peace. Each of these points will be discussed in greater detail below.

## Preserving Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is a specific constellation of objective, subjective, cultural,

social, ideological, and psychological factors that manifests within a human group, distinguishing it from others (Ta'i, 2003: 139). Today, this form of collective identity is under threat of erosion and elimination from several different quarters. Consequently, the struggle for its preservation and continuity has become a pivotal issue in the collective existence of ethnic group members, provoking a range of reactions amongst both elites and the general public. On a global scale, supra-ethnic and transnational cosmopolitan ideas, driven by the forces of globalisation in information, communication, economics, culture, and lifestyle, have posed a formidable challenge to traditional and local identities, whether ethnic, religious, or even national. At the national level, within countries characterised by ethnic diversity, groups find themselves in varying positions of threat or opportunity depending on their relationship with the dominant discourse of power. Their ethnic identity may be threatened and suppressed, or it may be preserved, sustained, and strengthened, according to this dynamic.

The preservation and vitality of diverse ethnic identities within the borders of a single political entity require a government that is committed to the principles of democratic rule. Such a framework provides the legal and structural foundations necessary to protect ethnic identities, whatever their scale or status. In politically underdeveloped societies that lack experience with democratic governance, however, ethnic groups are consistently placed in unequal positions.

This power imbalance poses a threat to the identity of most of these groups, because in such states, different ethnic identities are often defined in zero-sum terms, where the preservation of one is seen to necessitate the weakening or elimination of another. The origins of these hostile relationships can often be traced to the rise of modern, non-democratic states in multi-ethnic societies. In the course of their nation-building projects, the identity of one ethnic group is typically elevated to the status of the 'national identity', whilst other groups and their distinct cultures are relegated to a subordinate position. Their identity markers are regarded as traditional legacies lacking relevance or a need for survival in modern life. From the perspective of the ruling regime, their continuation is deemed detrimental to the national interest and territorial unity. As a result, even if these identities are not subjected to organised destruction, the state takes no effective measures to ensure their preservation.

> ***Rahim Mousavi, a pensioner and theatre director, from Semnan:***
> *Engaging with these things in their former sense has vanished. For example, we don't wear our fathers' clothes, we don't have their occupations, and all of this causes a distancing from that culture. My clothes, my job, the ways of marriage, and most importantly, the erosion of our language show that we are not like our fathers.*

The attitudes, actions, and stances of ordinary individuals and elites towards their own ethnic identity are also shaped by its position within the ruling discourse of power. Consequently, some groups, confident that their own identity's characteristics are secure within the construct of the national identity, may gravitate towards cosmopolitan ideals, perceiving no threat to their ethnic heritage. They may even view such trends as a necessary aspect of life in the contemporary world. In present-day Iran, this tendency is most apparent amongst the Persian ethnic group, many of whose identity markers have been elevated to the status of the national identity. Therefore, matters that remain of vital importance to other ethnic groups may be viewed with greater flexibility by the Persian public and its elites.

The resources and tools of social identity include an affinity for a shared culture, territory, language, and history. This common history and language may extend beyond the conventional borders of the modern world. Together, these elements lead to the formation of a group membership categorisation. This categorisation fosters behaviours that are favoured within the group but costly outside of it. Today, the basis of identity has shifted from being ascriptive and traditional; individuals now have the autonomy to search for and establish their own foundations of identity. The findings of this research indicate that this is most common amongst Persian speakers, who tend to expand their own sense of the collective 'we', defining it at a national or even global level. In other words, actors within this group are less inclined to look to the traditional roots inherited from their ancestors when redefining their identity.

***Shahram Geravandi, a sociologist and journalist, from Khuzestan Province:***
*As a modern human being who has gone through a certain course and stages, I have no belief in or attachment to ethnicity, and I consider myself a global citizen. I see myself as an Iranian who is a citizen of the world.*

Ethnic groups whose collective identity has been subjected to policies of denial and exclusion, and which are disregarded by the country's political establishment, perceive their identity to be under constant threat. This situation leads to two outcomes. Firstly, it results in the politicisation of ethnic identity, prompting a collective effort by the group's members to more sharply define and defend the boundaries of their identity through various political, social, cultural, and artistic means. Secondly, the endangerment of ethnic identity fosters resistance to the state's nationalism and a confrontation with the dominant political discourse. The clear consequences of this are divergence, an increase in social conflict, a lack of trust between ethnic groups and the state, the intensification of ethnic tensions, the activation of political and social fault lines, and a threat to territorial integrity and national cohesion. The overlap of ethnic discrimination with religious discrimination is another significant variable, which is highly pronounced among the Baluch, Kurd, and Turkmen communities, and which exacerbates these identity-based fissures and their attendant threats and tensions. It is therefore imperative for the country to overcome its current critical situation by designing and implementing ethnic policies and strategies that guarantee the preservation and strengthening of the pillars of ethnic identity and create the conditions to move beyond comprehensive political, cultural, economic, and social discrimination.

The research findings, analysed across the various themes and concepts discussed previously, reveal a strong consensus among both the general public and ethnic elites: the preservation of ethnic identity is a foundational principle for overcoming the existing crises. The interviews also yielded proposed strategies for achieving this, centred on two main approaches: activating the overlooked provisions for ethnic and religious affairs within the constitution, and creating new capacities by revising certain related principles and policies.

***Reza Savari, CEO of an integrated poultry production company, from Mahabad:***

*The dress of each ethnic group is a symbol of that nation and must be preserved.*

***Salahuddin Khadiv, a pharmacist and civil activist, from Mahabad:***

*The effort to promote one religion under the protection of the state has created a negative perception in us. When the ruling power supports the official religion, the religious divide deepens.*

***Nasser Bagheshi, a cultural activist, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***

*Compared to other Kurds, we don't have familial ties with those in Turkish and Syrian Kurdistan. But without a doubt, my cultural and historical overlap with a Kurd in Qamishli (Syrian Kurdistan) is far greater than with a Turk in Ardabil or a Persian in Qazvin, because with someone from Qamishli, I share a common history, common goals, common pain, a common language, and even a common utopia. This shared feeling has led me to learn to read and write Kurmanji Kurdish and even to teach it.*

For each of the four ethnic groups studied—Kurd, Azeri Turk, Baluch, and Arab—all of whom have co-ethnics living beyond Iran's geographical borders, the findings show a strong affinity for their kin in neighbouring countries. To put it another way, the Azeri Turks look towards Azerbaijan and Turkey to define their ethnic identity. The Kurds' focus is directed towards Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. The Baluch see themselves as one with their counterparts in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Arabs of Khuzestan consider their identity circle to encompass all Arabs worldwide, especially those in the Persian Gulf states. The people of these groups believe they share common values, heritage, and ancestry with their co-ethnics, separated only by political borders. They express a sense of shared destiny, feeling aggrieved by the hardships and heartened by the successes of their counterparts abroad. Examples from the interviews are provided below.

***Nazila Jalilzadeh, a researcher in philosophy, mysticism, and religions, from East Azerbaijan:***

*With Turks outside of Iran, we have a great cultural affinity in our social behaviours that is very tangible.*

***Qasem Al-Kathir, a researcher and ethnic activist, from Khuzestan:***

*We feel a great affinity throughout the Arab world. Culturally, Iranian intellectuals have a misunderstanding of the Arab world; they do not know the Arab world. The Arab world, as its name suggests, is a world. We have Jewish Arabs, Christian Arabs, various types of Sunni Arabs, and various types of Shia Arabs. We have common ground on some issues, but also many differences. For example, the definition of the 'other' in the mind of an Iraqi Arab is very different from that of an Ahwazi Arab, a Gulf Arab, or an African Arab. But the commonalities have been strengthened through the media. Our music here is the same as what they listen to in Palestine, and we go to watch the same programme on satellite at the same time.*

This perspective, which looks across borders rather than towards the national centre, is not only true for ethnic groups but also for Sunni Muslims. Due to their shared religious affiliation with bordering neighbours, they too often direct their focus outwards, a phenomenon that can be a matter of sensitivity for the state's political apparatus. In such circumstances, the governing authorities should strive to view these interactions from a cultural perspective, rather than through a purely political and security-focused lens that seeks to counter them by diminishing identity markers and promoting assimilation. As the findings in the next section will also demonstrate, ethnic and religious groups have consistently acted in alignment with the national interest.

***Sardar Sarani, a pharmacy technician, from Zabol (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*Yes, I follow and read the publications from Pakistan and Afghanistan, poems from very good poets, and the professors at the University of Quetta who hold chairs in the Baluchi language.*



*Image 3-29. Interview with Sardar Sarani*

Diagrams 23 and 24 illustrate the use of media and satellite television from co-ethnic groups in neighbouring countries. Among elites, 64.1 per cent show a preference for foreign satellite networks, particularly those broadcasting in their own language. This trend is also clearly visible among the general public, at 62.7 per cent.

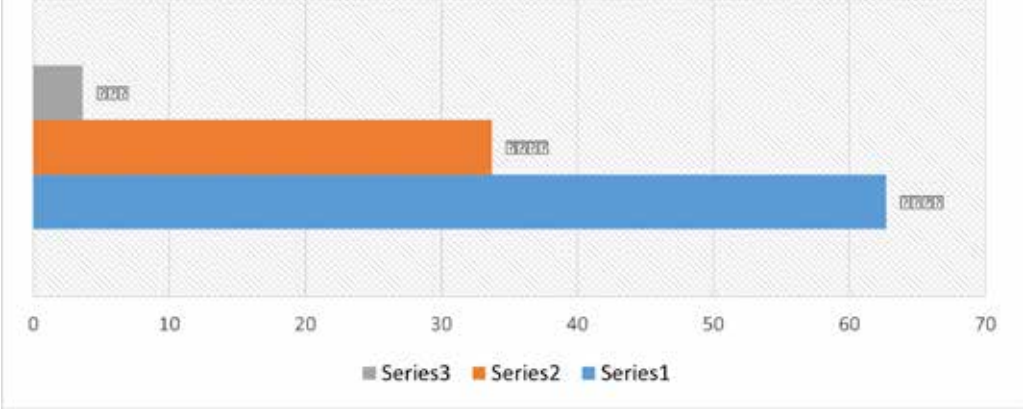



*Diagram 3-23. Use of external satellite networks of the same language – general public*

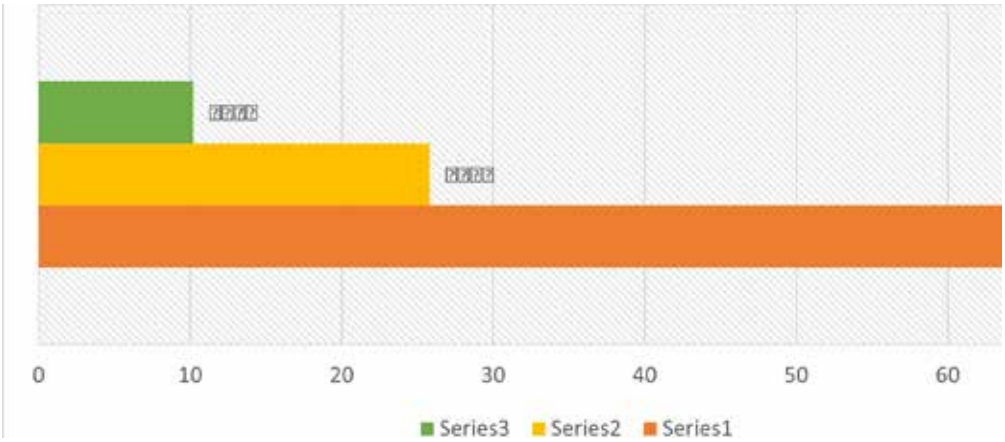



*Diagram 3-24. Use of external satellite networks of the same language - elites*

Media productions are highly influential in shaping concepts and meanings. It can be argued that the culture of human societies today is subject to significant change based on the content of messages transmitted by various mass media. Both domestic television programmes and those from satellite networks produced outside Iran influence the minds and bodies of audiences within the country and, from a broader perspective, determine a considerable portion of their individual and collective behaviours.

The policies of the state broadcaster, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), particularly concerning ethnic groups, have been geared towards homogenisation and the elimination of cultural diversity. Provincial IRIB channels are largely centralist and have little resonance with local culture. Furthermore, the entertainment, educational, and other programmes on both provincial and national IRIB channels are of such poor quality that the viewership of, and trust in, foreign satellite networks is significantly higher. Aspects of ethnic culture or dissenting voices that are ignored by the state broadcaster are accessible through these satellite channels. When it comes to films, series, and news analysis, satellite networks are the preferred choice. Censorship, a disregard for local and ethnic culture, a lack of provincial programming in ethnic languages, and the failure to broadcast certain ethnic rituals and ceremonies have led to the delegitimisation of domestic channels, consequently driving audiences towards co-lingual satellite networks in other countries.

## The Alignment of Ethnic and National Interests

Iran is a country composed of diverse ethnic, national, and linguistic groups (Persian, Turk, Kurd, Arab, Lur, Baluch, Turkmen, and others) as well as various religious communities (Shia, Sunni, Christian, Jewish, Assyrian, Armenian, and others). Each possesses its own distinct culture, and the durability and continuity of Iranian cultural identity throughout history is indebted to all of them, as each has enriched and deepened it by adding its own cultural layers. The participation of Azeris, Bakhtiaris, and Gilanis in the Constitutional Revolution is a prominent example of this collective effort towards a common goal, which shaped the political and cultural identity of that movement. The popular revolution of 1979 and the eight-year Iran-Iraq War are further instances of the crucial role played by the vast majority of groups and strata in Iranian society in shaping the nation's collective destiny.

> ***Saeed Bavi, a civil activist and employee, from Khuzestan:***
> *They were also present in the war with Iraq; their roots are Iranian, and they live in this country. Now, perhaps in terms of belief, they differ from us. In terms of territorial integrity, they have been by our side.*

National unity, derived from an alignment of ethnic and national interests, serves as the foundation for public consensus and cohesion and is considered a primary prerequisite for overcoming the current crisis. However, it is important to analyse the concept of 'national unity' from two different perspectives. On the one hand, national unity can be based on extremist nationalist and chauvinistic viewpoints, where a society envelops its nationality in a halo of sanctity and reverence, viewing other nations and nationalities not as equals but as inferior and insignificant. In this view, national unity requires self-aggrandisement and supremacism based not on genuine and shared values, but on ethnic and national fanaticism. The result is a belief in the legitimacy of dominating other nations and treating them as instruments. Proponents of this perspective maintain that strengthening the national identity depends on weakening or eliminating ethnic identities, arguing that a strong ethnic identity will inevitably undermine national identity and cohesion.

***Mohsen Goudarzi, a sociologist, researcher, and university lecturer, from Tehran:***

*The major political identities, like the main factions that to some extent represented the interests of large sections and groups of society, are not functioning. Instead, smaller and more minor ethnic, regional, kinship, and friendship identities have grown.*

***Ashkan Zarei, a cultural heritage activist and writer, from Khuzestan:***

*My upbringing, willingly or unwillingly, was such that I don't have an ethnic dependency, and if we look at it on a broader level, I am committed to an Iranian identity. I believe that subcultures must be preserved. To put it better, Iran is like an ancient tree whose branches are the ethnic groups, and its root is Iran itself, from which those branches draw life. For me, Iran has always been important, and the subcultures and dialects must also be preserved.*

On the other hand, national unity can be understood as self-reliance, drawing on the nation's own capital and capabilities while reducing the distances and divisions arising from religious, ethnic, territorial, and linguistic differences. The aim here is to strengthen solidarity, empathy, and cooperation among all strata and individuals of the nation for the sake of its growth and advancement. In this view, ethnic and national belonging never acquires an intrinsic or absolute value and does not entail fanaticism. Affiliation with one nation and territory does not provoke a negative or superior attitude towards others. The majority of Iran's ethnic groups desire this second vision. Indeed, this perspective holds that, contrary to some assertions, the growing global focus on local and regional identities does not necessarily conflict with a broader national identity (Zouelm, 2007: 41).

***Abbas Ghadimi Qeydari, a history lecturer at Tabriz University (East Azerbaijan):***

*I do not agree with the term 'Persian ethnicity' that you used. We have a totality called Iran, which is formed by a collection of ethnic groups. Sometimes, extremist currents emphasise one of these ethnic components, whereas this component is a historical product. A Turk is just as Iranian as a Kurd, an Arab, and so on. I have had contact with Kurds, Gilaks, Lurs, and Bakhtiaris. I have felt like a fellow countryman with numerous commonalities with other ethnic groups.*

Today, the significance of ethnic issues in the processes of social integration and disintegration cannot be ignored. This matter is of great importance because it affects all domains of society, including the political, economic, cultural, and social spheres. Therefore, in the current circumstances, preserving national consensus and a cohesive, unified Iranian identity is a critical and pressing task. This requires prudence, the establishment of capable governance, a critical and reform-oriented review of domestic and foreign policy, and the creation of equal conditions for all citizens. The findings of the present study indicate that the ethnic groups studied, despite all their protests against their situation and their belief in the existence of inequality and discrimination against them, never see themselves as separate from the larger entity of Iran.

In an article based on a national research project, Dr Ebrahim Hajiani used survey methodology to investigate the relationship between tendencies towards ethnic identity and national identity among Iran's ethnic groups. The results of this research indicate that both ethnic and national identities are simultaneously strong and prominent among these groups, and that there is no antagonistic or polarised relationship between them. Furthermore, it can be stated that while the cultural and social dimensions of ethnic identity have a strong positive correlation with the cultural (and to some extent, social) dimensions of national identity, the political dimensions of these two forms of identity are negatively correlated.

***Mehdi Keyvan, a historian and retired university lecturer, from Isfahan:***

*I have had many Kurdish, Turkmen, and Baluch students, and they all consider themselves Iranian. If you see something today, these are cultural grievances, economic grievances that have taken on a political form. For example, they talk of separatism, but in reality, they are not separatists. The Kurds consider themselves the most Iranian, and the Azeris consider themselves the most Iranian. It is because of the insults they have suffered...*

A more detailed breakdown of the findings reveals that the strongest inclinations towards ethnic identity are found among the Turkmens, Arabs, and then the Kurds. It should be added that the strongest inclinations towards national identity are found among the Baluch, Lurs, and Azeris. Thus, Iran's ethnic groups can be broadly classified into these two general categories. This ethnic studies scholar believes that national-level cultural and social planning and policymaking must make a greater effort to ease relations and deepen cultural ties between certain Iranian ethnic groups (especially Arabs) and the wider social system or Iranian nationality, using appropriate cultural, political, developmental, and economic tools. It is also necessary to work towards resolving political misunderstandings with some groups (specifically Arabs and Kurds). Moreover, it must be said that the growth of political tendencies among Iranian ethnic groups disrupts the process of national identity formation, whereas the strengthening of cultural and even social tendencies within these groups (intra-ethnic cultural trends) does not have a negative impact on their level of national identity (Hajiani, 2008: 164).

Other research conducted across the country also confirms that in Iran, different ethnic groups have always acted in alignment with the national interest. Where protests have occurred, they have been driven by factors such as a sense of relative deprivation and other similar grievances.

## A Revision of Beliefs

There is a broad consensus across the political spectrum in Iran today regarding a set of deep-seated national crises: political dysfunction, the decline of national social capital, widening social cleavages, economic mismanagement, the spread

of cultural pathologies, and a collapse in public ethics. The recurring theme in discussions about this state of affairs is one of political paralysis and a pervasive sense of bewilderment, which manifests as a profound inertia among social forces, including elites both inside and outside the state apparatus, as well as ordinary people in their daily lives.

The severe weakness of the state, in its broadest sense, in upholding fundamental ethical principles such as fairness, justice, truthfulness, and tolerance has steered society towards hypocrisy and duplicity in its social relations. The lack of respect for the law and the widespread mistrust of civil and public institutions are too evident to require proof. Citizens are confronted daily with examples of this decay, such as the routine sale of their rights in municipal offices through the re-zoning of land, the purchase of permits for extra building density, or other waivers of architectural and urban planning regulations. These practices are in clear violation of concepts like private property rights, freedom of exchange, and market competition. In a similar vein, the rights of voters and candidates are curtailed by an array of qualitative criteria that disenfranchise large segments of the population, often based merely on the response to an inquiry from a non-judicial body and without any ruling from a competent court. This represents another flagrant disregard for the fundamental rights of citizens.

The prevailing public perception is that every regulation has its price, depending on the situation and location. Regardless of how true this belief is in every case, its mere existence signifies a public loss of faith in the ability to secure one's rights through legal channels, and thus a failure in the application of the rule of law. The depletion of social capital in Iran has become a source of grave concern for many national figures and political groups. The evidence for this social observation is abundant. The ability to acquire wealth, power, and social status quickly, without merit or cost, and through illicit means has shaken the very foundations of civic norms and public morality.

In the medium term, this trend leads to the normalisation of unethical public behaviours such as dishonesty, greed, fraud, the violation of others' rights, bribery, corruption, vote-buying, covetousness, and the misappropriation of public property. The symptoms of this crisis are easily observable in the gridlocked traffic of major cities, in financial and tax evasion, in the lack of stigma associated with law-breaking, in the crisis facing the family as an institution, in the growth of various social pathologies, and in the millions of legal cases overwhelming

the judicial system. The findings of this research confirm the existence of this scale of problems and dissatisfaction among the ethnic groups studied.

> ***Sirus Shafaghi, a geographer and lecturer in urban planning, from Isfahan:***
> *If the government uses all the different strata and their knowledge, society will succeed. But if it relies on one specific group, no. It must use expertise correctly.*

> ***Mohammad Hagh-Moradi, a journalist, sociologist, and social critic, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***
> *With the current process, I am unfortunately not optimistic; that is, without changing the political, legal, social, and economic structures, the continuation of this trend, in my opinion, is not pleasant. Meaning, we will certainly not have a good future. Internal problems create economic pressures, and if we do not make a fundamental change, we will face a permanent crisis. And if we ignore these problems, public protests will arise.*

Many thinkers trace the roots of this situation to several interconnected factors: the absence of a strategic theory for national governance; a lack of coherent policy and stability in decision-making; dogmatism and the instrumentalisation of religion; official lawlessness; repeated fiscal indiscipline coupled with a lack of will to empower supervisory bodies like the Islamic Consultative Assembly or the judiciary; the weakness of the press and mass media in exercising public oversight, especially over the conduct of officials; extremism disguised as adherence to fundamental values like justice and altruism; the dissolution of planning institutions; the destruction of the bureaucratic system; and the concentration of decision-making at the highest levels of government, insulated from any need for accountability. These developments all point to a stubborn and powerful desire to maintain the centralisation of power within the state and to increase the dependency of social and economic actors upon it. Beyond these nationwide issues, a specific form of discontent is also evident among different ethnic and religious groups, who protest against the intransigence and inflexibility of the ruling establishment. Their grievances manifest in response to vast regional economic inequalities; cultural disregard for local and ethnic

customs; religious indifference towards minority groups and the imposition of restrictions on their ability to observe their own religious practices according to their own calendars; and other similar issues. The sheer volume of these problems necessitates a fundamental and structural reassessment of the methods of governance by the authorities.

Technocracy is one effective method of governance whose validity and efficiency have been proven in many societies, and it offers a promising path for contemporary Iran to move beyond its current unhealthy practices and routines.

***Ali Bakhtiarpour, academic staff member and lecturer in geopolitics at Ahvaz University (Khuzestan):***

*I believe we are undergoing a metamorphosis... This metamorphosis must take place through a suitable and calm process... I don't know how long this will take, but I am sure we are forced, even obliged, to change.*

***Mojtaba Shah-Noushi, a sociologist and academic staff member at Khorasgan University, from Isfahan:***

*My greatest wish is that we move the situation, even by a millimetre, in the direction of internal reform, and that the gentlemen come to their senses a bit and realise they are making a mistake. That they allow their opposing sections to be active. So that a transformation in the direction of the country's progress can occur without the balance of society being destroyed and collapsing.*

The lessons from these developments point to an unavoidable truth: Iranian society requires a fundamental paradigm shift in its intellectual foundations, with a renewed emphasis on inalienable citizenship rights. Iran's social and economic institutions must become sufficiently aware to distinguish between policies based on positive collectivism and those rooted in individualism. They must be able to reject state patronage policies that, while guaranteeing their short-term interests, ultimately foster dependency. They need to recognise that the outcome of such patronage is the subordination of social and economic institutions to the state, which strips them of their dynamism and autonomy. In contrast, national policies that emerge from structured social dialogue are the true guarantors

of citizenship rights, driving forward national development and prosperity. A century of experience should be sufficient to have learned that state patronage policies, based on political expediency, are sterile and ineffective.

> ***Peyman Nasehpour, a university lecturer and musician, from Ardabil:***
>
> *Regarding the official religion, reform must continue, and there is no problem if a Christian who insists on his Iranianness becomes president; the Sunnis, of course, have their place. The turbulence in Iran today is a sign of a very beautiful cultural revolution.*

> ***40-year-old woman, architect, from Tehran:***
>
> *Just as our religion is dear to us and is our sanctuary, we should not humiliate or mock another religion. We should not reject anyone's religion and say we are superior to them. We are not superior; no one is superior.*

Furthermore, Iran needs to undergo a paradigm shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’. Government refers to the top-down decisions of executive authorities, whereas governance encompasses the processes of participation by citizens and social institutions—stemming from their citizenship rights—in decision-making, in the selection and regulation of the executive system, and in the implementation and oversight of national policies. The concept of government is associated with historical stasis and stagnation, whilst the transition to governance brings with it dynamism, a forward-looking perspective, and progress. Governance is a system of organised social dialogue, where power is the product of the most effective discourse prevailing at a specific time and place. It is within the framework of good governance that citizens find their identity and can play a meaningful role. It is this paradigm that gives substance to concepts such as freedom, justice, equality, inclusivity, participation, consensus, and accountability (Akhoundi, 2012: 52).

Many societies today are increasingly moving towards multiculturalism, meaning they contain more than one community that wishes to preserve its distinct identity. A significant number of citizens belong to cultures that do not necessarily accept the foundational moral principles of the majority. The

challenge here lies in addressing the feeling of marginalisation experienced by cultural minorities.

To achieve the desired state of sustainable peace through practical dialogue, the first step is a revision of beliefs among Iranians, at the level of both the state and the nation. To realise this, a reassessment of the following areas seems essential:

1. Abstaining from ethnic mockery at all social levels is paramount, from daily social interactions to the programming of the state broadcaster and the rhetoric of public officials.

2. Avoiding ethnic supremacism is a prerequisite for achieving dialogue and establishing a lasting peace. Indeed, the ethnocentrism that exists to varying degrees among some of Iran's ethnic groups is a significant obstacle to national reconciliation.

***Ya'qub Mousavi, a sociologist and academic staff member at Al-Zahra University:***

*I have left myself free to employ cultural elements. Although I also had religious inclinations and was a sympathiser of the Islamic Revolution and a political activist, I did not subject myself to cultural blockage or dogmatism. For us social scientists, defining a specific characteristic regarding identity is difficult. My cultural foundations have revolved around the axes of Iran, Islam, and the West. At times it has been global, national, or religious, and in the midst of these, I have tried to create a balance. My interactions with other ethnic groups have been extensive due to my studies in Tehran, Isfahan, and England, and I have had very good relationships with Turks, Kurds, Southerners, Arabs, and Northerners, and I have no particular prejudice in this regard.*

3. Respecting all religions and creeds, and believing in the equality of social rights for the followers of all faiths residing within Iran's geographical territory, is crucial.

4. Refraining from discriminatory behaviour towards other ethnic groups is of high importance. This is an unpleasant experience that most ethnic groups have reported, not just one. Ethnic minorities speak of disrespectful behaviour from Persians in the capital. Conversely, residents of Tehran recount their own experiences of discrimination in conduct and commerce when living among

other ethnic groups.

5. Changing governmental procedures to realise economic and social equality for all Iranians is essential.

Among the elite groups studied in this research, the call for a revision of values and the creation of greater alignment between them resonates positively.

## Utilising the Positive Potentials of the Constitution

One prevailing view of the nature of the state in Iran is that its political system, despite being structured upon republican mechanisms, is comparable to autocratic, dictatorial, and totalitarian regimes. This perception is based on the belief that there are no free political parties or associations, that trade unions are either non-existent or extremely weak, that independent media are not permitted to operate, that civil society is absent, that the rights of ethnic groups and linguistic, religious, and confessional minorities are ignored, and that, in sum, only a single, monolithic ideological voice is heard.

However, according to another perspective, the problem lies not in the law itself but in its implementation, as many of the demands of ethnic and minority groups are already provided for in the country's constitution. Various rights, such as freedom of speech and thought, the right to protest and peaceful assembly, the use of mother tongues, freedom of religion and belief, and the right to form cultural, social, environmental, and political associations, are enshrined in the nation's laws. According to this view, the primary reason these laws remain unenforced is the arbitrary, personal, and ideological interpretations applied by the relevant officials.

***Arab man, a teacher, from Khuzestan:***

*In my opinion, the law of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a very complete and well-drafted law, and it has respected the rights of all ethnic groups and has established sufficient justice. However, with the governments that come to power, this varies to some extent.*

***Salahuddin Khadiv, a civil activist and journalist, from Mahabad (West Azerbaijan):***

*If even the rights that are granted to citizens in the Constitution were implemented, a revolution would happen in Iran.*



*Image 3-30. Interview with Salahuddin Khadiv*

To substantiate their argument regarding the affirmative potential within the constitution, proponents of this view point to various articles, including Article 59. This article stipulates that whenever a matter of public dispute arises, it can be put to a public referendum to gauge its legitimacy (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018: 27). It must be noted, however, that this article has so far remained purely theoretical; in the entire history of the Islamic Republic, it has never been implemented. In April 2021, former president Hassan Rouhani emphasised the need to use this constitutional provision, stating: 'I stress once again, the solution to the country's complex problems is solely Article 59 of the Constitution. If there is a complex issue, we just get entangled in it, this person says that, that person says this, one criticises the other. There is no solution other than Article 59' (Rouhani, 2021). [1]

Therefore, many believe that the rights and duties of minorities in Iran are

1. During his presidency, Hassan Rouhani referred to this dormant article in several other speeches, a subject that consistently provoked a backlash from extremist groups, particularly hardline principlists.

defined fairly and transparently in the constitution, which serves as the national covenant. This definition is based on scientific and legal principles that respect the Islamic tenets upon which the ruling system of the Islamic Republic is founded. The core issue, then, is not the absence of law but the method of its implementation and the manner in which linguistic and religious minorities can claim their rights.

According to the interviews conducted, Article 15 of the constitution, which addresses the issue of mother tongues and the right to education in one's own language, is another example of the affirmative potential existing within the country's legal framework. However, the various linguistic groups in this study believe that the implementation of this article, too, has been perpetually suspended.

> ***Alireza Khani, a cultural and literary activist, from Eyvan (Ilam):***
> *In the Constitution, Article 15 allows and specifies that ethnic groups can be educated in their own language and with their own dress, but this has only been written down. After forty years, we have still not been given permission to study in the Kurdish language.*

A review of these legal articles presents an image of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran in which a series of fundamental rights are recognised for all individuals, nationals, and citizens, irrespective of their ethnic, linguistic, or religious affiliation. These include equality before the law; the protection of life, property, employment, and housing; freedom of conscience; freedom of occupation; the right to social security, to seek justice, to education, to a fair trial, to nationality, and to participate in the administration of the country. All citizens should be able to enjoy these rights without discrimination. Based on this portrayal, one could conclude that the constitution adopts a relatively progressive stance towards minorities. While it is true that some reflections and considerations in certain laws and regulations pertaining to minorities are discriminatory, it appears that the Islamic Republic of Iran, partly due to international pressure, has recently taken some steps towards improving its legislative environment and demonstrating its commitment to international obligations.

It is on the basis of this affirmative legal potential that some political thinkers

like Sadeq Zibakalam—a notable critic of the country's executive policies and a self-proclaimed supporter of ethnic and religious minorities—state that they do not want the overthrow of the current political system, but rather seek to reform its flaws (Shoja'i, 2018).

It is crucial to state, however, that although the constitution of the Islamic Republic contains affirmative provisions that could temper certain ethnic policies, some of its other explicit and foundational principles constitute a significant barrier to achieving ethnic justice and eradicating systemic discrimination in Iran. This problem is systematically intensified in the executive and practical spheres. Therefore, the preservation of ethnic identity and the elimination of discrimination require a fundamental transformation in the nature of political power and its legal regime—a transformation based on a belief in human rights and individual and social freedoms, one that is prepared to accept diversity and plurality in all their dimensions, and which legally and structurally guarantees the protection of the rights and interests of all groups and strata, both minority and majority.

## Citizenship Rights

Citizenship Rights are a set of fundamental entitlements based on principles such as human dignity, the protection of inalienable rights and freedoms, popular sovereignty, the equal enjoyment of human rights by all, the prohibition of discrimination, and the equal protection of the law for all members of the nation. The Iranian constitution addresses some of the pillars of these rights, and in 2016, during the presidency of Hassan Rouhani, a declaration titled the 'Charter of Citizenship Rights' was announced. Derived from constitutional principles, its stated goal was to create a basis for the actions of the government and other state institutions in advancing these rights. The articles of this charter cover a wide range of entitlements, including: the right to life, health, and quality of life; the right to dignity and human equality; the right to freedom and personal security; the right to participate in determining one's own destiny; the right to good governance and sound administration; the right to freedom of thought and expression; the right to access information; the right to access cyberspace; the right to privacy; the right to association, assembly, and demonstration; the right to nationality, residency, and freedom of movement; the right to form and enjoy a family; the right to fair justice; the right to a transparent and competitive

economy; the right to housing; the right to property; the right to employment and decent work; the right to welfare and social security; the right to cultural access and participation; the right to education and research; the right to a healthy environment and sustainable development; and the right to peace, security, and national authority (Charter of Citizenship Rights, 2016).

One of the significant innovations of the Charter of Citizenship Rights, relative to the rights outlined in Chapter Three of the constitution, is its attention to the cultural rights of citizens in general and those of ethnic and religious minorities in particular. Section 'J' of the Charter, titled 'The Right to Cultural Access and Participation', dedicates nine articles to this important matter. It appears that the government not only officially committed itself to refraining from policies of elimination and assimilation but that the set of actions announced in the charter regarding the cultural rights of minorities indicates an application of policies of tolerance, and in some cases, support (Azizi, n.d.).

> ***Hossein Mohammadzadeh, a university lecturer, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***
>
> *Citizenship is about rights and duties, meaning one should have both rights and duties. For us, it is more about duties than rights. It's not that there have been no rights, there have been, but duties have been more prominent.*

The concept of citizenship and its associated rights is intrinsically linked to government and the state. Citizenship is truly realised only when all members of a society enjoy full civil and political rights and have easy access to economic and social opportunities. As members of a society, citizens participate in various domains and, in return for their rights, they also assume responsibilities for the better administration of society and the establishment of order. An understanding of these rights and duties plays an effective role in elevating the status of citizenship and creating a society based on order and justice (Javid et al., 2022: 90).

State bodies in Iran are quick to frame public participation in elections, rallies, or during natural disasters as a duty, portraying it as a national and religious obligation. However, when the conversation turns to the rights and entitlements owed by the state to its citizens, they typically fall silent.

***Gholamreza Jafari, an environmental activist, from Naqadeh (West Azerbaijan):***
*In the sphere of citizenship rights, it is not implemented for our city and for us. For other ethnic groups, it varies in intensity. Our biggest flaw here is that I think my demands (as a Turk) are in your hands, and your demands are in my hands. Until we eliminate this mentality, the violation of each other's rights will continue. Regarding citizenship rights, after four decades of the revolution, they have only just drafted them. Where are they?!*

Citizenship rights represent a bond between the state and the people, whereby each party has obligations. Individual responsibilities of a citizen include voting and electoral duties, military service (whereby all able-bodied individuals are called upon in times of war and serve either through conscription or voluntarily in peacetime), respecting the law and the rights of others, and paying taxes. In return, the state has responsibilities towards its citizens, including the protection of their lives, property, rights, and security; the provision of healthcare and education; the maintenance, repair, and construction of roads, highways, and railways; the conservation of natural resources, forests, and the environment; the protection of savings through bank inspections and deposit guarantees; and providing aid and compensation in unforeseen events such as floods, earthquakes, and droughts.

Citizenship rights are the guarantee of all entitlements that individuals in a society should enjoy. Given that the constitution and the Holy Qur'an emphasise human dignity, liberty, free access to information, popular rule, access to justice and a fair trial, security, and equality as citizenship rights, their implementation and protection are the duty of the state. The rule of law is considered the primary and fundamental foundation for securing and enforcing these rights.

***Yahya Shariat-Nia, a jurist and legal consultant, from Tehran:***

*Citizenship rights in Iran are, until further notice, fake and an illusion. Citizenship rights are a system; you cannot take just a part of it. Individuality and citizenship rights do not have much priority in Iran. For example, we don't know what cost we bear when citizenship rights are not observed in industrial production.*

***Parvin Zabihi, a civil activist, from Marivan (Kurdistan):***

*Consider this: they demolish a Sunni mosque in Tehran. Then when you look, for example, a Sunni individual cannot be a candidate for the presidency, a woman cannot. I, a Kurdish Sunni woman, am deprived of all political and employment opportunities.*

The denial of citizenship rights severely degrades the quality of life for citizens (Lauer & Lauer, 2002: 297). The various ethnic and religious groups in this study believe that these rights have not been granted to them as they should have been and that they remain deprived. Several significant examples of this violation of their citizenship rights were raised by these groups, including: the exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities from high-level strategic posts such as the presidency, ministerial positions, provincial governorships, and other senior management roles; the lack of dedicated places of worship, such as the absence of a Sunni mosque in Tehran despite the large Sunni population in the city; and the cultural marginalisation of artists, women, and social and environmental activists from minority communities.

One of the key issues in confronting the concept of citizenship rights is the manner in which it is defined and applied. Citizenship rights constitute a multifaceted and multidimensional concept that requires attention to all its aspects. The incomplete and selective interpretations of this concept were a problem pointed out by interviewees.

***Peyman Nasehpour, a university lecturer and musician, from Ardabil:***

*As a musician, the very fact that they don't show my instrument [on television] is a violation of my citizenship rights.*



*Image 3-31. Interview with Peyman Nasehpour*

The social exclusion of minorities weakens social bonds and calls into question the coherence of citizenship as an integrative force in contemporary society. The exclusion of ethnic minorities from full citizenship occurs through practices and discourses where gender, race, social class, and culture intersect as influential factors. This has significant consequences. Excluded groups cannot attain full citizenship simply by achieving formal equality. Minority groups require a special set of rights and specific forms of representation, shaped in response to the historical context of their exclusion and suppression. To ensure enforcement, appropriate mechanisms must be established to penalise violators of these rights, and the principles must be institutionalised within the pillars of power. At the very least, the executive branch should seek to establish them within its own

subordinate organisations and agencies (Mohseni, 2010: 117).

Diagrams 25 and 26 show the level of satisfaction with citizenship rights from the perspective of elites. A striking 92.2 per cent of elites are dissatisfied with the state of citizenship rights, with only 7.8 per cent expressing satisfaction with the country's human rights situation. Chart 3-34 illustrates the perceived level of ethnic-based discrimination in citizenship rights; according to this, 73.4 per cent of elites believe that ethnic groups do not enjoy equal access to these rights. As most interviewees from the general public lacked a clear understanding of the true meaning and scope of citizenship rights—and since it became apparent during explanations that their conception of the term was far removed from its actual meaning—the quantitative findings for this group have been omitted from this section.

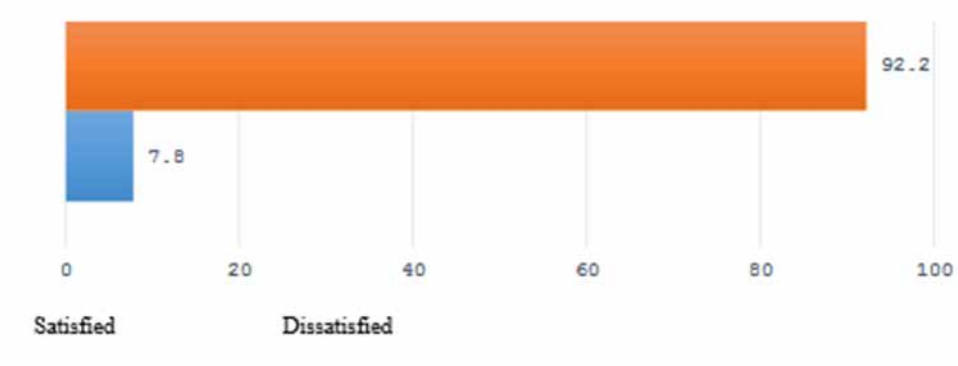



*Diagram 3-25. satisfaction with citizenship rights according to elites*

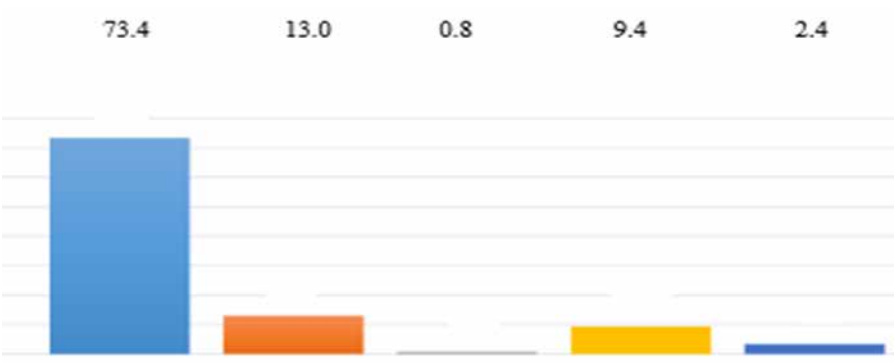



*Diagram 3-26. satisfaction with citizenship rights according to general public*

Today, the concept of citizenship is regarded as a social status within a civil society, and a citizen is an individual who, as a member of a political community,

possesses rights and duties associated with that membership. Attention to citizenship rights in any society provides legitimacy, stability, and continuity for the ruling political system. These rights have civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and judicial dimensions, and the quantity and quality of their enjoyment in any society are indicators of development and components of good governance (Taheri, 2016: 1).

One of the first steps towards the public observance of citizenship rights is the effort to internalise them within society and to raise awareness. Interviews revealed that even among elites, the concept of citizenship rights remains ill-defined. The failure to specify concrete applications, and inconsistencies between relevant directives and the constitutional text on civil, social, political, and economic rights, have led to dissatisfaction and a sense of discrimination among ethnic groups.

It appears that citizenship rights are often treated as a political slogan for partisan exploitation by politicians, rather than as a genuine legal and philosophical principle with firm roots in the constitution and other laws. One of the most essential actions required is public education. All citizens must be aware of their rights so that, through the pressure of their demands on the government and the state, they can challenge violations of citizenship rights. In this regard, the state broadcaster and the media at large have a greater mission and responsibility.

> ***Leila Shafa'i, a barrister, from Tabriz:***
> *Look, the issue that our women still have a long way to go is self-evident. We need great efforts from women and the accompaniment of society with them. The best thing we can do in this field is the proper education of new generations.*

It seems the most crucial step, before any further government discussions or the drafting of human rights charters, should be a campaign of public awareness about citizenship rights. The findings of this study show that, according to the interviewees, a large number of people are still unfamiliar with the meaning and concept of this term. The public must first become aware of their rights before they can be expected to discuss them, let alone demand them.

Therefore, the issue of citizenship rights, first and foremost, requires education and cultural cultivation. Part of this responsibility lies with social activists and civil society institutions. Education in civic behaviour is highly effective

in improving the performance of civil organisations. These lessons will help to strengthen social ethics and expand social solidarity at the local, national, and global levels. The other part of this responsibility falls to the state and its institutions. Indeed, the government, legislative bodies, national and local organisations, and other agencies have a prominent role in educating citizens through instruction on citizenship rights, skills for communal living, and the principles of urban management. In the context of educating and cultivating awareness of citizenship rights, learning the components of civic behaviour will contribute significantly to improving the quality of collective life and strengthening social capital.

***Mehdi Hamidi Shafigh, a political activist, from East Azerbaijan:***

*Citizenship rights have not taken root in Iran. I was arrested at a meeting about Lake Urmia. There were twenty-nine of us, and we were arrested. During the time I was in prison, a demonstration took place which I was accused of organising, while I was in prison.*

***Riyadh Ali Farhani, a social activist, from Khuzestan:***

*The target community still does not know exactly what its citizenship rights are!*



*Image 3-32. Riyadh Ali Farhani*

Another finding regarding citizenship rights is the coercive and security-focused response to the demands of activists in this field. The ruling system in Iran is intensely ideologised and, as a result, views various demands—whether environmental, social, cultural, or economic—through a security lens. Consequently, its response is often harsh and repressive. All of this indicates that the Charter of Citizenship Rights presented by Hassan Rouhani as one of the achievements of his presidency remained a purely promotional exercise. What the people of different ethnic groups see in practice today is worlds apart from the one hundred and twenty articles presented in that charter.

The latent potential of the Charter of Citizenship Rights was such that, had it been taken as a foundation and operationalised, it could have created a unique opportunity to overcome institutionalised crises. However, in diagnosing this failure and why it remained an ineffectual declaration, one must look beyond promotional ambitions and point to the structural obstacles within the power, legal regime, and dominant discourse of the Islamic Republic. Within this context, steps like the Charter are treated not as accepted political and legal norms, but as irregular, peripheral efforts that the system's hardline core seeks to counter and deny with all its might. Consequently, the Charter's fate was sealed; like so many other reformist endeavours in the realm of human and civil rights, it was rapidly met with isolation, neutralisation, and ultimately, irrelevance.

## The Separation of Religion and State

Secularism—often rendered in Persian by terms translating as the 'separation of religion from politics', 'conventionalism', or political 'worldliness'—is, in its more precise application, the separation of religious institutions from the state and its apparatus of governance. It is a principle advocating for a state that is non-confessional, meaning it holds no official religious or ideological creed, and in which religious doctrines have no formal role in the drafting of laws and regulations. It is essential to clarify, however, that within secularist thought, this separation does not imply an opposition to religion or religiosity itself. Nor does it seek to restrict the private faith of citizens or bar religious individuals from holding public office. Rather, it simply insists that the legal and executive mechanisms of the state must be founded on non-religious principles, and that its agents must adhere to this standard in their official capacities (Shamsini Ghiasvand, 2008). In a secularist framework, religion does not serve as the

basis for any of the three pillars of the state: political legitimacy, legislation, or political action.

***Amin Nateq, an architect and urban planner, from Isfahan:***
*I consider religion a personal matter that everyone can engage with in their private space, but I do not support any form of it. The moment it becomes a factor for seizing power, it becomes a source of corruption in itself.*

***Ebrahim Shams, a teacher, from Paveh (Kermanshah):***
*Religion should not interfere in politics, because it causes problems.*

***Meysam Sefidkhosh, a philosophy lecturer at Shahid Beheshti University, from Tehran:***
*The official status of a religion indicates that religion is not working. The further back we go to a less fragmented society, the less need there is to declare an official religion.*

Secularism is not merely a model of governance exclusive to Western societies and democratic systems; it can also serve as an operational basis for religiously diverse and pluralistic societies. One of the positive consequences of a secular political system in religious societies is the relegation of religion to the social sphere and the informal, non-governmental realm of politics. This, in turn, naturally obstructs religious and sectarian discrimination and, by transcending religious affiliations and beliefs, provides a foundation for the realisation of universal social justice.

The research findings revealed that a belief in the secularisation of the state was present in the views of numerous interviewees, the majority of whom were opposed to the intervention of religion in the political sphere.

In Iran, questions of religious and sectarian affiliation are consistently a fundamental component of administrative screening and government interviews. An individual's religion and sect are among the very first and most basic questions asked of applicants for nationwide university entrance exams and public sector employment. This question also appears ubiquitously on registration forms distributed by the government for various official matters. Consequently, religion and sect function as primary markers for individual and

social differentiation in Iranian society, and their use as a basis for judgement has created a discriminatory structure.

> ***Hamid Hammadi, a university lecturer, from Khuzestan Province:***
>
> *A religion shouldn't be legislated; it's a personal matter. Unfortunately, we see that if they give you a questionnaire, it asks for your religion and sect, and this is not right.*

The history of Iran demonstrates that due to the intrinsic entanglement of Shia and Sunni thought with politics and government, and the importance each tradition places on the formation of an Islamic state, the people of the country have been unable to uniformly embrace secularism in different eras. Furthermore, from the Safavid to the Pahlavi dynasties, rulers generally made a point of displaying symbols of religious conduct, leaving the deeper understanding of secularism to a small circle of elites. The evolution of secularist thought in Iran can be seen as having passed through four stages. The first was the formative stage, which took on a more systematic shape during the Qajar era, particularly in its final years during the Constitutional Revolution, and lasted until the rise of Reza Shah. The second stage was the era of secularist rule, encompassing the reigns of the first and second Pahlavi monarchs. The third stage was the period of secularism's decline following the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The fourth and current stage is marked by the re-emergence of secularist ideas over the last couple of decades.

Mohammad Reza Nikfar, a scholar of religion and philosophy, highlights the institutionalised religious discrimination in Iran and writes on the necessity of moving towards secularism: 'A religious system is defined by a set of discriminations. To democratise the country's political system, these discriminations must first be abolished, and to achieve this, the institutions of religion and state must be separated. The Islamic Republic, as a religious system, is based on a collection of discriminations: between state insiders and outsiders, between Muslim and non-Muslim, between the clergy and the laity, between Shia and Sunni, between men and women. To eliminate these discriminations, religion and state must be separated. In my view, the emphasis on this point is the most important established achievement of the secularism debate in Iran' (Nikfar, 2011).

***Mojtaba Shah-Noushi, a sociologist and academic staff member at Khorasgan University, from Isfahan:***

*I wished there was no specific official religion in Iran at all because it provides a basis for domination over other ethnic groups. Even now, power is effectively in the hands of the Shia government, and even Sunni Muslims are deprived of certain posts.*

The inclination towards secularism in Iranian society, which is to some extent concomitant with a move away from religious observance, has been a subject of serious debate in both the theory and practice of Iranian life in recent decades. It has been a topic of contemplation in intellectual circles and has also gained significant traction in the public sphere, especially among the young, educated middle classes. This trend has reached a point where institutions and individuals responsible for the country's religious affairs have frequently responded with alarm and called for urgent countermeasures. Gholamali Haddad-Adel, the head of the Academy of Persian Language and Literature and a cultural advisor to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, has stated: 'I personally consider secularism to be the most significant theoretical and practical challenge to the Islamic Revolution!' (Haddad-Adel, 2023). Similarly, the Supreme Leader's representative in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps describes the implementation of secularism in the country as the enemy's primary goal, remarking that: 'Secularism is founded on the separation of religion from politics, something which has no place in the essence of the Islamic Revolution. Therefore, the current of secularism is the most important point of conflict and enmity between the world and our revolution' (The Enemy's Goal is to Implement Secularism, 2022).

According to the findings, alongside the general growth of secularist sentiment in society, this trend is even more pronounced among followers of the Sunni sect. With the official establishment of the Shia faith in the country's constitution and the framing of many state affairs according to its tenets—as well as the role that being Shia can play in an individual's career prospects—the Sunni minority feels a sense of compounded injustice in this regard.

Iran is home to a diversity of religions and sects, which some officials and elites regard as a source of religious and cultural enrichment. Others, however,

disagree with the concept of an official state religion, pointing to the lack of access for other faiths to political and social opportunities and the resulting religious discrimination. The historical precedent for making Shi'ism the official religion of Iran dates back to the Safavid era. After the 1979 revolution, however, given that the country's leadership and the drafting of the constitution were heavily influenced by the Shia clerical establishment, this decision drew both support and significant opposition from other Islamic sects and religions.

Until about forty years ago, if secularist ideas were expressed in public gatherings in Iran, the speaker would most likely have faced severe repercussions. Today, only a generation later, these ideas have so deeply permeated public consciousness that their proponents can articulate and defend them in various settings without fear. It can be argued, therefore, that while the West underwent approximately five hundred years of intellectual struggle to arrive at these ideas, the core concepts became embedded in Iran in less than thirty. Perhaps the reason for this rapid shift is the intense religiosity of the ruling system during this period, where most individual behaviours are judged through a religious lens. This has been particularly distressing for followers of minority faiths, who, through the arbitrary application of personal and ideological preferences by officials, have been deprived of numerous social and economic advantages and opportunities. These circumstances underscore that in order to achieve an equal and free society, the state must refrain from making one religion official and marginalising all others.

## Pursuing a Path of Moderation

The practical path to realising the principles discussed above—the preservation of and respect for ethnic identity, the alignment of ethnic and national interests, the revision of beliefs, the use of the constitution's affirmative potential, the upholding of citizenship rights, and the separation of religion and state—is through the adoption of moderation and a middle way. This requires the avoidance of extremism by all parties, both the state and the various ethnic groups.

***Abdorrahman Ahmadi, a political activist, from Piranshahr (West Azerbaijan):***

*I have always participated [in elections]. One should not be indifferent to matters of destiny and we should not become hopeless or be accused of being conservative. We must not exploit the people. I detest armed struggle. Gandhi practiced peaceful struggle.*



*Image 3-33. Interview with Abdorrahman Ahmadi*

A moderate is an individual who possesses the moral and behavioural capacity to guide their own desires, ambitions, instincts, and orientations away from extremism, relying on logic and rationality to navigate a balanced and tolerant path. This strategy of choosing and achieving moderation is incumbent upon both ethnic groups and the government. The various ethnic groups must avoid repeating the mistakes of past generations, resisting the pull of bitter historical memories of extremism from certain individuals and political currents. They must present their demands through dialogue, the use of legal openings such as elections, and civil struggle, steering clear of any form of warfare, bloodshed, or armed conflict. The reality is that disorganised movements, relying solely on populist slogans and collective emotions, will achieve nothing of substance for these groups. In this regard, the research findings indicate that most members of ethnic and religious groups are opposed to undue fanaticism and violent,

disruptive behaviour. They see civil struggle, dialogue, and the strengthening of their own ethnic and religious culture as the most appropriate means of attaining their rights.

***Seham Sojeirani, a painter, graphic designer, and novelist, from Ahvaz (Khuzestan):***

*On Instagram, people write to me, 'Why don't you depict the sufferings of your nation?' I say, everyone is depicting the sufferings now. Instead of depicting the sufferings, I try to solve them. Instead of saying, 'Give me my language, give me my identity,' I publish a children's poetry book instead.*



*Image 3-34. Interview with Seham Sojeirani*

Furthermore, this same discourse of moderation is evident among religious minority groups, such as the Sunni community, in their approach to articulating their demands. Mawlana Abdolhamid, the Friday prayer leader of Zahedan, stated at the twenty-seventh graduation ceremony for students of the city's Darululoom seminary in April 2018: 'The Sunni community has chosen the path of moderation, and we feel proud of this choice'. The findings of the present

study also show that the followers of this group are opposed to extremism and violent actions, preferring to advance their cause through the channels of civil action and dialogue. It is important to clarify, however, that participating in elections is not always synonymous with moderation, just as boycotting them is not necessarily a sign of extremism. Struggle has both positive and negative aspects; participation in a transparent and genuine election is a form of positive moderate struggle, while boycotting it can be considered a form of negative moderate struggle. In some countries, what is presented as an election is merely a theatrical performance. If an individual or a movement avoids falling into the trap of these scenarios and boycotts an opaque and deceptive election through civil means, they have not departed from a path of moderation.

The experience of street protests in Iran in recent years has proven that the ruling power will not tolerate any form of dissent and deliberately pushes peaceful and civil struggles towards violence as a pretext for suppression. In a climate where street protests carry a high risk, closing shops, market strikes, industrial and transport strikes, sit-ins, and boycotting sham elections are all considered forms of civil disobedience and non-violent struggle.

> ***Simin Chaychi, a poet and women's rights activist, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***
>
> *If someone is very fanatical about any religion, an excess of fanaticism that harms other human beings, like having ISIS-like views, I would definitely oppose that. I prefer reactions to be in the form of civil movements and protests because I think now is a time when dialogue works.*

The foundations and components of moderation in the ethnic sphere include rationality, fairness, justice, and an interactive approach. Fairness is a prerequisite for any policymaking, including in the domain of ethnicity. Extremism in policy and its articulation is the most significant problem affecting the issue of ethnicity in Iran, and trusting Iranian ethnic groups is the condition for moderation in this field. The people of every ethnic group have the right to write and read in their own language, to choose their children’s names from among their own cultural heroes, and to live with their own traditions, customs, music, dance, and song. These are not delegated rights; they lie at the very heart of the inherent rights of every people and nation.

What activists for ethnic rights must diligently pursue is the adoption of legal strategies and cooperation with other moderate and reformist political currents in the broader field of citizenship rights, so as to add the legitimacy and urgency of their demands to the government's executive agenda. At this historical juncture in Iranian society, it is essential that all civil and political activists from every ethnic background avoid unilateralism and extremism. By insisting on civil and citizenship rights—which naturally encompass ethnic demands—and by focusing on the constitution's potential, including its neglected and forgotten articles, they can take practical steps towards their goals.

Citizens' awareness of their fundamental civil, political, and social rights, and their efforts to reclaim them through social institutions, can generate a tremendous force for reforming the status quo without resorting to extremism or violence. Iranian society has learned well from the historical developments since the Constitutional Revolution, especially recent events, that violence is a high-cost, low-yield strategy. In contrast, expanding awareness and demanding rights through the channels of civil society is a far less costly and more fruitful approach.

***Payam Dorfeshan, a barrister and civil activist, from Tehran:***
*I am not in favour of overthrowing the system, because its product is destruction and misery.*

***Mohsen Hesam Mazaheri, a researcher of religion and war, from Tehran:***
*I consider myself to belong to moderate Islam and have no prejudice regarding religious and sectarian boundaries.*

The other facet of moderation pertains to the government and its method of dealing with the demands and protest movements of different ethnic groups. Unfortunately, we have witnessed instances where the political establishment's response has been extremist, harsh, and repressive, with no effort made to realise the legitimate demands of these groups. The authorities must pay serious attention to the fact that unity cannot be achieved by ignoring the rights of others. Rather, it is by recognising these differences and diversities and by fostering national empathy amidst plurality that true unity can be attained. A system that procrastinates in implementing constitutional articles related to the rights of

ethnic groups and religious followers, and which ignores ethnic diversity as a natural outcome of a nation's historical process, is in fact the primary cause for the emergence of extremist groups and the creation of division and hatred among peoples who have lived together for thousands of years in peace, security, and mutual recognition.

Implementing the proposals outlined in this section through the path of moderation will enable the country to navigate its social and economic crises and move towards a future of peace, accord, and national fraternity.

## National Reconciliation

National reconciliation is a common concept in contemporary political literature, employed as a strategy for navigating a country's internal crises, such as civil war, unusual partisan conflict, or unbridgeable divides between social forces and groups. In such situations, which are generally accompanied by the alienation, isolation, or disenfranchisement of parts of the political and social body, one group seizes extra-legal control of national wealth and power and seeks to coercively eliminate, suppress, or silence other segments of society. The idea of national reconciliation, as a solution to internal crises, is often presented as a comprehensive plan initiated by national figures or movements, or sometimes with the involvement of external actors.

In the Islamic Republic, the idea of national reconciliation was proposed on 8 February 2017 by former president Seyyed Mohammad Khatami. One of the reasons he raised this issue was that in recent years, Iranian society has been suffering from a multitude of problems that, if not contained, could escalate into a major crisis. These problems range from environmental issues like water scarcity, soil erosion, and air pollution, to social pathologies such as addiction, divorce, rising violence, bribery, and other moral failings, as well as poverty, discrimination, and a widening class divide. Explaining the dimensions of the reconciliation plan, the reformist leader Mostafa Tajzadeh said: 'National reconciliation means accepting plurality from a position of equality. In my belief, all those who believe in the national and territorial independence and integrity of Iran, and who are willing to act within the framework of the law, renouncing violence and abiding by the constitution, should be given the opportunity to participate actively in the country's political and social arena, so that Iran and Iranians can benefit from their capabilities' (Details of Khatami's 'National

Reconciliation' Plan, 2017).

The experience of the Islamic Revolution shows that no single faction is capable of solving the aforementioned problems alone; a form of collective cooperation and reconciliation is required. Another reason for proposing this idea relates to the external threats facing Iran, particularly following the election of Donald Trump in the United States, the mitigation of which requires the cooperation and coordination of all national forces. A third reason for putting forward the idea of 'national reconciliation' is the need for major reforms in various fields, not only to solve existing problems but also to prevent new ones from arising. Undertaking such reforms requires a national consensus, and no single faction can bear this heavy burden alone (Details of the National Reconciliation Plan, 2017: 3). The continued house arrest of the protesters against the 2009 presidential election results, a subject the former president frequently raised, is another key motivation behind the proposal.

However, like many other conciliatory initiatives, this proposal was effectively stifled at birth, meeting with fierce opposition and a violent rejection from the central axis of power in the Islamic Republic. Just ten days after the idea was floated, on 18 February 2017, the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, responded during a meeting with people from Tabriz, stating: 'Why do you speak of reconciliation? Are the people at odds with each other? The people are at odds with those who came into the streets on the day of Ashura and, with cruelty and shamelessness, stripped a young Basiji and beat him. The people are at odds with them and will not reconcile' (Leader of Iran: National Reconciliation is Meaningless, 2017). The primary reason for these harsh reactions from Khamenei and his supporters was their perception that Khatami had proposed the idea in defence of the reformists who were placed under house arrest after the 2009 election.

In the summer of 2018, following a chain of street protests by ethnic groups (like the Arabs of Khuzestan), professional guilds (workers, truck drivers, teachers), and religious communities (such as the Gonabadi Dervishes) that had begun in late 2017 and peaked in January 2018, the subject of national reconciliation was raised once more. This time, it was proposed by the moderate conservative cleric Mohammad-Javad Hojjati Kermani, who had served several terms as a representative for Kerman in both the Islamic Consultative Assembly and the Assembly of Experts. He presented a plan for general national reconciliation

as the starting point for overcoming the country's acute internal and external problems (Hojjati Kermani's Call for 'National Reconciliation', 2019: 3).

> ***Mehdi Keyvan, a retired university lecturer, from Isfahan:***
> *This government has shown that it is divided into 'insiders' and 'outsiders', where the insiders have everything and the outsiders have nothing. What I want from the government is for it to consider everyone an insider.*

> ***Mohammad Ramezani, an English lecturer, translator, and novelist, from Bukan (West Azerbaijan):***
> *The country's political system, which was brought about by a revolution with the participation of all ethnicities, religions, and non-religious groups, was supposed to be a generous table where everyone had a share as a member. Unfortunately, the very first years showed that the people were under an illusion, and sadly, all the benefits have been placed in the hands of a minority that claims to be supported by a divine power. The political system has now invented the concepts of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The insiders are 1 per cent and the outsiders are 99 per cent of the people in society.*

The findings from the interviews in this research indicate a widespread belief within society that deep divisions and factionalism do exist, whereby one group has received abundant advantages while another has been deprived. This situation causes the disenfranchised to feel a sense of inequality and discrimination, leading them to see themselves as alienated from and unaligned with the ruling establishment. As a result, the national solidarity and reconciliation that would lead to the formation of a collective 'we' remain unattainable.

In diagnosing the country's political and social fragmentation, it is essential to note that a desirable state is not one devoid of any class, party, factional, or group structures. A prominent feature of modern societies is the complexity of their political and social frameworks, with a plurality of horizontal and vertical systems of stratification playing a role. Therefore, what is being criticised here is an institutionalised form of social, partisan, and factional structuring that is the product of a rentier political system—one that thrives on patronage and the distribution of state resources. This system uses illegal and extra-legal tools to

control the institutions of power and national wealth, imposes itself on the whole of society, widens the scope of discrimination and socio-political cleavages, and pushes the country ever deeper into crisis.

> ***Ya'qub Mousavi, a sociologist and academic staff member at Al-Zahra University, from Tehran:***
> *A type of socio-economic inequality has naturally been created [among] ethnic minority groups. But as for whether there is a will at the centre to impose this issue, I cannot read intentions in historical periods like the Qajar, Reza Shah, and today. Cultural distances influence macro-policies. I agree that ethnic groups do not have their rightful place in the managerial and policymaking hierarchies and are absent.*

If the state wants the people, despite their diversity of thought and political differences, to form a single national unit and stand united in defence of Iran's national interests, it has no choice but to recognise ethnic groups and dissidents, with all their differences. From this perspective, 'national reconciliation' means nothing other than political forces recognising one another's legitimacy, so that society and the state are no longer run by a single voice, and so that polyphony and pluralism become officially accepted (Sohrabi, 2017). By this token, the only possible way to achieve national reconciliation is through the acceptance of democracy; that is, accepting that all members of the nation enjoy equal rights, so that the idea of national solidarity can be realised—an opportunity from which, according to the interviewees, we are now worlds away.

Today, the situation in the country is extremely dangerous and complex. If the government does not awaken to this reality, extend a hand of cooperation to ethnic groups, and strive for mutual recognition and an emphasis on commonalities, the country will face crises in the future that are far more acute than those it currently endures. The existing cultural distances are poised to create and exacerbate social and cultural problems within the ethno-cultural landscape of contemporary Iran.

In the religious sphere, rifts and disagreements are visible between different sects, particularly as the officialisation of one religious current has caused the separation and exclusion of others. In the economic domain, recent volatility has been influenced not only by covert domestic actors manipulating the market but also by the allocation of the national budget and liquidity to the public sector and

to institutions beyond government control. This has created numerous challenges and limitations for the government, effectively tying its hands in solving the country's problems. The current difficulties threaten not just the government and the economy, but the entire system and the very existence of the country. Therefore, fanning the flames of these problems, engaging in blame games, making accusations, and promoting conspiracy theories will not cure the present ills. On the contrary, it will only add to the burden of problems day by day, pushing the political and social structure closer to disintegration, explosion, and revolution.

## Sustainable Peace

Sustainable peace refers to a desirable state that, by relying on legal, political, and cultural mechanisms such as equality, justice, democratic values, tolerance, and dialogue, creates an environment free from violence, hostility, conflict, and strife among the various groups and strata of society with their diverse tastes, interests, and preferences. This is not to suggest, however, an abstract or utopian condition devoid of all challenge and conflict. Such a view has little purchase in the contentious reality of the public sphere, whether at the domestic level or in relations between different nations. Rather, the goal is to devise mechanisms through which conflicts and contradictions can be resolved in a civil and non-violent manner.

A significant part of what constitutes sustainable peace lies within the cultural framework and relates to cultural norms. A cultural approach must be inclusive and accepting of both similarities and differences across all traditions, in such a way that it becomes possible to believe in them and even to feel pride and joy in them (Kuruvang, 2002: 36-44).

***Javad Tariri, a barrister, writer, and political activist, from Khuzestan:***
*When you can't even interact properly with the Gonabadi Dervishes, it shows you haven't been able to interact even with the founders of Iranian Shi'ism, who were dervishes and the noblest of people... When I don't have the opportunity to talk with my wife, to love, to caress my child, to read, what will my output be? Violence towards my wife, my child, my colleague... Violence emerges, wanted or unwanted.*



*Image 3-35. Interview with Javad Tariri*

Without a doubt, the most important element in the pursuit of peace is interaction and dialogue. Social and ethnic movements are a phenomenon that most countries in the world are grappling with. One of the tangible manifestations of these movements and their demands is the street protest, which can sometimes be diverted into chaos and disorder by certain individuals exploiting the emotions of the youth. In this context, what is crucial is the method of dealing with these protest movements. In some cases, the response is the use of force, violence, threats, and imprisonment. In other cases, interaction and dialogue can be the solution. In Iran, the ruling political structure not only lacks the will to pursue a path of interaction and dialogue but, by ignoring the self-evident demands of the people, has paved the way for the spread of defiance, anger, and resentment among numerous social groups. According to the research findings, beyond the

state level, a violence stemming from institutionalised structures is also reflected in the behaviour and actions of Iranians at the individual and group level.

> ***Payam Dorafshan, a barrister and civil activist, from Tehran:***
> *Human perfection lies in knowing that customs and traditions are nothing but abstract matters. Therefore, we must internalise peaceful and effective methods and procedures and think about the collective good.*

History teaches us that our lives are intertwined with the lives of all other individuals and peoples, as if the lives of all human communities are connected by an invisible thread (Falsafi, 2011: 15). Unfortunately, the situation among the different ethnic groups in the country is far from ideal in this regard. The dominant behaviour among these groups is often based on mockery, ridicule, and joke-telling, rather than addressing one another's needs. This issue is not limited to ethnic and linguistic groups but is also seen among religious and sectarian communities and their followers, who often focus on historical grievances and claims to past legitimacy rather than emphasising their shared religious roots and commonalities. This is despite the fact that a historical perspective helps us to realise, by creating effective historical awareness, that our knowledge of ourselves, our civilisation, and neighbouring civilisations is incomplete. An active dialogue draws on historical understanding to show that 'cultures are not cohesive, not homogenous, not monosemous, and not at rest. Cultures are intrinsically multi-faceted, conflict-ridden, changeable, and open. Cultures are engaged in a permanent process of rereading, rewriting, and transformation, in the course of which their diverse and often contradictory treasures are reaffirmed, transformed, exported, challenged, resisted, and redefined' (Fay, 2002: 112). Historical understanding gives us the insight to see that our current civilisation is the product of mutual influence and interaction—itself a process of effective and peaceful dialogue.

From this perspective, sustainable peace is a multidimensional condition whose institutional establishment requires the achievement of a peaceful and reconciled relationship on several different levels. The relationship between the state and the body of society and its forces is a fundamental variable that plays an infrastructural role in preparing the ground for sustainable peace. The democratic and pluralistic nature of the political system, a belief in human,

political, and civil rights, and the provision of frameworks for dialogue and positive, institutionalised relations with society are prerequisites for achieving a desirable state at this level.

> ***Sardar Fotouhi, a consultant for public and private research projects, from Saqqez (Kurdistan):***
> *Islamic and anti-Islamic movements and ethnic groups are in conflict with each other, and I do not see a favourable short-term future. A state of anarchism exists in the short term.*

Another dimension of sustainable peace relates to the dynamism and constructive interaction—based on tolerance and respect for the rights and dignity of social forces—among the elements of society themselves. This ensures that the internal vitality and efficiency of society, with all its diversity, are preserved in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and that the right to exist for all ethnic, religious, and other groups is both legally recognised and socially and customarily protected. At the same time, the mechanisms of sustainable peace provide contingencies so that, should any form of disorder, social conflict, or political hostility arise, it is always possible to steer the unstable situation back towards a desirable and stable state.

A fundamental question in political and international theory has long been how to contribute to the creation of an ethic of peace and sustainable peace in the realm of domestic and global governance. Any standard for peace that aims to be effective across societies and cultures must be created on the basis of free consent and a consensus derived from dialogue. The process by which we formulate a set of ethical principles applicable to all societies and cultures is as important as the final outcome itself. A peace-oriented cultural approach must be inclusive and accepting of both similarities and differences in all traditions, making it possible to believe in them and even to feel pride and joy in them. In the interviews conducted with experts from different ethnic groups, the absence of peace in the current state of Iranian society was a recurring theme, with most holding the state and the ruling system responsible for this situation. Peace, as a constructive idea, is a precondition for the realisation of values such as freedom and justice. That is, it describes the stable condition in which freedom and justice can emerge; only when freedom and justice are realised do we truly achieve peace.

***Mohammad-Nazar Didgah, former Member of Parliament and a religious Mowlavi, from Sistan and Baluchestan:***

*If they don't get their act together, Iran might be torn to pieces just like in the early days. It is in God's hands. If this is the arena, this is how it will be.*



*Image 3-36. Interview with Mohammad-Nazar Didgah*

With its flawed and inefficient policies, the government, instead of paving the way for peace and friendship, has taken the path of enmity and bloodshed. In other words, over the past several years, the result of the state's confrontational policies towards different ethnic and religious groups has been their exclusion and marginalisation, rather than their integration and the formation of national unity. The most important component of new theories on this subject is a return to practical dialogue in the public sphere. Despite all the cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic differences that exist within Iran's cultural geography, the crucial factor in achieving sustainable peace is the creation of a suitable platform for dialogue and interaction among different groups, ethnicities, religions, and social classes, while safeguarding human dignity and preserving their individual and collective identities.

*Chapter Four*

# Summary and Conclusion

## Introduction

The history of Iran is a testament to the enduring presence of diverse ethnic groups. The country's very fabric has always been a composite of these different peoples who, despite all vicissitudes, have maintained a stable coexistence. A shared repository of legends, tales, myths, and historical memories points to a deep entanglement and integration among these groups and their common past. However, the story of Iran's ethnic communities took a different turn with the advent of the modern era. As Iran stepped into the contemporary period, ethnicity became a decisive factor, shaped by the socio-political transformations and discursive struggles that defined this new age.

In the arena of contemporary ideological debates in Iran, those discourses that emerge from the country's diverse and pluralistic historical identity have often played only a minor, marginal, and fleeting role. These are the perspectives that commit themselves to safeguarding this rich heritage, that seek to approach identity-based diversity from a positive standpoint, and that believe a principled and democratic engagement with this characteristic could actually strengthen national cohesion. In opposition to these views stands another spectrum of identity-based discourses, which have typically held a dominant position and

have adopted an approach predicated on the assimilation and homogenisation of ethnic and religious groups. To justify their approach, these dominant discourses argue that the preservation of national cohesion, security, and political integrity depends on the assimilation of ethnic and religious minorities, or at least on their marginalisation and weakening. Consequently, they have consistently fostered an environment in Iran where the cultural and political identities of ethnic groups are censored and suppressed. What this perspective crucially overlooks is that this very method of policymaking has itself had a profound effect on endangering national security, leading to a sense of deprivation among ethnic groups and restricting their access to the country's sources of wealth and power.

In reality, the inequitable distribution of wealth, status, and power among the various ethnic communities, and the reinforcement of their sense of deprivation, have widened the chasm between these groups and the state. This, in turn, has led to the emergence of political movements and groups centred on identity-based demands. The prevention of mother-tongue education in schools, religious discrimination, inequality in the allocation of senior state and executive positions, the absence of ethnic-based political parties, a lack of welfare, health, medical, cultural, and educational facilities, and the exclusion of ethnic groups and their specific cultural markers from print and broadcast media, particularly the national broadcaster, are all examples of the demands articulated by these identity-seeking groups.

The relationship between ethnic identities and the national identity is a core issue in multi-ethnic states, and it is a critical determinant of peace, national cohesion, sustainable security, and governmental efficacy. If the ethnic identities existing within a country can define themselves under the umbrella of a broader, more inclusive identity, that nation will move towards greater cohesion and be able to harness its full potential. Conversely, if ethnic identities perceive themselves to be in conflict with the national identity or with other ethnic groups, then national security, social cohesion, the economy, and the integrity of the state are all placed in jeopardy.

In any society where justice is not perceived to be sovereign across the various dimensions of the social system, the national identity in all its components will suffer from crisis, instability, threat, and fragmentation. The same fate will befall a society whose constituent members do not consider themselves true members or 'citizens' of that community—a status that itself implies responsibility,

commitment, affection, and belief. Furthermore, these citizens inevitably compare themselves with one another. They see themselves as deserving of an equitable share in the facilities, resources, and privileges defined by their society, and they demand justice in all its facets. It is self-evident that the primary responsibility for administering this justice lies with the state or the political system. If individuals lose faith in the state's commitment to justice, their sense of citizenship, their belief, their commitment, their responsibility, and their affection—all of which are manifestations of their national identity—will be eroded, and the force that binds them to the social fabric will decay.

It was on this basis that the present study endeavoured to analyse the various demands of ethnic groups for the realisation of social justice from the perspective of peace. Progressive and democratic states strive to prevent violence and to foster the conditions for a sustainable peace. This entails not only the absence of war, conflict, and violence, but also the presence of security, tranquillity, and peaceful coexistence within a society, a country, or at the global level.

Identity-based plurality and diversity have been an existing reality in most societies, past and present. In the contemporary era, despite processes of modernisation and the establishment of modern institutions, this diversity has not diminished. Instead, it has become a subject of contention and conflict centred on identity-based distinctions and differences. Moreover, since the second half of the twentieth century, the processes of globalisation—such as the ever-increasing growth and expansion of media and the de-monopolisation of its control and management—have led to a rise in identity awareness and provided new platforms for its representation. In step with other social and cultural transformations, this has actually increased identity-based diversity. Alongside long-standing sources of identity like race, religion, sect, and nationality, new identity claims based on gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle, quasi-religious groups, and other factors have emerged, all demanding recognition and access to social rights and benefits.

The demographic composition of Iran is such that it is described as a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic society. The presence and coexistence of various ethno-linguistic groups—such as Persians, Turks, Kurds, Lurs, Baluch, Turkmen, Arabs, and others—within a single political geography is indicative of the ethno-cultural diversity of Iranian society. The majority of these groups reside in border regions, sharing cultural and religious ties with ethnic kin in neighbouring

countries, as political borders have often been drawn through their historical lands. In this respect, and in terms of its social structure, Iran must be considered a heterogeneous country, home to diverse ethnic, racial,linguistic, and religious identities, with some of these same groups also residing in adjacent nations. This situation is significant in shaping ethnic equations, both in terms of the potential for comparison and evaluation with co-ethnics across the borders, and because of the latent and active capacities it provides for ethnic mobilisation and activity.

Similar to other multi-ethnic and multi-lingual countries, Iran has at certain historical junctures witnessed forms of assimilationist or exclusionary ethnic policies, which have led to ethnic tensions and the formation of ethnic fronts within its geography. Although the reality of identity-based diversity in Iran has seldom been overtly denied, over the past century, the discrimination and inequality inherent in the country's political, economic, and cultural structures have consistently given rise to identity-based conflicts and activities centred around the three axes of ethnicity, language, and religion. It was in this context that the present research sought to provide a comprehensive picture of Iran's ethnic identities, living alongside one another within the country's borders, by focusing on the perspectives of their elites. This picture addresses the reasons behind the restrictions and discrimination faced by these groups, explores the nature of ethnic conflicts and their consequences, and finally, explains and elaborates on strategies that could lead to the resolution of tensions, the creation of peace and solidarity, and ultimately, social development.

The identification and assessment of the current situation serves to problematise the issue and frame it from various angles. By studying the internal and external conditions related to ethnic groups in Iran through modern scientific methods, this research project has laid a suitable foundation for planning and proposing effective, reality-based strategies. Since the research methodology itself allows for the derivation of general strategies for problem-solving—as is evident in the extracted theoretical model—it has become clear that the most significant issue confronting the people of Iran is a deep social and political rupture. This rupture has given rise to a demand for justice from various ethnic and social strata. If its overt and hidden dimensions are not addressed, this fissure has the potential to trigger catastrophic events that would be practically impossible to manage or control. This situation stems from shifts in the country's economy and livelihood, as well as the dominant ideology, which can be seen as the primary

factors shaping this phenomenon-driven society. Broadly speaking, the current state of affairs has led to a variety of strategic actions, each of which will result in different outcomes. The two potential consequences—the stability or the decay of social capital—represent different scenarios that will define the future challenges for the country.

## The Conceptual Model of the Research

The image below illustrates the conceptual model of the research, which is the outcome of the collection, coding, categorisation, interpretation, and analysis of data using the grounded theory method. Following the presentation and analysis of the research findings in the previous chapter, the subsequent section will examine the proposed scenarios and strategies, drawing upon the methodical outputs of this study.

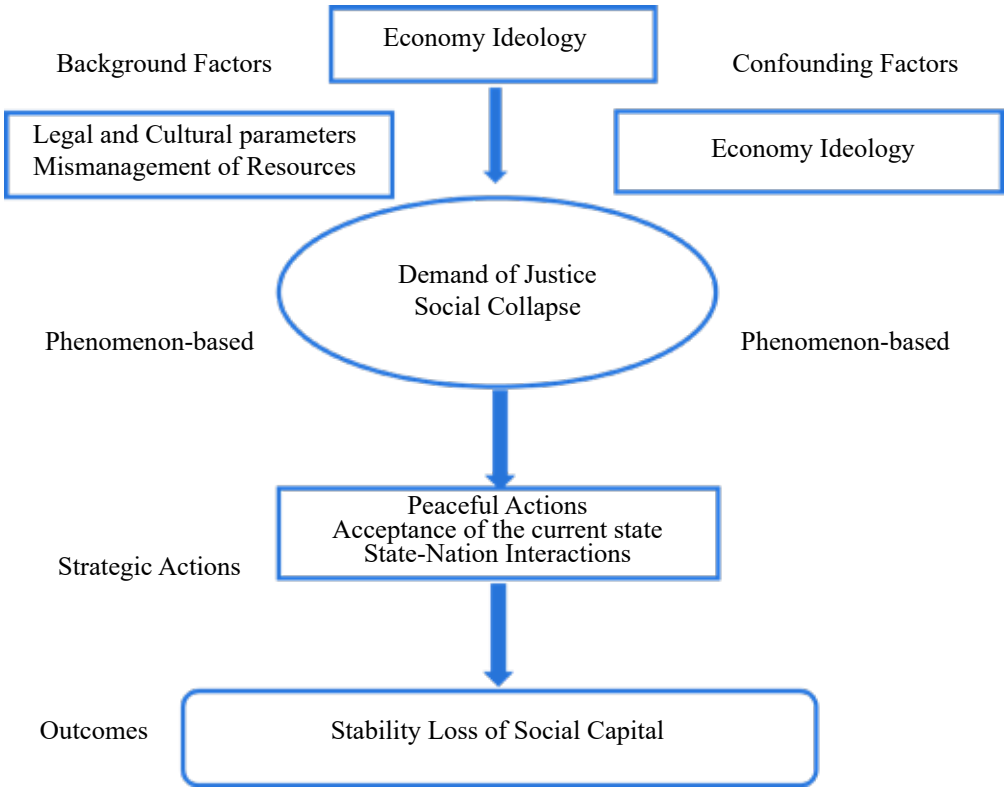



*Diagram 4-1. Conceptual model of investigating ethnic identity in Iran (2018-2019)*

The Based on the arrangement of the conceptual research model, an unequal economy is positioned as one of the primary factors creating a discriminatory ethnic situation in Iran, a point raised by the majority of interviewees. This is because a large portion of heavy industries, including steel and automotive companies, are located in Persian-speaking provinces such as Isfahan, Alborz, Semnan, and Markazi, to which the largest share of economic revenues is allocated. Thus, according to the field results of the research, we are witnessing the emergence of this very demand for justice, with ethnic groups pursuing their rights in various forms. This demand is unequivocally expressed as a demand of the people from the state, reflecting a form of peripheral awareness of the injustices that are discriminatorily imposed on ethnic groups by the centre.

It could be argued that after the Persian-speaking population, the Azeri ethnic group, particularly in East Azerbaijan Province, holds the second position in terms of economic revenue generation. This region's industrial sector boasts profitable and job-creating factories in tractor manufacturing, machine production, petrochemicals, and more, and it also possesses significant industrial and manufacturing capacities at the medium and small scale in its industrial towns. Despite these conditions, the dissatisfaction of Azeri-speakers with the state is no less than that of other ethnic groups. The Azeris' sense of inequality is rooted in two main issues. Firstly, this group compares its own economic situation with that of the Persian-speaking population and believes that the share of Azeri-inhabited provinces is negligible compared to central provinces like Isfahan, Semnan, Markazi, Qom, Alborz, and Tehran. This perceived disparity, based on their relative economic standing, has created discontent. The second source of their dissatisfaction is the belief that most of the industries currently active in their regions were established during the previous regime. They feel that in the four decades since the revolution, no significant new industrial factories have been built in their areas.

In the Kurdish regions of Iran, from the southern cities of West Azerbaijan Province to the provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and Ilam, the industrial sector is severely underdeveloped. There are few factories, workshops, or industrial towns that can generate adequate income or provide significant employment opportunities for the youth of these areas. Consequently, the unemployment rate among this ethnic group is extremely high, and a large portion of the active workforce migrates to Persian-speaking provinces, especially Tehran, to earn a

living. Another segment of the young population, some with university degrees, resorts to working in border towns as kulbars (cross-border porters), earning a minimal daily wage with no job security or insurance. Furthermore, due to the lack of processing plants and conversion industries, the majority of the region's agricultural products are transported out of the area raw, without any value-added processing. This situation has created widespread dissatisfaction and a sense of inequality among the people of these regions, who see the state as playing a significant role in creating these conditions. It is worth noting that the Kurds of West Azerbaijan Province express an additional layer to their demand for justice: a feeling of being third-class citizens, or even lower. In other words, in addition to the Persian/non-Persian discrimination, they also perceive a Turk/Kurd discrimination, a situation they describe using the term 'exploitation within exploitation'.

The Arab ethnic group of Iran is dispersed across the provinces of Khuzestan, Bushehr, and Hormozgan. The oil-rich nature of their lands and the presence of major southwestern and southern ports have fostered international trade and commerce, attracting labour from other regions as well as their own. However, despite these favourable geographical conditions, the situation for the Arab population is not prosperous, and they too feel a profound sense of economic inequality and dissatisfaction. The favourable economic and environmental conditions in their region have failed to improve their standard of living, and the general Arab populace receives little benefit from this natural wealth.

***Mowlana Abdolhamid Esmail-Zehi, Sunni Friday Prayer Leader of Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*[Baluchestan] has immense problems, and poverty is greater than in the rest of the country. Most of this poverty is the result of discrimination. In the world, wherever there is discrimination, it manifests itself in two ways: economic poverty and cultural poverty. We suffer from both types of this poverty.*

***Young Baluch woman, from Zahedan:***

*There is nowhere to work. No factory, nothing. There were a few factories, but they have closed down now. Now look, where are the men supposed to go to work? Many don't want to, but they are forced to do jobs they don't like. But they have to provide for their wives and children.*

The most dire economic conditions and the highest level of dissatisfaction among the ethnic groups studied were found among the Baluch. In addition to their ethnic distinction, they are also religiously different from the majority of society. In this region, much like in the Kurdish areas, the industrial sector has seen negligible growth, if any at all. Furthermore, due to harsh environmental conditions and the drying up of rivers in Baluch-inhabited areas in recent decades, the agricultural sector has been almost completely destroyed. Another factor contributing to the poor economic situation is the low level of literacy and education among the people, a problem that is itself a result of systemic ethnic discrimination which has denied them access to educational facilities. This has prevented them from playing an effective role in the administrative positions of their own province, with the majority of such posts being held by Sistanis, who share the same religious sect as the ruling establishment. Alongside all these factors, the region's remoteness and marginality have played a fundamental role in its underdevelopment. The people of this region cannot easily engage in economic and financial trade with their neighbouring provinces. These conditions have driven the local population, especially the youth, towards high-risk occupations such as smuggling goods and fuel, where they face further hardship from border closures.

Ideology, and the dominance of the Shia sect as the official state religion, which aligns with the thinking of government officials, is another key factor in the conceptual model that has shaped the ethnic landscape of Iran. This was a point of particular concern for Sunni ethnic groups in the Baluchistan and Kurdistan regions. They referred to Iran's history of religious conflicts, where the dominance of one of the two main sects has always come at the expense of the other—a pattern they believe continues to this day.

According to the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, two types of minorities are recognised: religious and sectarian. Religious minorities are addressed in Article 13, which stipulates that Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are recognised as official religious minorities and are free to perform their religious ceremonies and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance) and religious education. Meanwhile, Article 15 states that different Iranian ethnic groups may use their local and ethnic languages in the press and mass media and teach their literature in schools, although Persian is the official and common language and script of

the people. While the constitution formally acknowledges these rights, reality on the ground points towards a policy of ethnic and religious elimination or assimilation.

At the time of the Islamic Revolution, the populations of Christian, Zoroastrian, and Jewish communities were relatively large. Despite the freedoms constitutionally guaranteed to them, the practical conduct of the new regime led many to emigrate, and today only a small number from these religious groups remain in the country. The implementation of Article 15 regarding mother-tongue education in schools remains suspended. The Sunni community is deprived of having a religious centre and mosque in the nation's capital, a right they have not secured despite all their demands and efforts. The culture of ethnic and religious minorities is rarely promoted in the media; what is propagated in practice is not ethnic identity, but rather the dominant culture and lifestyle. Regional and ethnic political parties do not exist, non-governmental organisations are severely restricted in their activities, and a security-focused atmosphere prevails in ethnic regions. These media policies and the promotion of a lifestyle aligned with the tastes of the centre are classified in this research as intervening conditions.

> ***50-year-old male shopkeeper, from Mashhad:***
> *Our economic situation is ruined. The officials shouldn't cause us all this suffering and distress. If our officials weren't like they are now, filling their pockets and leaving, I'm sure Iran's future would be good.*

> ***Peymaneh Roshanzadeh, a gynaecologist and writer, from Semnan:***
> *The society of capitalists and thieves is not part of human society, and their interests are for themselves; they plunder the masses whenever they can. Their interests are in conflict with the interests of the people.*

Some interviewees identified another critical factor: the economic centralisation in the Persian-speaking provinces, which has resulted from political centralisation in those same areas and the selection of most government officials from among them in the post-revolutionary years. According to the ethnic groups, this mismanagement in resource allocation, across its various dimensions, has been

exacerbated by law and culture, which can be described as a contextual condition.

One of the most significant realities that Iranian ethnic groups expressed regarding the performance of the state is the issue of discrimination. The belief in the existence of political, social, economic, and cultural discrimination among Iran's ethnic groups has led to the formation of a general demand for justice. The failure to address this public demand has resulted in social distance, or a socio-political rupture. This social fragmentation threatens the life of Iranian society. Rising poverty, widespread unemployment, job instability, a declining capacity to generate wealth and provide welfare for the majority, an increase in social pathologies, spatial segregation, and the erosion of social capital are all worsening at a rapid pace. Large segments of the population have been pushed to the margins of the economic and social system, living in the outskirts of cities and in poor neighbourhoods, without fair and adequate access to educational or health services. Social values have become polarised, and there is no consensus or common ground on the most fundamental issues (Goodarzi, 2017: 7).

> ***43-year-old man, office worker, from Tehran:***
> *The issue is that discrimination has nothing to do with ethnicity. We are in Tehran; if you are not considered an 'insider', you will be discriminated against, no matter which ethnic group or city you are from. 'Insider' and 'outsider' status is not related to ethnicity.*

Official policies are so far removed from the lives of ordinary people that two opposing poles have formed. Life satisfaction is low, and a sense of alienation from society and its administration is spreading. A large part of the population believes they have been kept away from the resources needed for a decent, high-quality, and honourable life. These are all signs of widening social cleavages and a conflict between the people, the government, and the elites. A process of social disintegration is underway, manifesting in various forms such as instability, alienation, and conflict. Based on this, social and political rupture and the demand for justice are the central phenomena in this research.

Achieving social justice and sustainable development requires a transition away from the learned condition of state-nation antagonism towards a sufficient level of interaction between the two. Prudent management of the country, prioritising freedom based on the explicit and democratic legal and constitutional rights of

all Iranian citizens, regardless of ethnicity or religion, is one of the key strategies for emerging from this crisis. This is a strategy that can be realised through free elections, freedom of expression, and ultimately, the participation of ethnic elites at the highest levels of management, or perhaps through a form of political and economic federalism. In the current state of socio-political fragmentation and the resulting crises, which have been shaped by mismanagement in Iran, non-violent civil struggles are emerging, particularly through virtual connections and social networks. Movements such as non-violent gatherings and protests, which are also endorsed by the constitution, can be seen in various parts of Iran, although they are often met with suppression. The government's violence in quelling collective movements and the despair for a better future have caused some to act passively and accept the status quo, while others have been pushed into a phase of altering their form of struggle, gravitating towards structure-breaking demands for the overthrow of the ruling political regime. Accordingly, peaceful action, state-nation interaction, passive acceptance, and structure-breaking tendencies were identified as the strategic actions in this research.

Economically, from the early days of the revolution, a culture of clientelism gradually gave rise to a dominant state-rentier economy that provided special privileges for affiliated individuals. It can be acknowledged that non-Persian (ethnic), non-Shia (sectarian), and those labelled as 'outsiders' were unable to benefit from these privileges. In recent decades, this trend, exacerbated by the sanctions imposed on Iran, has created fertile ground for a wide range of corruption and financial embezzlement. Most participants in this study spoke of and criticised such discrimination and inequalities, citing evidence such as managerial ratios, disparities in cultural benefits, unemployment rates, and provincial development levels.

> ***36-year-old man from Taleqan, living in Karaj:***
> *From whichever door poverty enters, faith leaves through the same door. In a Muslim country, everyone is thinking about their own economic interests, and nobody is thinking about me, an empsaloyee.*

It is clear that such an economic, administrative, and political system paves the way for corruption. It is now evident that market hoarding, billion-dollar embezzlements by white-collar government officials, and ostentatious displays

of religiosity are all signs of anomie and the decay of social and political capital. In a healthy society, internalised norms, formed through the socialisation of individuals, both reduce government costs and strengthen the relationship between the people and the state. What is being felt in the current situation, however, is the very opposite of this dynamic.

Therefore, instability and the decay of social capital are among the most significant consequences of a society that is not institutionalised and rule-based—a society where a sense of discrimination exists among citizens who, due to the labels of ethnic and religious minority, are assigned a limited role and have little access to political, economic, and social opportunities. In a society that, beyond its ethnic and religious divides, suffers deeply from a fissure between the people and the state—or, in other words, a 'state-nation antagonism'[1] —the addition of ethnic and religious variables becomes a factor of disintegration, doubly widening the scope of divergence and conflict. This situation was observed with very high frequency in the findings of this research, and most of the pathological interpretations and opinions pointed to its foundational role in the continuation and deepening of the state of rupture and crisis.

## Examining Scenarios and Operational Policies

The outcomes of the research model and the analysis of its multiple dimensions depict Iran's future through the lens of two possible scenarios: the decay of social capital or the achievement of social stability. According to this framework, if the current unstable situation persists, in which social capital is deteriorating across various dimensions, the eventual outcome will be the collapse of the social, economic, political, and cultural pillars of the nation. As political and social relations abandon civil and legal channels and the potential for tolerance and dialogue becomes impossible, any chance of moving along a path of peace and interaction will vanish. This will consign everyone to a deeply uncertain and obscure future.

1. 'State-nation antagonism' is a theory of Iranian history and politics proposed by Mohammad Ali Homayoun Katouzian, who argues that the relationship between the people and the government throughout Iranian history has consistently followed a pattern of conflicting interests, leading to challenge, confrontation, and conflict. See: Homayoun Katouzian, Mohammad Ali (2022) State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis. Tehran: Ney Publishing.

***Bagher Sadri-Nia, academic staff member and university lecturer, from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan):***

*When the central power is strong, religious and ethnic issues must be resolved so that separatist tendencies are eliminated and do not form... If the central power weakens, various voices will be raised, among which the authentic voice will be lost... If a blind rebellion takes shape, it will bring nothing but destruction.*

In the second and more desirable scenario, however, social stability would create an environment conducive to fundamental reforms. These would include foundational changes to the country's infrastructure and superstructure, as well as in the economic, social, cultural, educational, and health sectors. The adoption of effective and sound decisions by state institutions and the country's various ethnic and social groups would become possible. In the favourable environment arising from this stability, and by resorting to the principles of rationality and the collective wisdom derived from citizen participation and democratic governance, the opportunity to solve fundamental problems and overcome crises would gradually emerge. A return to a rational and civil path based on peaceful social coexistence, under the aegis of a sustainable and comprehensive peace, would then become a tangible possibility.

***Mohammad Hagh-Moradi, a journalist, sociologist, and social critic, from Sanandaj (Kurdistan):***

*With the current process, I am unfortunately not optimistic; that is, without changing the political, legal, social, and economic structures, the continuation of this trend, in my opinion, is not pleasant. Meaning, we will certainly not have a good future. Internal problems create economic pressures, and if we do not make a fundamental change, we will face a permanent crisis. And if we ignore these problems, public protests will arise.*

As previously stated, the continuation of the status quo—a scenario that would unfold by maintaining a strategy of passive acceptance—will lead to the widening of social, ethnic, and religious cleavages. The expansion of these divides will result in the dissolution of the social order and an increase in antagonism

and conflict between social groups. Furthermore, the despair of the younger generation and the country's elites regarding the prospects for improving their lives will fuel their emigration. As a result, the nation will suddenly face a human resources crisis. These are individuals in whom the society has invested for many years; just as the time comes to reap the harvest of their knowledge, they take all that intellectual capital with them, and the vacuum they leave behind will inflict immense damage upon society. When this phenomenon is viewed alongside the escalating crisis of Iran's ageing population, its detrimental consequences become even more apparent. Until recently, the pivotal crisis of migration in Iran was primarily understood in terms of 'brain drain' and the exodus of elites. In the last few decades, however, the crisis of an ageing population and a shortage of human resources and labour have been added to the equation, deepening the significance of this issue and demanding serious, forward-looking measures.

***Mowlana Abdolhamid Esmail-Zehi, Sunni Friday Prayer Leader of Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***

*I am hopeful for the future of Iran. After all, a course is being followed. I believe that internal and external pressures will force us to change our ways. I believe the current situation cannot continue. Except with changes, changes that will gain the satisfaction of the nation. A series of policies must change, and a series of issues must be resolved.*

***Esfandiar Haji, a history researcher and writer, from Urmia (West Azerbaijan):***

*Change must start from all directions and will not be fixed by changing the president or with someone's populist ideology. There must be a public demand behind it. There is pressure and the people are in hardship. We must change this in some way... Activists must think about the society of tomorrow.*

Referring back to the research results, we can assess the conditions for the realisation of each of these two scenarios. According to the majority of interviewees, a move towards positive change and the realisation of the desirable scenario seems highly unlikely. They point to the persistence of the ruling regime's ideological policies, its undemocratic and anti-peace strategies in both domestic and foreign affairs, and the mounting pressures of daily life and livelihood, all

of which are leading to a rise in social conflict and pathologies. In their view, Iran is moving, more than ever, towards an unknown and ambiguous horizon. However, a minority of interviewees, particularly among the elites, believe that despite the difficult conditions and the accumulation of crises, new social and political capacities are emerging within Iranian society. They argue that these nascent forces are capable of paving the way for a successful transition to a more desirable state, and they insist that this future is not far off.

With these considerations in mind, if the desirable second scenario were to be realised, the future landscape of the country could be envisioned as follows: Iran would be a country with a rich ethnic and religious diversity that serves as a source of national unity and solidarity. Political and cultural decisions would be geared towards developing inter-ethnic relations, with national reconciliation as a central axis. The political system would accept the equal standing of ethnic identity alongside national identity, thereby eliminating the hierarchical social system and the ranking of citizens in its domestic policies. A true national will would form to eradicate all cleavages and discrimination.

To help realise this vision, and based on the theoretical and field-based findings of this research, the following section outlines a set of proposed operational strategies for the social, cultural, political, and legal domains. These have been largely extracted from the interviews conducted with elites and local community members.

## Proposed Policies and Actions

The problems facing Iran today are not limited to the dissatisfaction and sense of discrimination among ethnic groups, coupled with social and political fragmentation and a lack of stability. The economic and political crises stemming from international sanctions have severely impacted the internal situation, necessitating a complete overhaul of foreign policy. Furthermore, environmental crises and mismanagement have led to widespread public discontent. Within the perspectives of all the ethnic groups studied in this research, a deep understanding and concern for a grave environmental crisis was articulated, which interviewees believe has set the stage for the destruction of their cities and regions. The drying of the Hamoun wetlands in Sistan and Baluchistan, the deteriorating state of the Karun River in Khuzestan, the desiccation of Lake Urmia in Azerbaijan, the reckless dam construction in Kurdistan, and the air pollution in Tehran are all

examples of these environmental crises. In every case, flawed policymaking was identified as the primary cause of the deplorable environmental situation.

Many environmental and social activists describe Iran as a country of crises. These include crises in water supply, unemployment, and hopelessness about the future; corruption and academic fraud; substance abuse; urban marginalisation; marriage and divorce; the struggles of teachers, workers, and merchants; the pension fund crisis; ethnic challenges and women's rights disputes; the spread of high-risk sexual behaviour; migration; the phenomenon of aghazadehs (the privileged children of the elite) and the notion of a 'superior gene'; administrative and financial corruption; astronomical embezzlements; and conflict with countries in the region and the wider world.

> ***Mohsen Goudarzi, a sociologist, researcher, and university lecturer, from Tehran:***
> *I do not agree with the policies and cultural approach that tries to promote a specific lifestyle through bureaucratic tools.*

Mismanagement, the failure to utilise elites in specialised positions, and the prioritisation of personal connections over merit at various levels have intensified these crises. Among all segments of the population, ethnic groups express the highest levels of dissatisfaction, as the sense of discrimination and discontent becomes more pronounced and visible the further one moves from the centre. While government media policies do not permit open discussion of ethnic challenges, the advancements in communication technology, including social media, have transcended the boundaries of the national broadcaster. They have created a networked virtual society that seriously impacts real-world social equations and relationships, serving as a fundamental factor in shaping the collective actions and group demands of contemporary societies. In the new type of collective protests seen since late 2017 in Iran, virtual networks have become the inspiration and catalyst for societal demonstrations, playing a decisive role in both raising social awareness and coordinating logistics.

These protests have progressed to the point where some politicians within the system have proposed a plan for national reconciliation in an effort to preserve the regime. This idea has been repeatedly raised, yet it has been fiercely rejected by the architects of the status quo—those who control the core of power and

decision-making and who consistently prioritise their ideological interests over the national interest and the public good. They insist on continuing their extremist, unilateral, non-interactive, and belligerent policies, both at home and abroad. What is clear, therefore, is that ethnic and religious minorities, like the majority of Iranian society from workers and teachers to students and women, have demands that cannot be met within the framework of the country's current laws and management. In Iran's dysfunctional and unplanned environment, plagued by a crisis of mismanagement, it is impossible to conceive of national cohesion, ethnic solidarity, or a peaceful, coexistence-oriented future. The establishment of such a desirable state requires a range of prerequisites and actions—attitudinal, legal, structural, and strategic—which, based on the results of this research, are proposed under the following headings.

## Achieving Economic Justice

Justice can be defined as 'the allocation of a society's opportunities and resources to its citizens based on merit and need, in such a way that all feel a sense of satisfaction'. According to this, in a comprehensive system of justice, both the methods and the outcomes must be just. An economic system is successful in achieving justice when tension and conflict within its subsystems, and within the system as a whole, are minimised or non-existent. If the social, political, and cultural systems cannot interact logically, justice will not materialise. Therefore, in some cases, governments themselves can become an obstacle to the realisation of economic justice. This is particularly impactful in a country like Iran, where the economy is fundamentally state-controlled.

> ***Young Arab man, from Hamidiyeh, Khuzestan:***
> *Our economic situation is not good at all. Everything is very expensive, for example, the price of sugar and granulated sugar. There is no justice in Iran. But not in a way that only Arabs are oppressed; in Iran, all people have been oppressed.*

As stated in the previous chapter and above, in the industrial sector, the bulk of the country's production is located in the central, Persian-speaking provinces. The peripheral provinces, where ethnic groups are concentrated, have been deprived. We have discussed the dissatisfaction and sense of inequality among

the Turk, Kurd, Arab, and Baluch communities. We have noted the absence of manufacturing plants and industrial towns in the Kurdistan and Baluchistan regions, a situation that has forced the people into the informal economy of smuggling, cross-border porting (kulbari), and fuel carrying (sookhtbari)—a state of affairs that, beyond its damaging consequences for the national economy, perpetuates deprivation and systemic discrimination. In contrast, the establishment of manufacturing and processing plants in these regions would not only improve production and prevent capital flight for the purchase of foreign goods, but it would also create employment, harness the intellectual and practical capabilities of the local population, and foster a sense of satisfaction among educated young Kurds and Baluch, whose physical and financial security would be protected through formal employment within the country.

***Mohammad-Taqi Sheikhi, a demography lecturer at Al-Zahra University, from Tehran:***

*The centralised state has been in Tehran province and Tehran city, and for the past 80 years, investment has been here, while other cities have been deprived of industry and machinery.*

However, the mere presence of industries and factories in these regions is not sufficient to create a sense of equality. A similar sense of dissatisfaction exists among the Azeri and Arab populations, stemming from two main factors. On one hand, it relates to a comparative view of the industrial infrastructure in their own regions versus the central Persian regions, which reveals a glaring disparity. More importantly, however, it is rooted in the distribution of profits and wealth generated by these industries and natural resources. In most cases, the only share that ethnic groups receive from these assets is in the form of providing unskilled labour and bearing the burden of environmental pollution.

Although the economic conditions of the Turk and Arab ethnic groups are better than those of the Kurds and Baluch, a sense of inequality persists because they compare themselves to the Persian-speaking population and perceive their own economic status to be lower. This is not to say that there is no dissatisfaction among the people in Persian-speaking areas or that they live in absolute prosperity; interviews conducted in those regions also revealed discontent. However, it is a fact that provinces like Isfahan, Markazi, Semnan, Kerman, Yazd, and Alborz enjoy relatively better economic conditions than the rest of Iran. A key finding

concerning the Turk and Arab groups was their belief that their current economic standing is largely a result of the economic policies of the Pahlavi era; they feel that their share of industrial economic benefits during the Islamic Republic has been minimal. It is therefore necessary for state officials not only to help improve the economic conditions in ethnic regions but also to strive for an equitable and equal distribution of national wealth.

In summary, the state's mismanagement has led to the creation of privileged, under-privileged, and deprived regions in Iran. Eliminating the severe economic gaps between different parts of the country, especially the periphery and border areas, requires policies based on a share of benefits proportionate to participation in production, the right to equal opportunity, and a relative balance of wealth and income. Given the level of deprivation and comprehensive developmental lag in some ethnic regions, these areas are in need of economic policies based on positive discrimination[1] and compensatory economic measures in the infrastructural, service, and welfare sectors. Only then will phenomena like selling body parts, kulbari, sookhtbari, and poverty decrease.

When jobs are distributed based on justice and meritocracy; when the people of West Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, whose lands are rich in agricultural resources, minerals, gold, and other natural wealth, receive a share of the proceeds from these resources; when Sistan and Baluchistan is no longer known primarily for drug trafficking—only then will economic justice be established. This

1. The term 'positive discrimination' is a concept in service of meritocracy and the realisation of justice in access to opportunities. However, for various reasons, perhaps the simplest being the negative connotation of the word 'discrimination', it is sometimes misinterpreted as being contrary to justice and merit. The meaning of 'positive discrimination' is the undertaking of actions and the creation of conditions in favour of groups in society that, for reasons such as gender, race, colour, etc., have been treated unjustly. The goal is to grant equal opportunities to all members of society and to achieve justice. Therefore, positive discrimination is inherently the use of methods that bring an end to a discriminatory process, and the concept is introduced into social relations where unjust behaviour is present. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all human beings are entitled to equal rights regardless of race, gender, language, ethnicity, religion, property, etc. Article 19 of the Iranian Constitution also states that all people of Iran enjoy equal rights. Paragraph 9 of Article 3 of the constitution also stipulates the elimination of unjust discrimination and the creation of equitable opportunities for all in all material and spiritual fields. Social justice requires that the granting of opportunities be based on justice and merit, and that all persons have the right to enjoy all available facilities, and that the door to various jobs and positions be open to all under equal conditions. On the other hand, it is necessary that the greatest benefits be considered for the least advantaged groups—who are no different in terms of merit from the rest. See: Khati, Babak (2017). Fararu.

can be achieved through sound economic management based on a fair share proportionate to participation in production, the right to equal opportunity, a relative balance of wealth and income, an end to the ideological view of ethnic groups, and the de-securitisation of border regions where these groups reside. Most of the ethnic areas studied have high potential in agriculture, mining, handicrafts, and livestock products. By establishing industrial plants, agro-industrial complexes, and developing agriculture and animal husbandry, and by utilising their expert, young, and educated workforce, significant strides can be made towards achieving economic and distributive justice.

## Achieving Social and Cultural Justice

Social justice is defined as the fair and balanced distribution of wealth, opportunities, resources, and privileges among all members of a society through institutionalised and structured legal mechanisms (social justice, 2023). The principles of social justice, embedded in a society's basic institutions, provide a method for assigning rights and duties and for determining the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation. In a definition pertinent to our discussion, cultural justice consists of the fair, balanced, and proportionate provision of cultural services and opportunities to all members of society without ethnic or religious discrimination, treating each as an equal citizen (Cultural justice program, 2020). From this perspective, cultural justice can be examined in two key dimensions: material and content-based. The material and structural dimension of culture relates to the equitable distribution of cultural spaces, infrastructure, goods, and services. In this sense, access to cultural products is a realisation of cultural justice. If we look at it from the perspective of distributive justice, this means that all individuals in society, wherever they are, should have adequate access to cultural facilities and infrastructure. The content-based and value-driven dimension of culture is more complex and expansive. It relates to the universal participation in the creation and reproduction of a society's culture. Just as in advanced societies individuals participate in the political sphere through voting and elections to pursue their desires, so too should individuals be able to play a role in the culture of their society, presenting their own values, customs, and traditions (Bahrami Komeil, 2019).

In discussions of justice, two principles are often cited: the first defends equal

liberty and equal opportunity, and the second addresses the conditions under which inequalities can be considered justifiable and fair (Bashiriyeh, 1992). In the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sunni sects and the Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian religions are legally accepted. However, these faiths and sects do not have the same freedom as the official state religion to proselytise on the state broadcaster, in official government propaganda bodies, or in the mass media and press. Adherents of these faiths hold very few senior managerial positions in the country. The findings regarding the Sunni community, the country's largest Muslim minority, reveal significant dissatisfaction. One of the most important issues raised by participants from this group was the lack of a mosque and place of worship for Sunnis in Tehran, a city where they estimate their population to be around one million. To hold their religious ceremonies, they are forced to rent residential properties to use as prayer halls, just to be able to perform their congregational prayers. This not only imposes a financial burden but also subjects them to difficult conditions due to insufficient space, inconvenient locations, long travel distances, and crowded queues. Even in this, they have faced restrictions; in recent years, their prayer halls have been attacked and destroyed. Another source of discontent for Sunnis is the imposition of restrictions on and the closure of their religious schools. Historically, in the Kurdistan and Baluchistan regions, the training of religious scholars was carried out by their own clerics in small chambers (hojrehs) built next to or inside mosques. However, since 2007, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution has insisted that the administration of Sunni religious schools must be under the supervision of the 'Planning Council for Sunni Religious Schools' and the 'Council of the Supreme Leader's Representatives for Sunni Affairs'. Many Sunni religious schools refused to accept this decision and were subsequently closed. Restrictions on religious leaders and the monitoring of their speech and movements were other issues mentioned by some interviewees.

***Mohsen Goudarzi, a sociologist, researcher, and university lecturer, from Tehran:***

*I consider myself more Iranian and within the cultural framework of Iran, belonging to Iran's cultural tradition, for example, its poetry. But my feeling towards Iranian ethnic groups is a mixture of respect, anger, and dissatisfaction with the injustice and discrimination against them.*

Today, research in various scientific fields points to the inefficiency of top-down policies. It is now widely argued that the state should withdraw from the management of many local affairs, and by creating suitable conditions and cooperating with non-governmental organisations, should devolve the administration of affairs to the people themselves as much as possible. The Sunni community has historically managed its own religious centres in terms of human resources, finances, and other areas without any problems. It is proposed that the controlling and security-focused view of this group be lifted, and that local leaders and people be given the freedom to manage their own religious affairs. The terrorist attacks carried out in the late 2000s and early 2010s in Sistan and Baluchistan and Kurdistan provinces were a direct result of this securitised and discriminatory outlook. Having a dedicated religious centre and mosques for Sunnis in Tehran, alongside the places of worship of other monotheistic religions, would not pose a problem for any faith and would certainly fulfil a forty-year-old demand of this community, moving the country towards the concept of justice and equality. The failure to employ Sunni elites in the senior management of the country, at the ministerial and provincial governorship levels, is another source of dissatisfaction, a discontent that is intensified by the discriminatory and patently unjust treatment they face in employment screening processes, which makes it difficult even for young and educated Sunnis to find very ordinary jobs.

Another significant finding of the research was the issue of mother-tongue language and education. According to the explicit text of the constitution, different Iranian ethnic groups are permitted to learn their own ethnic language, and there should be no restrictions in this regard. This, however, has never been implemented and has remained merely a legal provision. In reality, when no arrangements are made for this issue and ethnic languages are viewed through a security lens, it amounts to discrimination and lawlessness. In recent

years, departments of Kurdish and Turkish language and literature have been established at the universities of Kurdistan and East Azerbaijan, respectively. However, a crucial point to consider is the lack of support for these fields in the job market. Since the goal of many university applicants is to choose a field that can guarantee their future career, the mere existence of such a university degree without any backing in the labour market has led to a lack of interest and empty seats. It is therefore essential that, in order to make this goal practical, mother-tongue education is brought to lower levels, especially the first years of schooling.

To achieve social justice in the domain of mother-tongue language, correct policies must be designed with the guidance of ethnic linguists and expert sociolinguists to eliminate this sense of discrimination. When all resources are used to promote and expand one specific language and religion, while other ethnic and linguistic minorities are restricted through a security-focused lens and are not provided with suitable conditions for their growth, it evokes a policy of assimilation or elimination of ethnic identity. This type of inequality is unjustifiable and divisive, leading to social fragmentation and a lack of cohesion. Lawlessness and poor management, which can be traced back to a lack of meritocracy, are among the most important reasons for the failure to achieve social justice.

Every ethnic group uses certain symbols, customs, and lifestyles to maintain its identity and show its distinctiveness from others. Local attire and the significance of certain colours within it, specific ethnic musical styles, regional festivals and conferences, group celebrations of certain holidays, local dances, and the general preservation of folk culture are examples of these local symbols among Iranian ethnic groups. The findings of this research show that the lowest level of perceived inequality among the groups studied relates to this area. The state has been relatively successful in this domain and has managed to gain the satisfaction of various ethnic groups. It should be noted that the state's success in this area is less a product of targeted policy, cultural investment, or artistic planning, and more a result of its non-interference in these spheres and allowing them a relative degree of freedom. The right to use local dress, play local music, and hold local ceremonies for celebrations and mourning is preserved for different ethnic groups. In the interviews conducted, apart from a reference to a restriction on the use of specific colours in the clothing of Kurds and Arabs, no

other issue indicating an injustice in this area was raised.

The customary rules and social values that shape attitudes towards ethnicities and their cultures were a matter of greater concern for the groups, causing them dissatisfaction because, in their view, inappropriate judgments are made about them, especially in Persian-speaking cities. However, at the state level, no instance of government pressure indicating a restriction on them was observed. Recently, the use of local attire has been permitted in a large number of government offices, a decision that is another important step towards creating a sense of cultural and social equality among Iranian ethnic groups. The existence of these cultural freedoms, which foster a sense of satisfaction among ethnic groups, can serve as a model for other sectors as well.

Iran is a country of ethnic and religious diversity, yet restrictions are sometimes imposed on ethnic groups during certain ceremonies and rituals. For example, in the celebration of religious holidays like Eid al-Adha or Eid al-Fitr, on which Sunnis and Shias often differ in determining the correct day, Sunnis frequently celebrate on the same day as Arab countries due to their shared religious jurisprudence. In the Kurdistan region, this alignment often exists with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and their declaration of the holiday, for entirely non-political reasons, frequently coincides due to shared religious principles. Nevertheless, despite the legality of religious freedoms mentioned in Article 12 of the constitution, not only is the testimony of Sunni witnesses disregarded by the Supreme Leader's office, which the system considers the authority for declaring the holiday, but Sunni clerics are also repeatedly warned by the clerical council and security agencies not to make public announcements. Similarly, in Kurdistan, restrictions are placed on the celebration of Nowruz. In some cases, the government shows sensitivity towards the celebration of cultural events such as 'International Mother Language Day' (21 February) and 'Baluch Culture Day' (2 March). Baluch Culture Day is celebrated officially and with great prominence in Pakistan's Balochistan and in Afghanistan. However, inside Iran, due to a lack of public awareness about the nature of such ceremonies and an overemphasis on religious aspects and mourning periods, celebratory events either are not permitted or must be conducted through a series of bureaucratic approvals, often framed within the context of the 22 Bahman (anniversary of the revolution) or Fajr Decade celebrations, or Unity Week, in a religio-governmental format.

The right to hold cultural, ethnic, and religious ceremonies and rituals is

recognised in many human rights documents. Among these is the 'Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities', which states in Article 2, Paragraph 2, that persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life. Article 2, Paragraph 4 of the same declaration obliges states to take measures for persons belonging to minorities to enable them to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs, except where specific practices are in violation of national law and contrary to international standards (1992). Furthermore, according to Article 27 of the Iranian Constitution, assemblies are free, provided they are not armed and do not violate Islamic principles. Therefore, preventing the holding of religious and ethnic ceremonies is a violation of citizenship rights (1995: 20).

Gender discrimination at both the state level and within society is another crucial issue, a large part of which, beyond legal limitations, is attributable to customs, rules, and social norms. Throughout history, following the decline of the matriarchal era on the Iranian plateau, Iranian society has been patriarchal. From the level of the tribe and family and in relationships between men and women, men have in most cases held power, while women have been subordinate and obedient to their commands. Now, at the social and economic level, based on prevailing customary, cultural, and religious beliefs, the duty of providing for the family falls on the man. It is therefore assumed that their sense of responsibility and work capacity are greater than women's; consequently, the job market has been dominated by them. Despite the high rate of female university admissions in the last fifteen years, after graduation, suitable job opportunities are not available for them, either in government offices or in private companies. As a result, they are forced to return to the traditional family environment and, according to customary rules, accept the duties of being a wife and mother, just like their own mothers did. In cases where they are employed by companies, they are paid low wages and face a significant pay gap with men for the same work.

***Akbar Yadegari, a painter, writer, and theatre director, from Semnan:***

*Discrimination is also seen in the sexual division of labour. They have made some jobs taboo for women without any specific reason, such as the presidency.*

Naturally, a society that wishes to develop must utilise all of its potential forces. Ignoring half of the population and setting them aside means failing to properly utilise one's human capital. This is all the more regrettable when women and girls have shown in fair competition with men in nationwide exams that they not only lack no talent but in fact achieve most of the academic successes. It is therefore essential that gender bias and the view of women as the 'second sex' be abandoned at both the state and societal levels. The government must strive to provide equal employment shares and advantages for women in recruitment exams, abolishing the quota systems that have existed until now. It must also allocate a suitable share of ministerial positions, governorships, and other high-ranking executive posts—which have so far been single-gender appointments—to women. Furthermore, using the power of the media and the expertise of social elites and civil activists, the government must enlighten the public and dismantle the stereotype of female incompetence, to the point where managers select their staff based solely on individual talents, without any gender bias. In reality, women and girls from ethnic and religious minority groups experience multiple layers of discrimination—gender, ethnic, and religious. They can be described as the most oppressed stratum of these communities, facing institutionalised hardships and a lack of legal and customary support in all political, social, cultural, and economic fields. Therefore, any movement towards achieving justice must prioritise women, because it is only in the shadow of women's freedom and the attainment of their rights that a society can set itself on the true path to democracy and the institutionalisation of liberty and human rights.

The concept of the 'second-class' or 'third-class' citizen is a common term used to describe the status of ethnic groups. This situation should be taken as a serious warning to cultural policymakers. Although this concept is not officially articulated in political circles, its theoretical framework exists among academic and scientific elites, providing a basis for its assessment in Iran. While its discussion as a national issue may not be welcomed by the political system, refusing to discuss or denying it does not mean it does not exist. The very formation of this concept in the minds of the general public, and especially among ethnic groups, is proof of its existential reality. The unequal distribution of wealth, services, and facilities, the exclusion of subordinate ethnic groups by dominant ones in multi-ethnic provinces, and similar issues are all factors that will create the conditions for inter-ethnic conflict and antagonism.

> ***Alireza Khani, a cultural and literary activist, from Eyvan (Ilam):***
> *When there is an unequal distribution of power and wealth, then consequently, our demands have not been met. When we, as Kurds, do not have a Kurdish minister or president, and there are no large factories to lift our youth out of unemployment, then this discriminatory view certainly exists.*

To eliminate this concept from the collective mindset of Iranian society and its ethnic groups, it is proposed that the economic and cultural gaps be minimised. To this end, the following strategies are emphasised:

1. A comprehensive, development-oriented approach towards deprived regions, prioritising ethnic and religious minorities.
2. The development of participatory planning that utilises the diverse cultural capacities of ethnic groups.
3. The reduction of centralisation and the redistribution of economic and social opportunities.
4. Bottom-up planning and reverse development, such that resource distribution begins in the border regions and then moves towards the centre.
5. The reform of the administrative system and the country's managerial hierarchy by delegating more authority to local managers.

## The Realisation of Political Justice

Political justice may be defined as the rights-based allocation of political values and privileges, a process that culminates in citizens attaining their rights through the proportional distribution of political offices and opportunities. The establishment of political justice lays the groundwork for 'citizen choice' and opens a pathway for society to secure its 'political rights' (Aghataghi et al., 2024, p. 38). The domain of political justice is intrinsically linked to the dynamics of power, governance, and public participation. A pivotal question within this domain is how rulers acquire their legitimacy and whether they are, in fact, perceived as legitimate by the populace. From a public perspective, a government is considered just if its rulers are deemed worthy of their position. Conversely, if power has been seized through force and coercion, the regime is regarded as

tyrannical, and obedience to it is not deemed permissible (Jamalzadeh, 2008, p. 12).

> ***Bagher Sadri-Nia, academic staff member and university lecturer, from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan):***
> *It is intellectual factors that lead to relations with other countries, not ethnic factors. Thought is the tool for communication with ourselves and with other countries. This is an important point.*

One of the most critical issues within the sphere of political justice is the role and function of political parties. As discussed in the preceding chapter, despite approximately two hundred political parties being officially licensed in Iran, there is a conspicuous absence of substantive party activity within the fabric of society. If, for instance, a selection of educated Iranians were asked to name just three of these two hundred licensed parties, they would most likely be unable to do so. Some of the elites studied in this research suggest that success in both domestic and international arenas is achieved by aligning with similar intellectual spheres rather than mobilising around ethnic constituencies.

The findings of the present study corroborate this state of affairs. According to the ethnic groups surveyed, political parties in Iran tend to proliferate ephemerally, like mushrooms, during the election season for a maximum period of two weeks, only to vanish once the electoral process concludes. Furthermore, these parties predominantly operate in service of a monolithic, structural mode of thought. Within ethnic regions, there is a stark absence of political parties that articulate the specific demands of their own communities. Perhaps the most significant reason for the torpor and marginalisation of political parties in Iran can be attributed to the securitised, monitored, and controlled environments enforced by various institutions—many of which operate beyond the government's direct control—as well as the nation's extensive filtering networks. The primary function of a political party is to voice the demands of its constituents through democratic principles and dialogue. When such processes are absent from a society, democratic principles and discourse give way to conflict and violence, the emergence of which can pose a significant challenge to the regime's legitimacy. It is therefore imperative to dismantle the securitised and militarised atmosphere at the societal level. This entails not only activating licensed parties and granting

them access to diverse media platforms but also extending the sphere of party politics to encompass ethnic groups, thereby allowing their demands to be articulated and resolved through exclusively democratic and dialogic means.

> ***Mowlana Abdolhamid Esmail-Zehi, Sunni Friday Prayer Leader of Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan):***
> *75 per cent, and at a minimum 70 per cent, of the people here are Baluch, but the jobs are not in their hands, and their participation is very minimal. They are not at the head of affairs, and in the management of the province, the share of the Baluch is the absolute minimum; they have nothing.*

In practice, a just government is one that removes restrictions to facilitate equal and free public participation in the political sphere and distributes power and political appointments based on individual talent and merit (An Introduction to the Concept of Political Justice, 2015). In this regard, all four non-Persian ethnic groups studied herein expressed their dissatisfaction with the absence of such a conducive environment. The Kurdish, Baloch, and Arab groups reported that in over four decades of the Islamic Republic's rule, there has not been a single instance of a fellow native speaker being appointed to a top-tier political position, such as head of the executive, legislative, or judicial branches, a government minister, a provincial governor-general, or an ambassador to a strategically important country. In Arab and Baloch-populated regions, the appointment of district governors is predominantly made from non-native individuals. For the Balochistan and Kurdistan communities, this inequality is compounded by their religious affiliation, which they see as another basis for discrimination alongside their ethnicity. Accordingly, the prerequisite of being a 'political-religious figure' and an adherent of the official state religion effectively disqualifies members of religious and ethnic minorities. This situation is indicative of an ideological state apparatus wherein the nation's political affairs are monopolised by a particular intellectual faction.

Interestingly, the level of dissatisfaction among the Azeri Turkic ethnic group, who share the same religious denomination as the ruling establishment, is no less than that of the other three groups. This suggests that the prevailing conditions cannot be attributed solely to an ideological outlook; a mono-causal explanation is insufficient. The Turkic people believe that, over the past forty-plus years,

they have been politically marginalised and have received important political appointments only on a very rare and limited basis, disproportionate to their share of the country's total population.

In other words, a dichotomy between 'insiders' (khodi) and 'outsiders' (gheir-khodi) has been established among the political elite in Iran. The 'insiders' occupy all levels of public administration, from district chief to the highest echelons, while the 'outsiders' are entirely absent. This described reality is profoundly at odds with the principles of political justice outlined at the beginning of this section. If this issue is not addressed—and if the 'insider/outsider' paradigm is not dismantled in favour of meritocracy in management at all political levels—the realisation of political justice and the legitimacy of the government will be jeopardised. It is therefore essential that those who have been ostracised as 'outsiders' be treated as 'insiders'. Concurrently, the establishment of a federal political system could empower all of Iran's diverse ethnic and linguistic groups to determine their own political destiny. The implementation of such a measure could minimise the political cost to the state and ultimately lead to the formation of genuine political justice.

## The Realisation of Social Welfare

Social welfare comprises an organised framework of laws, regulations, programmes, and policies, delivered through welfare and social institutions, designed to meet the material and non-material needs of individuals and to secure human flourishing, thereby fostering growth and excellence (Abdol, 2019). It encompasses both the material and non-material dimensions of life. The material dimension focuses on the provision of basic necessities such as food, clothing, employment, housing, and healthcare. The non-material dimension includes literacy and education, health, legal protection for the public, and the enjoyment of human, political, social, and economic rights. In the 2017 CE World Welfare Index, Iran ranked 117th out of 142 countries. This position indicates a dire state of social welfare. More concerning, however, is that social welfare indicators—such as access to infrastructure, roads, dams, health services, cinemas, parks, green spaces, leisure facilities, personal and public security, and judicial safety—decline precipitously as one moves further from the centre and towards minority-inhabited and border regions.

***Young Arab man, working in a grocery shop, from Mashhad:***
*I don't want anything from society anymore because if I do, I'll just be more disappointed. I'm from Abadan, but because of unemployment in my city, I had to go elsewhere to be able to earn an income.*

Access to hospitals in the provinces of Kurdistan and Balochistan is grievously inadequate, to the extent that hospitals in Kurdistan are incapable of performing even the most basic surgical procedures and medical care, forcing patients to travel for three to four hours or more to reach provincial medical centres. A visit to Tehran's hospitals reveals a vast influx of patients from various provincial towns who, driven by the deprivation in their own regions, have sought refuge in the capital, with they and their families often spending the night in hospital courtyards or on surrounding streets.

Access to natural gas remains unavailable in many border regions, particularly in their villages. In recent years, this has led to catastrophic incidents in schools across Kurdistan and Balochistan due to the use of oil heaters, claiming the lives of several children and teachers and leaving many others with permanent burn injuries. In many rural schools in these areas, classes are still held in shacks (kaparha) or in open fields. For educational levels beyond primary school, even these makeshift schools do not exist, compelling adolescent boys and girls from villages to travel to urban schools daily, in all weather conditions. The lack of adequate transportation frequently leads to students, especially girls, being compelled to abandon their education. Even in urban areas, schools often operate on a two-shift system with excessively large class sizes.

The concepts of cinema, parks, and leisure are virtually meaningless in Iran's border regions. For instance, according to 2020 CE statistics, the province of Sistan and Balochistan, the second-largest in the country, has only four cinema halls, of which just one is operational. It ranks 29th in the country for the number of screens, seats, and audience attendance (Ranking of Cinema Halls and Audiences in Iran's Provinces, 2022). This situation is mirrored across most welfare and recreational indices in the majority of Iran's ethnic and peripheral provinces. Beyond this, they suffer from a similar deprivation of essential infrastructure. The heart-wrenching news of children in Baneh and Marivan, on Iran's western borders, being killed or losing limbs to landmines while playing is reported with

alarming frequency. The developmental, industrial, and road infrastructure in minority and border areas is in a deplorable state, with the roads having turned into ‘human slaughterhouses’ for their youth. As Mehdi Farshadan, a Member of Parliament for Kurdistan Province, noted when highlighting the province's last-place ranking in rural road development, the roads there are veritable "human slaughterhouses" (The condition of Kurdistan's roads is poor and they are "human slaughterhouses", 2018). In light of this, it is recommended that social welfare indicators be fundamentally re-evaluated through proper management and without ethnic or religious discrimination, particularly in the sectors of health and education. This review must, at a minimum, consider regional scope and road infrastructure. To prevent irreparable harm, existing shortcomings must be rectified and appropriate measures implemented.

## The Realisation of Media Justice in Relation to Ethnic Groups

Since the advent of the printing press and the subsequent social transformations of recent centuries, mass media has emerged as one of the most influential social institutions, alongside the family and the formal education system. The number, quality, and technological sophistication of media outlets, along with their audiences and users, are ever-increasing. These modern communication tools bear significant responsibilities, including information dissemination, surveillance and guardianship, education, and the enhancement of social cohesion. In Iran, the national broadcaster, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB)—manifested primarily through state television and digital media—has failed to adequately represent ethnic identity. Indeed, the national radio and television networks can by no means be described as truly ‘national’. The provincial media channels that have been established often act more as a façade or a superficial representation of ethnic cultures, failing to reflect or respond to their genuine cultural needs. Approximately one hundred percent of the programmes, documentaries, series, and films on national television channels depict the lifestyle and culture of Persian speakers, with a distinct Tehran-centric focus. It is only with great rarity and in a limited capacity that one can find a programme showcasing the lifestyle, culture, and customs of ethnic regions. When such films or series are occasionally broadcast, they often adopt a comedic tone and, rather than introducing the culture of non-Persian-speaking peoples, tend to ridicule them. A prominent example is the multi-season series 'Nun.Kh', which critics argue

portrays the Kurdish people as primitive and unacquainted with civility.

From a religious perspective, nearly all programmes that directly or indirectly address religious themes do so in alignment with the official state religion, Shi'ism, leaving Sunni adherents unable to see themselves reflected.

> ***Arab male student, from Abadan:***
> *In reality, there is no media that aligns with our culture. For example, our music is very important to us, and it's not seen in the media as it truly is, or the various ceremonies we have. The provincial media should be in accordance with the culture of each ethnic group.*

In addition to national media, each province has its own audio-visual media outlets, typically named after the province's predominant ethnic group, a historical or geographical landmark, or a symbolic regional figure. Our findings indicate that Azeri Turks, who reside mainly in the provinces of East Azerbaijan, Zanjan, Ardabil, and parts of West Azerbaijan, make little use of these provincial networks, as they do not consider them to be adequate representations of their culture and customs. Regarding the Kurdish ethnic group, present in the provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and Ilam, as well as over half of West Azerbaijan, it can be said that until about three to four years ago, there was widespread dissatisfaction with their provincial networks. However, in recent years, changes have been implemented in the Kurdistan and Mahabad (southern West Azerbaijan) networks, and our findings suggest a degree of relative satisfaction among the general populace in these areas. Over this period, greater attention has been paid to the region's culture and arts, especially in the fields of folklore, music, traditional attire, and local culture. For the first time in the history of the IRIB, musical instruments are now shown on these two networks, and major Iranian and local music groups are invited to perform.

While this represents a positive turning point, these media outlets are not without their flaws, and points of dissatisfaction persist. A significant negative aspect that remains is the predominance of Shi'a religious thought and the hegemony of state ideology and centrist supremacism, despite the almost entirely Sunni composition of these regions. Until a few years ago, neither of these networks broadcast the call to prayer (adhan) according to the local Sunni timings. Even now, the local adhan is only broadcast for three of the five prayer

times: morning, noon, and sunset. This is despite the fact that, according to Sunni religious practice, there are two additional calls to prayer for the afternoon and evening. Furthermore, there is no mention of prominent Sunni religious figures on these networks, whereas during religious occasions related to the Shi'a Imams, the programming is entirely dedicated to Shi'a narratives. Naturally, at such times, viewership plummets to near zero, and the resources invested in these programmes yield no return.

The province of Sistan and Balochistan is a composite of two minority groups: the Sistani people, who are adherents of Shi'ism and reside in the north, and the Sunni Baloch majority, who inhabit the central and southern parts of the province. Findings from the Baloch ethnic group reveal widespread dissatisfaction with the provincial television network. They believe that the management of this network is controlled by the Sistani religious minority, which is aligned with the ruling establishment. Even the network's name, 'Hamoun', is derived from a geographical feature of the Sistani region. They feel the channel predominantly endeavours to showcase its own culture, customs, and religion, and that the Baloch people do not see themselves adequately represented. According to them, only a few hours of programming are broadcast in the Balochi language daily, and these are typically scheduled during off-peak hours with minimal viewership. Similar sentiments were expressed by the Arab ethnic group, who are situated between Persian and Bakhtiari populations. These collective experiences have fostered a sense of discrimination among the aforementioned ethnic and religious groups. They feel their identity is not reflected in these networks, and consequently, they turn to satellite channels and internet networks from across the border that align with their ethnic and religious cultures. For each of these ethnic and religious groups, several channels exist in neighbouring countries such as Iraq, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Pakistan, and Arab nations, as well as various networks run by opposition groups based in Europe.

> ***Young male merchant in Tabriz market:***
> *It's obvious that the media doesn't behave properly regarding ethnic groups. Just look at how the media treats different accents. They are mostly used for laughs and comedy. This is an insult to ethnic groups.*

It is evident that the national media propagates and displays a collective

identity that is religiously and politically sanctioned by the state. Within this framework, Iran's ethnic and religious minorities have no place in the policies of the IRIB. This disregard for the cultures of ethnic and religious minorities is not confined to the operational conduct of the IRIB but is also embedded in the organisation's charter. Article 9 of this charter states the organisation's objectives: "The main goal of the organisation, as a public university, is the dissemination of Islamic culture, the creation of a favourable environment for the purification and education of humanity, the growth of moral virtues, and the acceleration of the evolutionary movement of the Islamic Revolution throughout the world. These goals shall be achieved within the framework of guidance, educational, news, and entertainment programmes" (Charter of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, 1988).

This stands in stark contrast to the true mission of media, which should be to produce content that fosters ethnic integration, cohesion, and solidarity. The realisation of media justice for ethnic and religious groups requires, first and foremost, media and cultural policies that acknowledge and are committed to the freedoms and rights of minorities. To this end, productions could be created that emphasise the shared historical and cultural heritage of all Iranians. Ethnic media professionals could be utilised within the IRIB. Policies of homogenisation and the politicisation of cultural issues should be avoided. Furthermore, an equitable approach must be adopted towards all ethnic groups, and their cultural traditions and practices must be respected. If such measures are taken, inter-ethnic familiarity will increase and social distances will diminish, for media is a cornerstone of peaceful ethnic coexistence. However, the public media, led by television, has failed to meet the needs of the general populace, pushing people towards online media and virtual spaces. Meanwhile, the imposition of internet filtering and the hardware-based confrontation with these media by certain intellectual currents indicate a desire to monopolise information and prevent its free circulation.

In this context, it is proposed that instead of confronting virtual media and blocking information channels, a climate of tolerance should be fostered. Not only should the online media sphere be liberalised, but the private sector and independent parties should be permitted entry into television broadcasting. Licences for the establishment of private networks should be made available, allowing private and local media to produce and broadcast programmes alongside

the national broadcaster. This would create healthy competition and could help restore public trust in the national media itself.

## The Necessity of Interfaith Rapprochement and Securing Minority Religious Rights

One of the most salient findings of this research in the domain of social and cultural justice is the dissatisfaction of the Sunni religious minority with the state. Because this religious identity overlaps with the ethnic identities of the Baluch, Kurd, Turkmen, and others, it often takes on a greater significance and expression in social, cultural, and political equations. The majority of interviewees from all ethnic and religious groups believe that other Islamic sects do not receive the same budgetary allocations or the same educational, cultural, and promotional facilities as the official state religion (Twelver Shi'ism). In Tehran, there is no mosque for Sunnis. In Mashhad, Sunni mosques have been demolished. Religious preachers are arrested, religious schools are closed, the publication of religious books by minorities faces severe restrictions, the travel of their religious leaders is controlled, and various other prohibitions are imposed upon them.

These issues, beyond fueling political conflict between the followers of minority faiths and the ruling regime and thus threatening the country's political cohesion, also create social divergence and hostility between religions and sects, disrupting peaceful coexistence. Religious restrictions, in and of themselves, can lead to extremism and violence, examples of which have been observed in recent years, particularly among Sunnis in Baluchistan and Kurdistan. In response to this, the idea of rapprochement, dialogue, and deliberation, based on freedom and mutual respect for rituals and beliefs, is proposed. This would lead to unity and cohesion among ethnic and religious minorities, and its outcome would be tolerance and peaceful coexistence. When interfaith rapprochement is encouraged and promoted, the emphasis shifts to commonalities, which in turn brings different faiths and sects closer together. It should be noted that an institution named the 'World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought' currently exists, but its mission is primarily focused outside Iran's borders, aimed at introducing and legitimising the Shia faith in other Islamic countries. Internally, its efforts are largely directed at gaining influence among Sunni scholars and elevating the status of those clerics who are close to the regime, and it holds little standing among independent Sunni scholars.

***Bagher Sadri-Nia, academic staff member and university lecturer, from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan):***
*The official religion should not be presented in such a way that some feel they are in a minority, and other religions do not feel insulted or suppressed.*

The vast majority of tenets in both Sunnism and Shi'ism consist of shared religious principles. The conflict lies almost entirely in the matter of governance, dating back some 1400 years. Adherents of Shi'ism, based on their interpretation of religious sources, believe that leadership should have passed to Ali ibn Abi Talib. In contrast, followers of Sunnism, based on other sources and traditions, believe that the events of that era did not represent a deviation from the path of the Prophet of Islam. This difference of opinion has persisted ever since, and whenever one of these two groups has held power, it has sought to implement its own ideology while marginalising the other. In the current situation, with governance in the hands of Shia thought, and based on the research findings discussed above, followers of the Sunni faith protest against a prevailing discrimination and dissatisfaction. A crucial finding of this study, according to interviewees from both Shia and Sunni communities, is that the removal of religious ideology from the foundations of the state and the adoption of a secular system of governance is a practical solution. A significant effect of this would be the negation of any privilege or injustice based on religious belief, allowing human talents to be utilised solely on the basis of knowledge and expertise.

## Utilising the Affirmative Potential of the Constitution and Implementing its Suspended Articles

Some of the demands articulated by ethnic groups can be met by referring to the unimplemented articles of the constitution. The religious and human freedoms enshrined in Articles 12, 13, and 14; the right to mother-tongue education in Article 15 and other relevant articles; and the principle of equality for all ethnic groups and races in Article 19, among many other provisions, all point to an affirmative potential within the country's laws for securing the rights of ethnic and religious minorities.

> ***Mohsen Soudmand, a psychologist and consultant, from Ardabil:***
> *Mother tongue education can be community-led. It should be handed over to the people themselves. It is a right, and it is mentioned in the Constitution. The government or the Ministry of Education should allow it; if there is a demand, classes should be formed.*

Devolving the management of the cultural affairs of ethnic groups to non-governmental organisations is an effective solution to this problem. According to the findings of this research, the source of dissatisfaction for these groups—a discontent that at times becomes so intense that it verges on social crisis and collapse—is the fact that these laws have remained suspended at the legislative level and have not been implemented throughout the entire history of the Islamic Republic. During this period, various governments with different intellectual and political leanings have come and gone, yet none has dared to discuss these dormant articles or to strive for their implementation. As has been stated, many of the demands of the various ethnic and religious groups align with these very principles, and many of the injustices they have suffered have been the result of arbitrary decisions made by incompetent managers. It is therefore necessary, given the country's current deep-rooted crises, to return to these affirmative constitutional principles as a potential solution to public demands and as a path to achieving reconciliation and sustainable peace. By treating the constitution as the final arbiter, it would be possible not only to counter the arbitrary views of unwise individuals but also to soothe the tense and volatile atmosphere in Iranian society.

Regarding the positive and negative potentials of the constitution of the Islamic Republic, it is essential to clarify that while it does contain affirmative provisions that could moderate certain ethnic policies, some of its other explicit and foundational principles constitute a significant barrier to achieving justice and eradicating systemic discrimination between ethnic groups in Iran. This problem is systematically intensified in the executive and practical spheres. Therefore, the preservation of ethnic identity and the elimination of discrimination require a fundamental transformation in the nature of political power and its legal regime—a transformation based on a belief in human rights and individual and social freedoms, one that is prepared to accept diversity and plurality in all their

dimensions, and which legally and structurally guarantees the protection of the rights and interests of all groups and strata, both minority and majority.

## Concluding Remarks

The interpretation and analysis of the findings of this research on the situation of ethnic groups and the question of ethnicity in Iran, while acknowledging the historical solidarity and coexistence of these groups, reveal a growing trend of ethnic divergence. The primary and accelerating factors behind this trend are the dominant nationalist discourses and the nature of the ruling political systems in Iran which, through their ethnic and religious policies, have shaped a vision of national and territorial identity whose inevitable consequences include the isolation and elimination of ethnic identity and the annulment of the rights and merits of ethnic groups.

This trend has intensified in recent decades under the ideological rule of the Islamic Republic, in concert with major domestic and international political and social crises. Many experts in the fields of sociology and political science have warned that if the current trajectory continues, the collapse of the pillars of Iran's political, economic, and social life, and the eclipse of any possibility for peace, will be inevitable.

Given the legal, structural, and institutional dimensions of ethnic and religious discrimination and oppression in Iran, which are tied at a higher level to the very nature of the ruling political regime, any effort to change these relations and to realise ethnic rights in accordance with the principles of human rights and the freedoms enshrined in international conventions requires a transformation in the pillars of political power. The ground for this change must be prepared through peaceful and peace-oriented political and social capacities, avoiding violence and socio-political conflict, to enable a successful transition from the current critical state to a more desirable condition.

Unfortunately, considering the positions of the ruling establishment and its short- and medium-term plans, even the most basic prerequisites for such a change are absent in Iran's current situation. Not even a glimmer of hope for an opening towards top-down change is visible. Therefore, given the accumulation of crises and the absence of a rational and strategic will on the part of the state to confront them, as we approach the end of the fourteenth century of the Persian calendar, the country's economic, political, and cultural horizons depict a future

that is more ambiguous and challenging than ever. Social collapse, a rising tide of discontent, social and economic unrest, and the emergence of revolutionary movements seeking to move beyond the current ruling regime are all among its probable scenarios.

*Appendix Chapter:*

# The Contours of Identity and the Transformations of Iranian Society at the Dawn of the 15th Century (Solar Hijri)

## Introduction

In the short span of time since the first edition of this research was completed in early 2020, Iran has entered a period of accelerated and turbulent change. The country's domestic and foreign relations have been reshaped by profound political, economic, and social shifts, which have had a particularly momentous impact on the discourses of collective identity and ethnic relations. This period, which can rightly be considered a new chapter in Iran's contemporary history, was defined by two landmark events that convulsed the public sphere: the nationwide protests of November 2019 and the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising of 2022. The overt and covert consequences of these movements have resonated deep within Iranian society and politics, establishing them as fundamental turning points for any re-examination of the nation's internal dynamics and the complex interplay of ethnic and national identity.

Consequently, any contemporary study of collective identity in Iran would be fundamentally incomplete without a thorough consideration of these transformations. This chapter, therefore, undertakes a dual task. On the one

hand, it re-examines the events and conditions of this recent period, supported by statistical data and documented reports, through the conceptual and theoretical lenses established in this study. On the other, it comparatively reviews the original findings, analytical propositions, and policy recommendations of this research against the backdrop of Iran's evolving identity horizons. The aim is to offer a more current and nuanced narrative of the situation on the ground, with a focus on ethnicity and nationality, and to re-engage with the vital and urgent question of how ethnic, national, and identity disputes might be resolved on the basis of a sustainable peace.

## The Political, Social, and Economic Conditions of Iran at the Dawn of the New Century

With the impasse of the reformist movement in the mid-2000s, the ground was prepared for the revival of new forms of Principlist discourse—that is, a conservative ideology emphasizing the founding principles of the Islamic Revolution—in the country. By altering the foundations of the ruling establishment's political behaviour and its strategies in the economic, social, and cultural spheres, these new forms became the agents for creating different conditions in Iran. The domestic and international consequences of this period led to a dangerous convergence of public grievances and a deepening of societal hardship, ultimately plunging Iran into a critical situation at the dawn of the 15th Solar Hijri century (the early 2020s). The clear signs of this crisis were manifest in public anger, widespread discontent, and the outbreak of nationwide protests. A description and explanation of this general situation requires an examination and exposition of the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of these changes and transformations.

The influential developments of this historical period are significant in both their domestic and foreign dimensions. The overall trajectory of their ebbs and flows, continuity, and evolution can be traced by re-examining the transformations in the political discourse of governments and by investigating their domestic and international consequences across the various facets of the country's social life.

## The Return of the Principlist Discourse with the Slogan of Righteous Governance and Global Justice

The end of Khatami's second government in 2005 and the marginalisation of the reformist movement led to the renewed dominance of conservative and right-wing forces over the positions and sources of power and government. Consequently, with the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the ninth presidential election, a new reading of political Principlism entered the country's leadership. Its clear characteristics included opposition to liberal concepts and the principles of democracy and civil rights, the propagation of a justice-centred ideology, and the slogan of a global ideal of righteous governance. The emergence of this discourse—reliant on claims of reviving true Islam and populist slogans of combating discrimination, corruption, and aristocracy (Sadjadpour, 2006: 151-162)—and its eight-year rule (2005-2013) over politics and society in Iran, marked the beginning of a new chapter in the Iranian lifeworld in both domestic and international dimensions. Its consequences, at both domestic and global levels, created the political, social, economic, and cultural grounds for a historical situation whose results, in both the short and long term, played an undeniable role in shaping the state of Iran at the end of the 14th century SH.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's victory in Iran's ninth presidential election in 2005 was the result of a coalition of Principlist political currents and parties under the name 'Developers of an Islamic Iran,' who sought, under the shadow of a broad consensus, to completely marginalise the reformist movement and the idea of reformism by dominating most of the official sources of power and, with all their might, to prepare the ground for a return to the principles of Principlism (Asna-Ashar, 2007: 7). Mahmoud Ahmadinejad emerged from such a context and held the helm of politics in Iran for eight years. Changing the course of the system's general policies in the fields of domestic and foreign policy, economy, culture, and social affairs, in order to set aside and eradicate the intellectual and practical legacy of the reformists, was among the most important programmes of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's eight-year presidency. This began with the full and comprehensive backing of the regime's institutions and the complete support of the leader of the Islamic Republic, because during this period, for the first time, the three branches of the regime's government came under the dominance of a single political current, and the unification of the ruling establishment is considered one of the most important consequences of the ninth presidential

election (Asna-Ashar, 2007: 8).

Ahmadinejad's Principlist programmes at home were formulated and presented based on slogans of combating social injustice and inequality, corruption, and discrimination (Sadjadpour, 2006: 151-162), and the axis and foundation of his foreign policy was the slogan of seeking and spreading justice in the international arena. The president, at a gathering of ambassadors and heads of the Islamic Republic's missions abroad on 24 July 2007, explicitly enumerated justice-spreading as one of the three principles on which all pillars of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy and diplomatic model should be designed, implemented, and presented to the international community (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2010: 71). Thus, another of the political readings and discourses of the governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran began in 2005 with the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. This discourse is known by names such as justice-centred Principlist, idealist principle-based, or ideological value-based discourse. The discourse attributed to the Ahmadinejad government can be considered a revolutionary-traditional discourse in which an emphasis on the primary values of the revolution and an inclination towards tradition is central. In other words, in this discourse, modernist elements are marginalised, and the political elites, with a revolutionary interpretation of the sources and rules that shape the revolutionary-Islamic identity, highlighted the identity roles based on these rules (Mohammadian et al., 2021: 128).

In this discourse, in the cultural sphere, a kind of inward-looking and cultural nativist approach was pursued. The keywords of this discourse in the field of culture and communication with global culture include: cultural invasion, cultural imperialism, cultural ambush, cultural assimilation, cultural NATO, and the like (Sadiq Sarvestani, 2010: 18). The concept of political development in Ahmadinejad's intellectual discourse is the product of elements and categories that, by relying on the primary values and principles of the revolution, provide a different and new interpretation of this category. In other words, in this discourse, modern and modernist elements are marginalised, and with a revolutionary interpretation of the sources and rules that shape the revolutionary-Islamic identity, the concept of political development takes on another meaning and concept in the orbit of the ideals and primary principles of the Islamic Revolution—a concept that is different and fundamentally distinct from the meaning of political development in the thought of the political elites

who preceded Ahmadinejad (Bashiriyeh, 1999: 75-88). The concept of political development in Ahmadinejad's intellectual discourse takes on another meaning with components such as connection with the people, establishment of social justice, creation of a young revolutionary government, realisation of economic slogans such as cash subsidies and the Mehr Housing project, and the reduction of the class distance between the government and the people (Amouei, 2007: 11)—an approach that clearly bespoke a kind of populist policy.

Ahmadinejad and his close circle of supporters initially came to power with the full support of right-wing and Principlist currents. However, his and his associates' eight-year tenure witnessed a process of increasing divergence and distancing of him and his movement from a large part of the body of right-wing and Principlist parties and movements. The final years of this government were passed in increasing tension with the majority of Principlists, and the other branches of the system, especially the Islamic Consultative Assembly, which was in the hands of the Principlists, experienced high tensions with the tenth government. As a result, Ahmadinejad and his close associates became an isolated current within the Principlist forces after the end of the tenth government. With his faction now officially branded the 'deviant current' by its hardline opponents—a politically charged label signifying a dangerous departure from revolutionary orthodoxy—some of its members, including Mohammad Reza Rahimi, the first vice president; Hamid Baghaei, the executive vice president; and Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, an advisor and the ideologue of Ahmadinejad's circle, faced judicial prosecution and imprisonment (Moghadamfar, 2011).

The Ahmadinejad government, with its disregard for the principles and rules of foreign policy, diplomatic relations, international conventions, and legal regimes, and specifically the United Nations resolutions (Ahmadinejad: 'The resolution is a scrap of paper,' 2007) which were mainly concerning Iran's nuclear programme, plunged Iran into a quagmire of political and economic sanctions. Despite an unprecedented increase in the price of oil and an income of 700 billion dollars from it, this led to the comprehensive isolation and sanctioning of the country, a fall in the value of the national currency, the suspension of some infrastructural economic and development projects, a decrease in the level of investment in oil and petrochemical facilities, an increase in the price of basic goods, a rise in the inflation rate, a six-fold increase in the amount of liquidity in the country, and generally a tangible decline in macroeconomic

indicators (Aramian, 2013: 4). 'Bringing oil money to the people's tables' was one of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's key slogans in his election campaigns, the goal of which he stated was to reduce the class gap and enable the weak and low-income strata to benefit from the national wealth. In this regard, the plan for targeting subsidies and paying cash subsidies to households was implemented. This plan, alongside some other financial and economic policies of the ninth and tenth governments, such as the Mehr Housing project, the establishment of fast-yielding enterprises, and some interest-free financial facilities, were in fact more elements of a populist policy than a real stimulus for the equitable distribution of national wealth and an opportunity for entrepreneurship and the creation of new economic opportunities. Ultimately, while wasting huge amounts of capital, they did not have much effect on the general living situation and pushed the economic and livelihood space towards severe straits (Ahmadinejad's Souvenir for Iran's Economy, 2016).

The performance of the Ahmadinejad government on the social stage was also a function of the evident contradiction that existed in most of his populist policies. During this period, although the head of government presented himself as a supporter of social freedom in various platforms and even criticised the behaviour of leftist forces in the early days of the revolution in dealing with women's hijab (The Views of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, 2005), his government was the initiator and executor of the 'Social Security Enhancement Plan,' according to which the authority to determine the type of public dress was given to the police (Head of the Moral Security Police of the NAJA, 2007). The political, civil, media, and professional atmosphere of Iran also faced similar conditions in this period. The imposition of severe restrictions on the limited open political space, the prevention of the activities of most political parties and groups critical of the government, the coercive treatment of student movements and non-governmental organisations (Bualhari, 2007), the mass closure and suspension of newspapers and journals, and the widespread violation of citizens' and human rights were clear manifestations of the government's policy in this period (The year 2009, the darkest year for the press, 2010).

Identity and ethnic policies concerning the demands of ethnic groups and other discriminated groups, including women and religious minorities, which had received some attention during the reform period, were not only consigned to oblivion under the banner of generalising and populist slogans and claims but

were also often met with a security-oriented perspective. The extensive closure of local and ethnic publications and non-governmental organisations active in the cultural and artistic affairs of ethnic groups were examples of this approach (The danger of closure of ethnic newspapers in Iran, 2010). Another consequence of the dominance of the Principlist discourse over the pillars of government was the further restriction of the freedom of religious minorities. For example, the religious freedom and ritual activities of the Gonabadi Dervishes in Iran came under greater threat and harassment from the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to the extent that several of the order's hosseiniyehs in various cities were destroyed (Ethnic and religious minorities in the year 2009).

After four years of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's challenging and widely criticised rule, the tenth presidential election in June 2009 became a flashpoint for social discontent, igniting the most significant protest movement in Iran's contemporary history. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mohsen Rezaee represented the Principlist front, while Mehdi Karroubi and Mir-Hossein Mousavi stood for the Reformist current.

The official conduct of the election on 12 June 2009, and particularly the swift announcement of a decisive victory for Ahmadinejad, was met with immediate and severe protest from the Reformist candidates and their supporters (Portal of the Ministry of Interior, 2009). Widespread suspicions of electoral fraud and systematic vote engineering were immediately raised, igniting a firestorm of public dissatisfaction (Parsanejad, 2017). In the days that followed, this discontent spilled onto the streets. Major cities, most notably Tehran, became the scene of unprecedented demonstrations, with millions of protesters taking part in what were some of the largest public gatherings in the history of the Islamic Republic (Piltan, 2009).

What began as a protest against the election results, however, gradually transformed into a broader challenge to the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic regime itself. As the movement swelled, it adopted the colour green—the symbol of Mir-Hossein Mousavi's campaign—as its own, becoming known both inside and outside Iran as the 'Green Movement.'

The Green Movement, which saw nine months of sustained street protests, was ultimately a watershed moment. Although the protesters' demands were not only rejected but met with massacre, mass arrests, and the severe suppression of both demonstrators and critical political figures, its long-term legacy was to

fundamentally reshape the power relations between Iran's political factions. The rift between the Reformists and the Principlists widened into an unbridgeable chasm, particularly after the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, publicly denounced the movement's leaders as 'the heads of sedition' (sarān-e fetneh)—a term laden with religious and historical condemnation, implying a profound conspiracy against the Islamic order (Khamenei, 2009).

Subsequently, the entire Reformist front, including its parties and prominent figures, was officially branded the 'seditious current' (jaryān-e fetneh) in the regime's media and political literature (Akhavan, 2023: 39-40). They were subjected to a campaign of complete political isolation, effectively eliminating them from electoral competition and the formal relations of power. Conversely, the Principlist front, rallying under the banner of the Supreme Leader, consolidated its control over nearly all sources of power, both elected and appointed.

These events, however, represented more than just a shift in the internal balance of power; they led to a radical reconfiguration of Iran's political discourse. The Reformist platform—based on concepts of popular sovereignty, civil society, balanced development, and constructive international relations—was systematically dismantled, discredited with accusations of pro-Westernism and hostility to revolutionary and Islamic values. In its place, an uncompromising ideology derived from right-wing Principlism—touting revolutionary aspirations, absolute allegiance to the Guardianship of the Jurist, and strident anti-imperialism—revived and fortified its power base, becoming the sole, unrivalled discourse in the arena of Iranian politics (Qasemi et al., 2020).

A crucial consequence of this discursive transformation was the deliberate marginalisation of critical social issues. By reframing the political agenda, concepts such as ethnic rights, human rights, freedom of expression, women's rights, and sustainable socio-economic development were themselves labelled as 'deviant' and consigned to oblivion. This ideological hardening occurred at a time when Iranian society was moving in the opposite direction. Influenced by global transformations in communication technology and the emergence of new forms of ethnic, gender, and generational awareness, society was undergoing a slow but irreversible evolution that made any return to previous social norms impossible. It was this profound contradiction—a state retreating into ideological rigidity while its society grew more pluralistic and globally connected—that, when compounded by deteriorating economic conditions, led to an ever-

increasing accumulation of public dissatisfaction and collective despair.

The eight-year period of the Ahmadinejad government and its associated discourse came to an end while the Principlist discourse and its ideological slogans for achieving universal justice and self-reliant economic prosperity not only had no tangible achievement but had created a critical situation in domestic and foreign affairs, which was criticised by many Principlist elements and insiders. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his circle of supporters and close associates were criticised and even incurred the wrath of most Principlists.

## The Government of Moderation: Futile Endeavours and Rising Discontent

The legacy of the Ahmadinejad years—a landscape of acute domestic problems, foreign policy crises, and deep schisms within the Principlist camp—created an urgent necessity for a political course correction. The dire economic and political conditions demanded a moderation of the country's atmosphere and a turn towards pragmatic diplomacy. It was these circumstances that, on the eve of the eleventh presidential election, opened a narrow path for pragmatic and moderate currents to re-enter the electoral arena. Thus, for the final eight years of the 14th Solar Hijri century (2013-2021), the helm of government was taken by the political current known as the Moderates, led by Hassan Rouhani (Delavari, 2015).

This transfer of power occurred under extraordinary conditions. The preceding eight years of Principlist dominance had been marked by a reckless campaign of elimination and suppression against all critics and opponents. This process not only stripped the disgraced Reformists of their political rights but also demonstrated that no faction—not even moderate centrists or prominent revolutionary figures—was safe from the onslaught of the hardline right. Indeed, the most sweeping act of political exclusion in the history of the Islamic Republic had just occurred with the disqualification of former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani from the very election Rouhani would go on to win (The largest disqualification in the history of the Islamic Republic…, 2013).

Against this backdrop of public disillusionment with the ballot box, the rise of a government of moderation represented a final glimmer of hope. It suggested, however faintly, the possibility of an exit from Iran's unstable, isolated, and economically suffocating predicament, the hardships of which were weighing

ever more heavily on the public, particularly the lower and middle classes. The national crisis was compounded by the international impasse over Iran's nuclear programme, which, beyond crippling sanctions, had placed the country under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, making the threat of military confrontation alarmingly real (Abdollahi, 2020: 3). The emergence of a political current capable of managing this crisis, even temporarily, was therefore an opportunity that the Supreme Leader and his inner circle implicitly, if not explicitly, welcomed.

For the regime's core power circle, however, this pragmatic acceptance of the Moderates was tempered by a deep-seated mistrust. The challenges posed by the Reformist government and the trauma of the 2009 election crisis served as a harsh lesson for the conservative Principlists. Consequently, from the moment the moderate forces took power, they were met with a strategy of containment. Despite their different ideological foundations, the Principlist establishment adopted a critical, controlling, and at times destructive stance towards the Rouhani government, determined to ensure its role and function remained entirely subordinate to the will of the dominant hardline current.

As a result, the Rouhani government, constrained by multifaceted political limitations and intense economic pressure, was reduced to managing the country's day-to-day affairs with conspicuous shortcomings. Any opportunity to articulate and expand a broader discourse of moderation—as a sustainable strategy for managing Iran's politics, society, and economy—was denied. Trapped in a cycle of escalating economic tension, fraught nuclear diplomacy, and relentless obstructionism from Principlists and military elements, the government's authority suffered severe erosion. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), for instance, an unrivalled institution in Iranian politics, maintained a contradictory and often adversarial relationship with the Rouhani administration. This conflict was particularly acute in the domains of the domestic economy and regional diplomacy, as evidenced by tense meetings between IRGC commanders and the president (Sardar Hajizadeh in an interview with Kayhan…, 2022: 11) and the public complaints of Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif regarding the sidelining of his ministry by the IRGC and Qasem Soleimani personally (The Zarif audio file; Qasem Soleimani was an obstacle to diplomacy, 2021).

On the international stage, the government's primary mission was to resolve the nuclear crisis. The negotiations with the P5+1 and international bodies culminated in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Yet this

landmark achievement, secured despite countless obstructions from domestic opponents,[1] proved ephemeral. The withdrawal of the United States under President Donald Trump, coupled with the alignment of domestic hardliners with this decision,[2] rendered the agreement ineffective before it could deliver any tangible transformation to the lives of ordinary Iranians. Iran was once again subjected to crippling sanctions.

The administration's intense focus on the nuclear file and the economy meant that many social and cultural matters were seriously neglected. More fundamentally, however, the government was systematically prevented from intervening effectively in cultural and social policymaking. What is remembered as the rule of the moderate discourse, therefore, remained largely a change in the personnel of the state's macro-policy apparatus, not in its substance. The majority of cultural and social issues—the press, human rights, freedom of expression, civil society, and the affairs of women and ethnic groups—remained on their previous trajectory. In some instances, hardline factions appeared to intensify repression in these areas precisely to impose the political costs of the resulting public backlash onto the government. Increased pressure on minorities, harsh crackdowns on women over the issue of hijab, the closure of newspapers, and the prevention of any liberalisation of the public sphere were all hallmarks of this period.

The controversy surrounding the UNESCO 2030 Agenda exemplified the regime's determination to block any alignment with global development-oriented policies. The agenda, part of the comprehensive document 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,'[3] was a global framework for progress based on principles of human dignity, social justice, peace, and cultural diversity, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 (Technical report by the Bureau of the UNSC, 2015). Its educational component, 'Education 2030,' was intended to provide a basis for human and sustainable development. A localised version, the 'National Document on Education 2030,' was unveiled in

1. See the book: Izadi, Hossein (2016), Sarāb-e Barjām (The Mirage of the JCPOA), Nashr-e Shahid Kazemi Publications.

2. In this 256-page report, the alignment of domestic economic corruption with American obstructionism abroad to prevent the proper implementation of this agreement is discussed.

3. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Iran in December 2016, with the Minister of Science hailing it as an 'intelligent move' in line with international standards (With the presence of the Minister of Science…, 2016: 7).

Almost immediately, the document was attacked by hardliners, who denounced it as a 'document of slavery' (Rahimpour Azghadi, 2020), an 'educational and cultural capitulation' (Raeiji Yanesari, 2018), and a 'Trojan horse for secularising Islamic societies' (10 scientific critiques of the 2030 document…, 2020). Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei personally led the charge, declaring, 'This is not a place where the flawed, destructive, corrupt Western lifestyle can exert such influence' (Khamenei, 2017). Despite the Rouhani government's assurances that the framework was non-binding and that Iran had issued formal reservations (Statement of the Ministry of Science…, 2017), the onslaught was relentless. Ultimately, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution formally cancelled its implementation in September 2021 (Resolution on the cancellation…, 2021). Alongside the JCPOA, the 2030 Agenda became a potent weapon for discrediting the Rouhani government, with some opponents demanding the prosecution of the president and his ministers (Taeb, 2023).

In sum, the eight-year rule of the moderate discourse was merely an interlude between two periods of Principlist dominance. Trapped in a web of domestic and foreign problems and constrained by the unforgiving realities of Iran's power structure, it ended in a futile and erosive performance. Despite its considerable efforts, the government failed to deliver meaningful change. By its second term, unprecedented price hikes and severe economic hardship had culminated in two waves of popular protest: in December 2017 and again in November 2019, an uprising that became known as 'Bloody November.' These widespread movements, suppressed with extreme force, marked a new phase of collective action in the history of the Islamic Republic—one in which the street, in the absence of any democratic platforms, had become the primary arena for the pursuit of public demands.

## The Revolutionary Government: The Dream of a 'Second Step' and the Confrontation with 'Woman, Life, Freedom'

The collapse of the JCPOA, brought about by America's withdrawal and parallel acts of domestic sabotage, transformed the Rouhani government's greatest achievement into a sword of Damocles hanging over its architects. The

last vestiges of hope invested in the moderate current evaporated into a mirage. This dire situation unfolded at a time when, in addition to the economic hardships and sanctions that had already led to the widespread revolt of November 2019, the government was suffering from a debilitating lack of cooperation from other branches of the state, which effectively paralysed its executive function. On several occasions, Hassan Rouhani openly criticised the malicious conduct of the Principlist-controlled Majles and institutions like the state broadcaster (IRIB) and the IRGC, accusing them of systematically obstructing his government's activities (Rouhani's criticism of the Majles regarding the JCPOA and FATF, 2021).

This political landscape had profound consequences for the thirteenth presidential election in 2021. Not only did non-Principlist political movements lose any hope of continued participation in the electoral process, but even prominent and long-serving Principlist figures, such as Ali Larijani, the three-time speaker of the Majles, were barred from running (Ali Larijani was disqualified, 2021). The elimination of all non-Principlist factions and even key Principlist figures from the electoral contest, combined with widespread public disillusionment with the ballot box—felt acutely by a populace whose livelihoods were shrinking and who still remembered the trauma of November 2019—paved the way for a complete consolidation of power. In a non-competitive election with a predetermined outcome, the radical wing of the Principlist movement secured its victory, bringing Ebrahim Raisi to the presidency.

With Ebrahim Raisi's assumption of the presidency, political power and governance became almost completely monolithic. All channels of authority across the three branches of government and other state institutions fell into the hands of right-wing hardliners and elements known as 'revolutionary forces'—a process that has been described as a political 'purification' (khāles-sāzi) (Azar, 2023). From this perspective, the rise of the thirteenth government was not merely a change of personnel in the executive branch. It was, rather, a preparatory step for the regime to confront the threats and challenges it perceived. Under the leadership of the Supreme Leader and his inner circle, the consolidation of power and the complete alignment of all its pillars were designed to set the stage for the predetermined programmes of the 'Second Step of the Revolution.' This new phase was intended to diagnose the country's current state and, from that diagnosis, design and implement effective strategies to preserve and perpetuate

the regime's power. Consequently, the tenets and objectives of the 'Second Step of the Revolution' manifesto—such as building a new Islamic civilisation, defending the theory of the revolutionary system, promoting 'jihadi management,' ensuring service delivery, centring justice, increasing spirituality and morality in the public sphere, standing against global arrogance, and combating corruption and the Western lifestyle—became the core directives of the thirteenth government's agenda (Haji Najari, 2021).

At the turn of the century, the thirteenth government presented itself as the executor of the 'Second Step' agenda. Yet it did so against a bleak political and economic horizon, shadowed by the failure of the nuclear agreement, the mounting pressure of global sanctions, chronic domestic mismanagement, and the purging of many capable figures from executive, managerial, and scientific roles. A disregard for modern principles of governance, the propagation of an ideology of 'jihadi management,' and rampant corruption had led to a vast squandering of human and financial resources.

Beyond the economic and livelihood crises that had broadened the scope of public discontent, the ideology and slogans of the revolutionary discourse were being advanced at a time when Iranian society, more than ever, was searching for its place in the world. Generational change, the universalisation of the internet, the expansion of generational and gender awareness, the formation of new collective identities, the emergence of new self-awareness and demands among ethnic and religious groups, and the growing desire among the public—especially the younger generation—for freedom of choice in personal matters such as lifestyle, dress, and beliefs, were creating a society deeply connected to and influenced by global culture. This new social landscape stood in stark contradiction to the regime's ideological projects, which sought to impose its own lifestyle and belief system on the public while ignoring the comprehensive epistemic and identity transformations that had permeated the fabric of society. These were the factors that fuelled the increasing divergence and rift between the nation and the ruling system.

A reflection on Iran's socio-economic indicators at the dawn of the new century, from the perspective of the international Legatum Prosperity Index, paints a clear picture of the country's overall situation in 2021. In this ranking of 167 countries, Iran's position was as follows: 165th in Personal Freedom, 145th in Governance, 131st in Safety and Security, 89th in Social Capital, 126th

in Investment Environment, 152nd in Enterprise Conditions, 104th in Market Access and Infrastructure, 138th in Economic Quality, 57th in Living Conditions, 61st in Health, 75th in Education, and 156th in the Natural Environment. Overall, Iran ranked 123rd in the world, a drop of three places from the previous year. Given Iran's potential human and material resources, these statistics clearly indicate the extremely unfavourable state of its social, economic, and human capital (Legatum Prosperity Index 2021). Another of the most common political economy indicators for measuring livelihood crisis is the Misery Index, which is the sum of the inflation and unemployment rates. Since the mid-1970s, it has been used in political economy literature as a tool to measure economic crisis in countries. Severe inflationary fluctuations have caused Iran to spend the last 15 years in the 'most miserable' possible condition, with the highest Misery Index of the last three decades recorded at 57 in 2022. An examination of data from the International Monetary Fund and the International Labour Organization shows that in the past twenty years, Iran has ranked among the top twelve countries in the world with the highest Misery Index for fourteen years, dropping to eighth place in 2022 and 2023 (Radio Farda Data-Mining Group, 2023). If we add to this situation some other indicators, such as the persistent environmental crises and the extremely perilous issue of water scarcity—which has been described as Iran's 'super-challenge and super-crisis' (Fazeli, 2021: 56)—and consider the weakness of the country's macro-management and the lack of a clear programme and strategy for identifying and solving these problems, the depth of the predicaments gripping Iran at the dawn of the new century becomes starkly apparent.

As noted, the political, social, economic, and cultural realities of Iran at the start of the new solar century reveal a profound divergence and conflict between the desires of the majority of the population and the objectives and programmes of the ruling establishment. The public faces increasing restrictions in the public sphere, constricting their lives in every respect, at the very moment they are asserting their right to social freedom and free choice more forcefully than ever before. This contradiction between social demands and the regime's ideological goals, in the absence of any mechanism for interaction, compromise, or understanding, and with no possibility of change through electoral participation, inevitably intensifies the impulse toward divergence, conflict, and confrontation. The immediate result is the selection of the street as the only possible arena for

pursuing collective demands through protest. This strategy, given its relatively radical nature and the repressive, violent reaction of the ruling system, is inexorably drawn towards the binary of 'suppression versus overthrow' (Abdi, 2021: 9)—an experience that Iran endured under economic pressure and high prices in the final decade of the 14th century SH, during the years 2017 and 2019.

In 2022, the first year of the new century, continuing the trajectory described, Iran became the scene of numerous intersecting and accumulating political, economic, social, and diplomatic challenges, the brunt of which was ultimately borne by the people. In the middle of 2022, in this inflamed atmosphere, the death of a young woman named Jina (Mahsa) Amini in the custody of Tehran's morality police ignited street protests against the Islamic Republic's hijab policies. From these protests, a nationwide uprising emerged under the banner of 'Woman, Life, Freedom.' This movement, after a short time, transformed into a discourse and manifesto for freedom and democracy in Iran, marking a significant turning point in the country's contemporary history.

## The Season of Protest: A Metamorphosis in the Pattern of Collective Action in Iran

Political protest is a form of collective behaviour in which all or part of a society directs its actions towards the formal network of power—that is, the state and the ruling establishment. Its purpose is to declare discontent and articulate critical positions regarding conditions or matters deemed undesirable, with its subject matter unfolding within the political sphere (Dieter, 2016: 77). Civil protests are a conventional and legitimate form of collective political action, predicated on the principles of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, which occur for the purpose of announcing public positions and demands. The process by which demonstrations emerge and take shape, and the manner in which the state and the ruling system respond to them, generally offer clear indicators of the levels of dissatisfaction, the depth of societal problems and crises, the prevailing patterns of public behaviour, and the perceptions, logic, and interactive approach of the governing authorities. From this vantage point, a re-examination of protests, while clarifying the various dimensions of a given event, carries powerful implications for understanding the general state of a society. This section will analyse the process of metamorphosis in Iran's collective movements in recent

decades, examining indices such as the geographical distribution of protests, the classes and groups involved, casualty and fatality statistics, the state's methods of confrontation, domestic and international reactions, the role of opposition forces, and the legal and long-term consequences of these events. The identity and ethnic dimensions of these movements will be a central focus of this representation.

The period between the 2009 post-election protests, known as the 'Green Movement,' and the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising of 2022 was a sensitive and volatile era in which Iran's public sphere repeatedly witnessed various forms of professional and public protest. The demonstrations by supporters of the Green Movement in 2010 and 2011, in solidarity with the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt; the April 2011 protests in Khuzestan, known as the 'Day of Rage' or Yawm al-Ghadab; environmental gatherings in Azerbaijan protesting the drying of Lake Urmia; the 2012 Tehran bazaar protests following the surge in currency exchange rates; the Isfahan farmers' protests; the sit-ins and protests of the Gonabadi Dervishes; the 'Girls of Revolution Street' campaign; the December 2017-January 2018 protests; the movement seeking justice for the victims of Flight PS752 in 2020; the 'Bloody November' of 2019; and numerous professional strikes and protests by workers, teachers, and pensioners—all constitute the public and professional protests that occurred during these years. Through a comparative re-reading of the sociological literature, one can speak of three types of protest action during this period. The first type comprises protest movements with more or less specific and limited professional and livelihood-based structures. The second type consists of thematic or sectoral protests related to environmental issues, gender, children's rights, mother-tongue education, and the recognition of cultural identity. The third type encompasses widespread protest actions that directly target the political order. The far-reaching protest uprisings of 2017 and 2019 are two important examples of this widespread movement (Peyvandi, 2023: 4)—a type that finds its quintessential expression in the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising.

In this light, this chapter of Iranian history can be named the season of public protest. It describes a condition that some scholars have termed a 'movement society,' a society in which social discontent is transformed into collective action. The gradual expansion of protests, their steady diffusion, the progressive institutionalisation of protest itself, and the institutionalisation of the state's response are the four primary characteristics of a movement society (Madani,

2020: 6). The significance of these events, however, lies not merely in their frequency but, more profoundly, in the very nature of collective political behaviour during this period. The pattern of action in most of these popular protests marks a clear and substantive break with previous forms, which had largely sought reforms and changes within the existing structure. Instead, it shifted towards system-challenging demands and the desire for regime change.

From this perspective, Iran's Green Movement holds a symbolic importance in the history of protest movements during the Islamic Republic era. Any re-examination of the protests of the last decade necessitates a return to it and a reflection on its characteristics and achievements. The Green Movement, which formed under the slogan 'Where is my vote?' as a demonstration against the results of the 2009 presidential election, was a protest conceived within the political and legal framework of the Islamic Republic. It sought to achieve its demands through the mechanisms of the constitution and the existing possibilities of the ruling political system. Indeed, from the very first day, the two protesting candidates, Mehdi Karroubi and Mir-Hossein Mousavi, legally sought a permit for a protest march (Mousavi's call for a march on Monday, 2009). The initial demonstrations were centred on completely peaceful and silent processions, known as the 'Silent Marches,' with the singular slogan 'Where is my vote?' (The silence was full of unspoken words, 2009).

However, this peaceful protest action, bound by the norms of the system, entered a new phase following the violent and repressive reaction of the state, which resulted in the killing, injury, and arrest of a wide range of protesters and the application of the worst forms of torture and illegal treatment. In this new phase, the election results and the protest against vote engineering were no longer the central focus; instead, the protests' focal point shifted to the Islamic Republic regime itself and its pillars, especially the revolutionary leader. Accordingly, the spectrum of slogans changed from 'Where is my vote?' (Rāy-e man ku?), 'Annulment of the election, end of the protests,' and 'Even if I die, I will take back my vote,' to 'Rape, crime, death to this guardianship' (a direct challenge to the Supreme Leader's authority), 'This is the month of blood, Yazid will be overthrown' (likening Khamenei to the reviled Umayyad caliph who killed Imam Hussein), 'Death to the Islamic Republic,' and 'Death to Khamenei.' This transformation, which occurred spontaneously in the inflamed atmosphere of the Green Movement, symbolically narrated the end of the idea and project

of reform in Iran and its arrival at an impasse. The very common and frequent slogan, 'Reformist, Principlist, the whole story is over!' (Eslāh-talab, usul-garā, digeh tamume mājarā), which is expressed in most subsequent protests, clearly shows this public belief. For this reason, the Green Movement is considered a turning point in the movements and protests of the Islamic Republic period, which practically introduced the idea of moving beyond the system and the regime of the Islamic Republic into the sphere of public demands in Iran and made it a main component in the discourse of Iranian protest, which gradually acquired a central position.

It is for this reason that even with the victory of the moderates in 2013, the behavioural and discursive pattern of this protest discourse did not subside, and its system-challenging slogans repeatedly echoed in public and professional protests. However, in terms of its class and social base, the Green Movement was a completely political action belonging to the modern urban middle class. Despite articulating and demanding the rights of most strata, classes, and even ethnic and religious minorities, it could not cross its own class barrier and penetrate the body of the entire populace. For this reason, its centre of formation and continuity remained largely in Tehran, and support for it in other cities and regions, apart from some student protests in universities, was very scattered, limited, and sporadic. Nevertheless, after it, a new chapter was opened in the realm of collective action in Iranian society.

## An Analytical Review of the November 2019 Protests

The November 2019 protests, widely known as ‘Bloody November’, refer to a series of demonstrations that began on Friday, 15 November 2019, in response to a 200% increase in the price of petrol and its renewed rationing. The protests, which started in numerous Iranian cities, lasted for a week until 22 November, spreading rapidly across the entire country and drawing in demonstrators from nearly every social class and stratum.

While the initial catalyst for these protests was economic, reflecting the dire financial straits of the people, particularly the most vulnerable, their scope did not remain limited to economic grievances. The demonstrations quickly became a platform for articulating a wide range of political, social, professional, and generational demands. Several factors can be cited to explain the outbreak of this wave of protest. In the years and months leading up to November 2019, various

segments of society had repeatedly endured the bitter taste of runaway inflation, uncontrollable price hikes, and the devaluation of the national currency. The pressures of international sanctions related to Iran's nuclear programme and the regime's costly ventures in regional and global diplomacy weighed ever more heavily on the public.

These hardships were descending upon the people at a time when there was not the slightest will or glimmer of hope for reform from within the ruling establishment. On the contrary, a constant stream of news about billion-dollar embezzlements and corruption, tax increases, the printing of money and the resulting inflation, and shortages of medicine and basic goods left the public with neither the strength to endure nor a bright horizon to anticipate. The regime's managerial crises, lack of transparency, and evasion of accountability at both macro and micro levels, combined with its ideological project to promote an Islamic lifestyle based on its own narrow interpretation, created another fundamental challenge. This project, which opposed various forms of social freedom under the pretext of combating cultural infiltration and a 'soft war', clashed with a society where new generations were products of the virtual world and the borderless expanse of the internet; a society where educated women and girls were naturally beginning to confront patriarchal culture both at home and in public life. The establishment's refusal to comprehend and adapt to this new reality was another powerful stimulus that broadened the scope of the protest movements. In such a polarised and conflict-ridden situation, where effective civil institutions and electoral structures for expressing the public will were absent, the street inevitably became the primary arena for politics and political struggle.

According to documented reports from the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), the geographical spread of the 'Bloody November' protests encompassed 29 provinces, 104 cities, and more than 719 distinct locations (Summary of the Bloody Protests of Aban 98, 2019). The November 2019 protests were, therefore, unlike many previous episodes of unrest, a truly nationwide and popular movement that erupted in all corners of the country, with its pattern of diffusion not limited to any specific geographical area. Contrary to some class-based analyses that confine the protesting community to the 'urban

poor'[1] and the marginalised poor, most social strata and classes participated in these protests, with a higher concentration in less privileged areas. Asef Bayat argues in this regard: 'In November 2019, protesters with different social bases (the poor, women, students, youth, the middle class, etc.) entered with their own specific grievances and began to raise more general and political demands. This, in my opinion, was a very important change that brought the November 2019 movement closer to a protest-revolutionary movement… In general, in any large-scale and national protest movement, there is never just one actor. Different social groups usually participate. This plurality of social groups is both a strength of protest movements and also complicates them, because their social origins and sensitivities differ. In the November 2019 protests, different social groups participated, especially the youth, women, and the lower strata, particularly from the provincial towns and the geographical and social peripheries. But it seems the presence of low-income strata in the peripheral areas, in other words the economically subordinate classes, was very significant' (Bayat, 2019).

The slogans of the November 2019 protests, with their economic and political themes ranging from 'Death to high prices' and 'Poverty, slaughter, high prices, the people are the victims' to 'We don't want an Islamic Republic', 'Death to the dictator', 'Death to Khamenei', 'Freedom and justice; this is the nation's slogan', and 'Leave Syria alone, think about us instead' (The slogans of Aban 98; protesters targeted the foundation of the government, 2019), demonstrated a public understanding of the deep entanglement of economic, political, and social affairs. They reflected a belief that the root of the country's problems lay in the behavioural and discursive foundations of the regime itself.

The participants in the November 2019 unrest, in order to express their demands and dissatisfaction, employed a diverse set of tactics appropriate to the conditions, the number of protesters, the location of the protest, and the response of the security and military forces. These tactics included shutting off car engines on streets and motorways, blocking intercity roads, holding peaceful and non-violent gatherings with placards and chants, striking and closing shops and bazaars, damaging public property, and attacking ideological sites and symbols of the government (Madani, 2020: 36). The turn towards violent protest

1. Urban marginals, street vendors, and day labourers, all of whom have been considered under the general heading of the urban poor, are among the social groups that do not belong to a specific class or stratum (Bayat, 2012: 1).

tactics was often a direct consequence of the behaviour of the state's control and suppression forces, who, without any regard for international or even domestic anti-riot legal principles, resorted to illegal and violent repressive measures. This was in direct violation of Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states, 'Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life' (1996). Law enforcement and security forces have a duty to respect and protect the right to life. To this end, the 'United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials' stipulates that law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, and that intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. If the use of firearms is unavoidable, officers must use them only to the extent necessary to achieve their legitimate objective and in a manner that minimises damage and injury (Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, 1990). Incidents such as the destruction and arson of government property and attacks on religious seminaries and the offices of Friday prayer leaders occurred after the protests were met with violence. Some analysts saw these attacks as a sign of public protest against the seminaries' support for the Islamic Republic, while some political figures believed that the government itself destroyed public property to intensify the suppression and then blamed it on the protesters.

During these protests, the Islamic Republic of Iran declared a state of emergency without any official announcement. According to a report by Amnesty International, 'the Iranian government has deliberately and lethally used firearms and has resorted to disproportionate force'. In many videos released from the protests, police officers are seen shooting directly into the crowds. In some of these videos, a number of the dead are seen to have been shot in the head. According to international law, even if the Iranian government's claim of damage to public property is true, the use of weapons is only justified in 'circumstances of self-defence and protection of individuals against the immediate danger of death or serious injury', and not for throwing stones, destroying public property, or setting fire to government buildings. Meanwhile, observer organisations and eyewitnesses confirm that the Iranian government used live ammunition against protesters and escalated the protests to violence (Montazeri, 2019).

In its latest report, Amnesty International stated the number of identified individuals killed in the November 2019 protests to be 324, providing their names, place of death, date of the event leading to death, age, reported cause of death, and the source of the information. The report notes that the organisation believes the actual number of deaths is higher. It goes on to state: 'Amnesty International has concluded that the use of lethal weapons by security forces against the deceased was in the vast majority of cases an unlawful act. Based on extensive research conducted by the organization, including analysis of videos, there is no evidence to suggest that protesters possessed firearms and that their behaviour posed an imminent threat of life to security forces or other individuals' (Amnesty International, 2021: 1). Seyyed Hossein Naghavi Hosseini, the spokesman for the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Majles, announced in a meeting on 25 November 2019 that the number of detainees was around 7,000 (Meeting of representatives and officials, 2019). Human rights organisations and non-governmental media outside the country estimate the number to be over 8,600 (Mehrabi, 2019). According to reports from human rights organisations and the testimonies of some of the detainees, those arrested were subjected to shocking torture and widespread human rights violations. On 2 September 2020, Amnesty International published a report titled 'Trampling Humanity', detailing the mass arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture following the November 2019 protests. This report, based on interviews, written and audio messages, and video testimonies from hundreds of citizens inside Iran—including protesters, witnesses, family members, lawyers, medical staff, journalists, and informed sources within prisons—describes the Islamic Republic's treatment of protesters and the inhuman torture they endured. The report states that 'Amnesty International has investigated the treatment of detainees by Iranian authorities and has concluded that these authorities have engaged in widespread and systematic gross human rights violations, including through arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment, and flagrant violations of the right to a fair trial'. In addition to peaceful protesters, media activists, human rights defenders—including minority rights activists—and participants in memorial ceremonies for the victims were also targeted (Amnesty International, 2020: 6). Beatings, enforced disappearances, prolonged solitary confinement, denial of access to medical services, inhuman detention conditions, forced nudity and dousing with cold water, prolonged exposure to extreme heat or cold,

bombardment with harsh lights and deafening sounds, pulling out of fingernails and toenails, spraying pepper spray on various parts of the body including the genitals, forced injection or ingestion of chemical substances, electric shocks to the testicles, waterboarding, mock executions, psychological torture, and forced confessions were among the flagrant forms of torture used against the November 2019 detainees (Amnesty International, 2020: 42-71).

The international community's reaction to the November 2019 protests began almost immediately after the demonstrations intensified and spread to nearly one hundred cities in Iran. From international human rights organisations to political officials in various countries, many took a stand on the events. The first international reactions came from senior officials in the United States. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed his support for the protesters in a tweet, writing that 'the United States is with the Iranian people'. State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus condemned the Iranian government's internet shutdown. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that the protests were not simply about the price of petrol but were a result of widespread public dissatisfaction with the Islamic Republic. Following the internet blackout, Sweden, Germany, and France issued separate statements calling on the Iranian authorities to respect the people's right to freedom of expression and peaceful protest. France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed its commitment to freedom of expression and assembly and urged Iran to adhere to its international obligations, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu expressed a neutral hope for a swift end to the demonstrations, while King Salman of Saudi Arabia stated that the Islamic Republic's behaviour had harmed the Iranian people. The European Union's foreign affairs spokesperson called for maximum restraint. One of the few positions in support of the Islamic Republic came from Russia, whose foreign ministry spokesperson claimed the situation was gradually normalising. The continuous reactions from world leaders, spearheaded by the United States, continued in the days and weeks that followed. President Donald Trump, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, and many members of Congress condemned the crackdown, and on 22 November 2019, the US Treasury Department sanctioned Iran's Minister of Communications for the widespread internet censorship.

In response to the internet shutdown, the International Federation of Journalists

demanded an end to the 'internet siege'. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed 'deep concern' over the killing of protesters. The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) criticised the violent response. The UN High Commissioner also called for an 'independent and impartial investigation'. Human Rights Watch urged the UN Human Rights Council to take swift action regarding the 'violent suppression'. Amnesty International also announced that activists and citizens from around the world had signed petitions demanding the release of those arrested (Karimi, 2020).

A significant legal outcome of the global reaction to the violent and unprecedented suppression of the November 2019 protests was the establishment of the International People's Tribunal on Iran's Atrocities of November 2019, also known as the Aban Tribunal. This people's tribunal was formed at the initiative of three human rights organisations—Justice for Iran, Iran Human Rights, and Together Against the Death Penalty—in response to the calls of grieving mothers and the inaction of the international community. The tribunal's official website states its objective as responding to the repeated demands of victims' families for justice. Comprised of a panel of distinguished international jurists from the UK, the US, Indonesia, South Africa, and Libya, the tribunal held five sessions in London from 10 to 14 November 2021, hearing testimony from 45 survivors, relatives of the deceased, and witnesses (Iran Tribunal: The International People's Tribunal on Aban). The tribunal aimed to determine whether officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran had committed crimes against humanity. The summary of its judgment, issued on 30 September 2022, states: 'The panel of judges unanimously concludes that the findings irrefutably establish that the government and security forces of Iran… designed and implemented a plan to commit crimes against humanity, including murder, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence, in order to suppress the protests and cover up the crimes committed'. The judgment names Ali Khamenei, Hassan Rouhani, Ali Shamkhani, Ebrahim Raisi, and several other senior officials as being accused of crimes against humanity. The conclusion of the judgment states: 'The panel of judges unanimously finds that the Islamic Republic of Iran is responsible for the violation of the following rights and freedoms: freedom of assembly; the right to life; the right to liberty and security; the right not to be subjected to enforced disappearance; the right not to be subjected to torture

and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment including sexual and gender-based violence; the right of access to justice; and the right to dignity, including the dignity of the deceased'. It calls on the international community, particularly entities with sanctions regimes like the UN Security Council, the EU, the US, and the UK, to impose targeted individual sanctions on those responsible and to ensure that these sanctions contribute to accountability and reparations for victims (Summary of the Judgment of the International People's Tribunal on Aban, 2022).

From an analytical framing perspective,[1] of the 150 slogans expressed during the November 2019 protests, 72 fell under diagnostic framing (identifying the problems), 30 under prescriptive framing (proposing solutions), and 17 under motivational framing (inspiring action). The diagnostic slogans primarily revolved around economic and political themes. Protesters criticised the monopolisation of economic privileges and oil revenues by certain groups, identifying this unequal distribution of wealth as a primary cause of society's economic problems: 'Capitalist, give us our money back'. They also pointed to the government's economic support for other Muslim countries as a factor in their own poor economic conditions. In response to officials blaming domestic problems on external factors like US sanctions, protesters chanted, 'Our problem is right here, they lie saying it's America', thereby rejecting the narrative of foreign interference and attributing the crises to internal factors, mismanagement, and flawed policies. Although the protests, like those of December 2017-January 2018, were sparked by economic issues, a significant portion of the slogans targeted the political system, the Supreme Leader, and the regime's core values, as well as criticising the three branches of government. This was encapsulated in slogans like: 'The bankrupt government is riding on our backs / Petrol got more expensive, the poor got poorer'.

1. According to framing theory, frames, by assigning meaning to and interpreting events, aim to mobilise potential members, attract the support of onlookers, and pacify opponents. According to Snow and his colleagues, social actors define grievances, construct collective identities, and create, interpret, and transform opportunities for social movements through 'frames'. Therefore, the mobilising grievances that cause collective behaviour are the result of an interpretation and interaction that frames have made possible, and leaders, participants of social movements, as well as their opponents, regularly perform this interpretation… The process of assigning meaning in the course of collective actions takes place in three stages: problem identification (diagnostic framing), potential problem-solving strategies (prescriptive framing), and motivation for action (motivational framing) (Amini et al., 2022: 11).

The prescriptive slogans described an ideal system that was democratic, with slogans calling for freedom, nationalism, accountability, and an end to discrimination: 'Not sanctions, not batons, just a referendum for the people / Resignation is not enough, trial is necessary / Livelihood and life are our undeniable rights'. The motivational slogans used nationalist and political values (freedom-seeking, justice-seeking, and anti-despotic) as well as nostalgic themes related to the Pahlavi monarchy to encourage participation. Overall, the diagnostic frame was most prominent (87 slogans), followed by the motivational frame (36 slogans), indicating a clear focus on identifying the source of grievances and inspiring action against tyranny (Amini et al., 2022: 29-30).

Royalist slogans, particularly those venerating Reza Shah, such as 'Reza Shah, may your soul be blessed' (Reza Shah, ruhat shād), and expressing a desire to return to that era, have become a feature of protests in the last decade. The rise of these slogans is significant, given the predominantly modern, anti-dictatorial, secular, and pro-democracy nature of the protest movements. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon. The first is a nostalgic reaction within Iran's collective memory. A large part of the Iranian populace, which once overthrew the monarchy with slogans like 'This nation will not be a nation until the Shah is in his shroud'[1], now looks back from a distance of several decades and, comparing the present with the past, feels a sense of self-condemnation and regret. That era is now remembered as a time of progress and tranquillity. This reaction is partly rooted in a historical psychology prevalent in the Iranian collective spirit, which often views the past with nostalgia, recalling its positive aspects while forgetting its darker sides. Royalist media outlets, such as the Manoto television network's documentary series 'Tunnel of Time', play a significant role in promoting this image. Furthermore, royalist political parties[2] are an active part of the opposition and have sought to strengthen their position with financial and organisational support. Within Iran, although liberal, secular, and democratic ideas are dominant, a small segment of society still supports a monarchical system, arguing that it is intrinsically woven into the fabric of Iranian history and is the only path to salvation (Sufiamehr, 2022).

1. One of the main slogans of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

2. Iranian royalist political parties include: the Constitutionalist Party of Iran, the Kingdom Assembly of Iran, the National Council of Iran, the Pan-Iranist Party, Farashgard, the Rastakhiz Party, and the Sazman-e Azadegan.

Beyond the historical and nostalgic factors, half a century of life under the Islamic Republic provides a basis for comparison with the previous era, which contributes to public favourability towards, or at least preference for, the Pahlavi period. In many cases, venerating the Pahlavis is less a defined political tendency and more an expression of animosity towards the Islamic Republic, which has consistently tried to portray the Pahlavi era as an age of autocracy, Westernisation, economic dependency, political subservience, and anti-Islamic values, while glorifying the revolution and its achievements. However, the lived experience of the people over nearly five decades tells a different story. It is a story that began with the promise of 'Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic' and a paradise on earth, but which soon saw the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the nation and its people sacrificed at the altar of the revolutionary ideology of the absolute Guardianship of the Jurist. In recent years, comparisons of macroeconomic and welfare indicators between the two periods have even entered the discourse of some government officials. Mohammad Reza Bahonar, former deputy speaker of the Majles, remarked: 'From 1979 to 2015, our average economic growth was 3 percent, which, considering population growth, is effectively zero. The average inflation rate in the 15 years before the revolution was in the single digits, but after the revolution, it has been over 20 percent… The unemployment rate has always been in the double digits' (Bahonar, 2017).

These protests were a clear manifestation of the inseparable link between the social (economic and livelihood demands) and the political (challenging the state and demanding accountability) in the arena of the street, aimed at re-centring the forgotten classes in Iranian governance. Protesters emphasised issues like work, bread, job security, and the environment. They were an expression of existence, demanding accountability from managers for everything from their livelihood to the environment. They cried out against corruption and discrimination. All of this reflects the impact of quality of life and political challenges on daily existence, a theme prominent in modern political sociology. The fact that students protest against flawed policies and unemployment in support of workers and pensioners, and that during environmental protests people also cry out against poverty, shows that people at all levels have reached a breaking point. They have realised that the majority of their society is enduring unbearable conditions. Since the political, social, and economic are intertwined, the political demands are not separate from the economic ones; they identify corruption, inefficiency,

and the political status quo as the causes of the dire economic situation and the class divides (Sardarnia & Alborzi, 2022: 135-136).

The extensive and multifaceted use of cyberspace and social networks for information dissemination, organisation, virtual networking, and meaning-creation is one of the most distinctive features of recent protest movements, giving this new generation of protests a special character. Manuel Castells, in his theory of the 'Network society', explains the role of the internet and social media in shaping and directing social movements. According to Castells, these tools have played an irreplaceable role in organising the unorganised urban masses, spreading street protests, and mobilising global public opinion. He uses the concept of 'mass self-communication' to refer to the horizontal communication networks of urban masses who either lack institutional organisations or live in states where the media is government-controlled. This interactive, horizontal communication allows for the rapid, low-cost organisation of the lower and middle classes and the sustenance of justice-seeking social movements (Castells, 2017: 11-14). The lack of institutionalisation and the absence of popular parties and civil associations are conspicuous weaknesses of contemporary Iranian society, as ruling systems have always sought to prevent the formation of any independent social currents outside of official political structures, while also exercising strict control over mass media. The network society and the possibility of mass self-communication in this political context represent a rare opportunity that transforms the nature of mass communication and creates a new space for social interaction outside the state's sphere of influence. The role of social networks in the November 2019 protests is clear proof of this. The nationwide internet shutdown on the first day of the protests was a direct response to this fact (CNN report on the dimensions of the internet shutdown in Iran, 2019). However, these restrictions could not erase the role of the network society; on the contrary, its capacities are expanding and becoming more sophisticated every day. In the shadow of the new capabilities created by the awareness and organisation stemming from the network society, the street tells us, in the most tangible and explicit way, that the masses are no longer condemned to remain on the margins of politics. They are active players who challenge governments by continuously voicing their economic and professional demands. The street shows us where the decision-makers have gone wrong, where they have hit a dead end, where they have stood too far or too close (Tajik, 2007: 35). The events of November 2019

are part of a category of popular riots or uprisings that have spread rapidly across the world in the last decade. They are the embodiment of ordinary people's demands for economic and political change, which, using new communication tools, quickly lead to the mobilisation of dissatisfied groups and street politics. This is the collective-protest action of a large number of people in different parts of the country at the same or similar times, who, in their minds and imagination, seem to be pursuing a single protest movement and a common demand. In other words, deep dissatisfaction exists, the dissatisfied actor exists, the desire for change exists; what is new is the emergence of modern communication technology that, relatively easily, quickly, and extensively, brings these ordinary dissatisfied individuals together and creates a national oppositional group with a shared pain (Bayat, 2019).

Regarding the relationship between ethnicity and the November 2019 protests, the dominant view among analysts is that the trans-class, trans-generational, and nationwide character of the demonstrations renders any ethnic or minority-based interpretation irrelevant. However, if we re-examine the protests through the lens of certain indices, they do acquire an ethnic dimension, albeit an implicit one. The first point is the predominance of economic and livelihood-based causes. If high prices, inflation, unemployment, and poverty were the main drivers, then Iran's ethnic regions, which are among the most deprived and under-resourced, would naturally be at the forefront. The extent of the protests in these areas partially attests to this fact. The second point that highlights the ethnic element was the state's method of suppression. Although the military and security forces drew blood across Iran, the intensity of the crackdown was far more unrestrained in cities with ethnic and religious minorities. For example, in the small city of Javanrud in Kermanshah province, nearly 15 people were killed by direct fire from government forces in less than an hour (Kurdistan Human Rights Network Statistics Center, 2020). Khuzestan province, particularly Ahvaz and Mahshahr, was another major hub of protest and brutal suppression. In its annual report on religious freedom, the US State Department expressed concern about the harsh suppression of ethnic and religious minorities in the November 2019 protests, noting that international NGOs reported the highest death tolls in these provinces, with at least 84 killed in Khuzestan (mainly Sunni Arabs) and 52 in Kermanshah (mainly Kurdish). The report cited IranWire's claim that the total number of protesters killed in Mahshahr over five days was 148, and a New

York Times report of up to '100 people being killed in one day by machine-gun fire in the marshes of Mahshahr, many of them Sunni Arabs' (US Department of State, 2020). This disproportionate response appears to be the standard operating procedure for suppression in ethnic regions, a pattern confirmed by a review of crackdowns on collective protests in these areas over different periods. Another aspect linking the nationwide protests to ethnicity is the pre-existing and escalating discontent among ethnic groups. Continuous ethnic and religious discrimination in all political, cultural, and economic spheres makes these communities doubly susceptible to becoming dissatisfied and protest-prone. From this perspective, any protest that enters an ethnic community automatically acquires an ethnic dimension.

Various terms have been used to define the nature of these protests, including 'protest action', 'riot', 'uprising', 'revolution', 'movement', 'non-movement', 'unrest', 'disruption', and 'sedition'. Sociologist Reza Omidi calls the event a 'protest action', a view supported by Taghi Azad Armaki, who says: 'You have a society that I have termed a 'protest society,' because protest becomes the main action of the society' (Madani, 2020: 38-39). A 'revolution' implies a structural change in the foundations of political power and the overthrow of one system for another; from this perspective, the November 2019 events do not fit, though some leftist analyses have described them as the beginning of a revolutionary process. Saeed Madani and his colleagues argue that the term 'social movement' is also inappropriate because the protesters lacked a unified identity or vision; they were reacting to a decision that threatened their livelihoods. Thus, their action lacked the necessary elements to become a social movement (Madani, 2020: 43). 'Riot', meaning any violent demonstration with collective clashes involving more than one hundred people (Taleban, 2008: 176), is another term used, often in phrases like 'the riot of the hungry' or 'the riot of the urban poor' (Bayat, 2021: 4). Most experts believe 'riot' is the most suitable term. However, some researchers, like political scientist Fatemeh Sadeghi, argue that the events had elements of a riot, a movement, and a protest action simultaneously (Madani, 2020: 45-46). In the official discourse of the Islamic Republic, however, the protests were interpreted through the lens of conspiracy theory, labelling them as 'disruption', 'sedition', and 'chaos' orchestrated by foreign enemies and their domestic agents (The 2019 seditions were neither the first nor the last, 2019).

The outcomes of the 'Bloody November' protests can be examined from two

perspectives: the evolution of the protest movement and the position of the ruling political system. In the short term, the protests failed to force the government to yield; the petrol price increase remained, and the state responded with the harshest possible suppression. In the medium term, however, the protests widened the chasm between the nation and the state, pushing the relationship to an irreconcilable point. This was evident three months later in the February 2020 parliamentary elections, which saw the lowest voter turnout in the history of the Islamic Republic, a direct result of the crackdown (Afshari, 2020). Despite this, the regime made no tactical adjustments, instead intensifying its security-focused and police-state approach. This, along with the devastating economic and social consequences, further eroded the system's legitimacy and intensified anti-state sentiment. This process, despite more than two years of severe social restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, led in less than three years to the nationwide 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising.

From the perspective of the movement's own evolution, November 2019 was a turning point. Many analyses suggest it was a step towards the unification of all social classes and the formation of the foundations for a movement aimed at transcending the current system. Asef Bayat states: 'In November 2019, a qualitative change occurred in the protests… different social groups, despite their specific concerns, began to raise more general and political demands. This was a very important qualitative change, so that the government's responsibility for the current failures and crises became the common discourse of protesters from different social bases… It was expected that the November 2019 uprising would be a warning to the authorities to adjust the system of governance and socio-economic policies… Instead, it seems that the authorities are dealing with this social phenomenon from a political-security perspective. It seems for them the priority is how to deal with the protesters and neutralise them' (Bayat, 2021: 4). Thus, in the Iranian lifeworld, the dual trends of the public's growing inclination towards radical protest and the state's will for severe suppression continued as two irreconcilable forces, until the escalating internal crises once again set the stage for their confrontation in mid-2022, leading to the nationwide 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising.

In reviewing the social movements of the last decade in Iran, the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated public health and quarantine requirements were a significant intervening variable. From late 2019 to early 2022, the public sphere

was subject to comprehensive restrictions and a relative shutdown, which inevitably caused a hiatus in the protest movements. The absence of major, widespread protests during this period was not due to a change in the economic or political situation or a subsiding of demands, but was a direct result of the pandemic. This period, while exposing the system's ever-greater inefficiency in crisis management and its profound weakness in dealing with the virus, also exacerbated public dissatisfaction by restricting business and causing further economic hardship. Ultimately, once the pandemic conditions passed, the accumulated problems and grievances exploded in the uprising of September 2022, manifesting as the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement.

## An Analytical Review of the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' Movement

As Iran entered the year 1401 SH (2022) and stood on the threshold of its 15th century, the nation's political, economic, and social fabric, along with its standing in international relations, had deteriorated to an alarming degree. This decline was a direct consequence of a confluence of devastating factors: the ever-widening schism between the public and the ruling establishment; the relentless persistence of corruption and inefficiency within state institutions; the continuation and intensification of sanctions and politico-economic pressures stemming from the nuclear crisis; and the profound societal aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The tumultuous period of protests and strikes between 2016 and 2019 was followed by two years of enforced social stillness during the pandemic (2020–2022). This hiatus could have represented a crucial opportunity for the ruling establishment to engage in a deep and honest introspection. It was a chance to analyse the perilous political, economic, and social conditions that had brought the nation to the brink, to rethink and recalibrate its macro-level strategies, and to take decisive, peace-oriented steps towards resolving the country's manifold problems. Instead, this period saw no such will for change emerge. On the contrary, the regime's political actions served only to deepen the existing crises and amplify the volume of public discontent. Its profoundly weak and misguided management of the public health emergency resulted in devastating consequences for the health and economic well-being of most Iranians. The pandemic's impact, compounded by state mismanagement, led to a sharp decline in production, the collapse of numerous businesses, and a subsequent

surge in poverty, unemployment, and inflation, causing a catastrophic drop in the psychological and material security of the populace.

Beyond the immediate crisis, however, lay a more fundamental issue concerning the regime's overarching approach to the state of the nation. While this period could have been a moment for rational deliberation and a search for viable solutions to the most critical domestic and foreign policy issues, the ruling system chose a diametrically opposite path. It used the relative quiet of the pandemic years as a window to accelerate its project of political 'purification' (khāles-sāzi). This involved a systematic campaign to eliminate or weaken all opposing and critical parties, movements, and figures; to impose stricter controls over the social sphere and intensify the security-focused atmosphere; and to formulate new socio-cultural policies grounded in a revolutionary discourse, thereby preparing the ground for the realisation of its 'Second Step of the Revolution' agenda. Consequently, by the time the pandemic restrictions were lifted and people returned to the public sphere, the underlying factors for discontent and protest had not only remained but had accumulated to an unprecedented and explosive degree.

The mandatory hijab for women and girls has been one of the most contentious and volatile issues in Iran over the last decade, consistently transcending the matter of dress to become a flashpoint for a much larger struggle over gender identity and women's freedom. With the ascendancy of Ebrahim Raisi's revolutionary government, this issue—a core component of strategic plans for the 'Expansion of the Culture of Chastity' and the 'Enjoining Good and Forbidding Wrong'—was placed at the very heart of the state's social and cultural policy agenda. A key executive arm of this policy was the 'Guidance Patrol' (gasht-e ershād), officially known as the Morality Security Police, which was tasked with policing public appearance, particularly that of women, and taking disciplinary action against perceived instances of improper veiling. Encounters between the Guidance Patrol and women deemed improperly dressed have been a persistent feature of conflict on the streets and in public spaces for decades, but this conflict entered a new and more volatile phase in the spring and summer of 2022. Viral videos and images depicting the often brutal methods of the patrols—including one particularly harrowing clip of a mother clinging to a patrol van in a desperate attempt to protect her arrested daughter, only to be callously disregarded by the officers, and the forced televised confession of Sepideh Rashno, a woman

who had protested the mandatory hijab—circulated widely on social media, amplifying public anger and resentment. It was in this inflamed atmosphere, pregnant with the potential for mass protest, that on 16 September 2022, the death of a young woman named Jina (Mahsa) Amini in the custody of Tehran's Guidance Patrol ignited the accumulated rage of a nation, setting off a new wave of nationwide protests that would become known as the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising.

On 13 September 2022, a 21-year-old woman named Jina (Mahsa) Amini, a native of the city of Saqqez in Kurdistan province who was visiting Tehran with her family, was arrested near a metro station for alleged improper hijab. Two hours after being transferred to the Morality Security Police headquarters, she was hospitalised, reportedly due to severe head trauma resulting in brain death. She died three days later, on 16 September. News coverage of Jina Amini's coma and the circulation of a photograph of her lying in a hospital bed sparked a massive wave of sympathy and outrage on social media, which intensified dramatically upon the announcement of her death. On 17 September, the first anti-government gatherings formed on the streets near the hospital, with protesters chanting slogans such as 'Death to the dictator', 'Guidance Patrol is a slaughter patrol', 'By the blood of Mahsa, Iran will be free', 'Khamenei is a murderer, his rule is illegitimate', 'From Kurdistan to Tehran, oppression against women', and 'I will kill, I will kill, whoever killed my sister'. These initial demonstrations were met with a violent response from anti-riot forces (Protests and expressions of anger by the Iranian people following the death of Mahsa Amini, 2022).

The transfer of Jina's body to her hometown of Saqqez and the protests that erupted during and after her funeral were a pivotal moment in the continuation and meaning-making of this nascent movement. The family's refusal to cooperate with state institutions in their attempts to cover up the circumstances of her death, combined with powerful acts of protest at her graveside, galvanised the movement. A handwritten note in Kurdish placed on her grave, which read, 'Jina, dear, you will not die. Your name will become a symbol' (Jina giyan, to namri, nawt êbête remz), and the chanting of the slogan 'Woman, Life, Freedom' over her tomb, which soon became the global anthem of the uprising, marked a definitive turning point. The sustained momentum of the protests, coupled with the extraordinary wave of global solidarity it inspired, provided the conditions for its transition from a protest uprising into a new social movement, known to

the world as the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement.

Simultaneously with the funeral, calls for mass protests were issued in many cities. In Sanandaj, Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, and Rasht, the first demonstrations took shape around the central slogan of 'Woman, Life, Freedom', quickly evolving into broader anti-regime protests. Despite a severe and repressive reaction from the state, it was not long before the entire country became a stage for protests against Jina's death and for open opposition to the regime. The geographical scope of this uprising was vast, encompassing all 31 provinces, 161 cities, and 144 major universities, with a total of 544 street protests and 615 university gatherings recorded. The movement continued with relative consistency for approximately three months, making it one of the most widespread and sustained periods of protest in the history of the Islamic Republic (HRANA, 2022: 8).[1] An analysis by The Guardian described it as the biggest challenge to the leadership and the regime of the Islamic Republic since 1979 (The Guardian, 2022).

The social base and primary actors of the 2022 uprising were women, adolescents, young adults, and university students across a multitude of cities, large and small, as well as ethnic and religious minority groups in the country's peripheral regions. Beyond the specific pressures of gender and generation, the common thread uniting these groups is a shared sense that they are the primary victims of the country's intolerable conditions. They experience, in various ways, the spillover from the general social, economic, and political crises, both within society at large and within their own families. They have endured an uninspiring and tedious educational system, and with a keen awareness of the country's bleak job market, they see no bright future ahead of them. Finally, they find what few opportunities they have for leisure and recreation to be under the constant and intensified control of state institutions. A professional element also existed among the young protesters; alongside ethnic and religious minorities, a large number of those killed were either unemployed youths or temporary workers in small private service sector businesses like restaurants, cafes, and gyms. This demographic composition clearly illustrates the imprint of economic hardship alongside the social and cultural grievances driving this movement (Delavari, 2023).

1. It should be noted that the provided statistics cover the 82-day period from 17 September to 7 December 2022. This report only includes protest gatherings of over 30 people in its statistical survey.

One of the features that distinguished the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement from previous protests was the extensive participation of the market, guilds, and workers in the form of strikes. Strikes by merchants were primarily concentrated in the northwestern and southeastern regions of the country. However, despite the government's significant influence, parts of the Tehran Bazaar—the heart of commerce in Iran—also witnessed strikes. In total, businesses in 53 cities went on strike on 163 occasions over the 82-day period. Educational and professional institutions in 33 cities held 110 sit-ins and gatherings, and in 14 cities, people engaged in work or study stoppages on 43 occasions. Workers, some truck drivers, teachers, and lawyers also showed their solidarity with the nationwide protests through rallies or by ceasing their work (HRANA, 2022: 60).

Another noteworthy aspect of the movement's social base is the conspicuous silence of the traditional, non-governmental clergy. Throughout the uprising, despite repeated calls from state leaders and official circles for the 'elite' (khavās)—a term used by the regime to refer to high-ranking figures, including senior clerics—to condemn the movement, there was little evidence of such a response from this segment of the clergy. On the contrary, during this period, some of these clerics were occasionally heard criticising the existing situation and the government's policies. This was particularly significant given the movement's non-religious (though not necessarily anti-religious) orientation and the clear anti-clerical sentiments expressed by some protesters. This silence, whatever its cause, holds important implications for the future trajectory of the movement. Overall, the movement possessed considerable actual and potential strength, a fact attested to by its geographical breadth and its persistence in various forms despite extreme pressure and repression (Delavari, 2023).

The 2022 uprising substantially surpassed previous movements in its message, scope, and unity, adopting a fundamentally different character and dynamism. It brought together the urban middle class, the impoverished middle class, segments of the urban periphery, and various ethnic groups—Kurds, Persians, Lurs, Azeri Turks, and Baluch—under the unifying banner of 'Woman, Life, Freedom'. A shared sense of grievance was forged; a pain and a demand that united disparate social groups, compelling them not only to feel and share it but to act upon it. With the emergence of 'the people' as a super-collective in which class, gender, ethnic, and religious differences temporarily faded in favour of a greater public good, the uprising took on a revolutionary character. The demands

went far beyond ending the Guidance Patrol and the mandatory hijab. For the first time, a nationwide protest movement in the country called for systemic change and a structural transformation of the state (Bayat, 2023: 50).

The revolutionary uprising of 'Woman, Life, Freedom' transformed urban spaces outside Iran into arenas of participation and contestation for countless actors, from individuals and groups to international organisations, all with unequal access to economic, social, and political resources. The external solidarity dimension of this movement, which was powerfully influenced by its progressive and human rights-based demands, is one of its most prominent and significant features, unparalleled in Iranian history. From the earliest days of the uprising, the death of Jina (Mahsa) Amini and the subsequent events triggered a massive international reaction that had a profound impact on the movement's nature and course. The Iranian diaspora, heads of state, international political bodies, human rights organisations, global trade unions, renowned academic and artistic figures, and ordinary citizens in many countries all became global actors in support of the movement. The United Nations, the European Union, Human Rights Watch, and Western countries including the United States, Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom openly supported the movement and took concrete actions, such as imposing sanctions on leaders of the Islamic Republic and establishing support programs. The UN Security Council issued a statement on human rights violations in Iran during an informal meeting held for this purpose (2022). On 14 December 2022, the UN Economic and Social Council voted to remove Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women, a move unprecedented in the commission's history. The Munich Security Conference in 2023 was also held without the presence of Iranian officials, with invitations instead extended to prominent opposition figures (Start of the Munich Security Conference…, 2023).

Touraj Atabaki comments on the movement's resonance abroad: 'One of the visible hallmarks of the movement is its achievements beyond Iran's borders. Thanks to the millions of Iranian refugees and migrants living across the globe, a movement has formed that I call the 'diaspora movement.' This movement has not limited itself to mere support for the demands of the people inside but has, by providing a complementary discourse, helped to strengthen and enrich their demands. The most successful and striking example of this role is the organisation of massive rallies in European and North American countries.

More than 50,000 people participated in the Toronto rally and over 80,000 in Berlin. Such steps not only support the revolutionary protest movement inside Iran but also have the capacity to influence it through their organisational forms and slogans. Long-distance solidarity has given way to a globalised, close-knit empathy. Furthermore, this diaspora, at both grassroots and elite levels, has not only mobilised global public support for the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in an unparalleled way but has also drawn governments and many international institutions to its side, which is also a rare sight in contemporary world history. The support of the world's people for the struggle of the Iranian people is, without a doubt, unprecedented' (Atabaki, 2022).

The prominent and unprecedented role played by the Iranian diaspora—from ordinary people to elites and opposition parties—during the uprising allowed them to seize a degree of initiative and representation of the movement in the free spaces of the Western world. While this had positive consequences in globalising the movement's voice, it also brought a set of negative and distorting effects. The most damaging aspect was the emergence of extremist right-wing, left-wing, and monarchist ideologies from within the diaspora, which sought to co-opt the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement. These currents, with their reductionist approaches and ideological agendas, attempted to steer the inclusive and modern movement, with its universal and humane message, towards superficial interpretations and partisan interests. Sociologist Mehrdad Darvishpour writes: 'This movement emerged at a time when we were simultaneously witnessing the rise of a radical and extremist Iranian right abroad that was alien to the movement itself; a tendency that has no affinity with the rise of women, no affinity with the rise of ethnic groups, and is not compatible with the movement's peaceful and pro-democracy nature, viewing it only as an instrument. This current, under the pretext of supporting the movement but in clear distinction from it, was mostly a purveyor of a kind of lumpenism, violence, extremism, and misinformation. In the field of demonstrations, the far-right displayed its destructive capacity through aggressive, violent, and intimidating behaviours such as raising gallows and photos of former torturers, beating opponents, and imposing itself on others. Their populist call for unity around the symbol of the monarchy quickly turned into 'Our leader is Pahlavi, whoever denies it is a foreigner' and a declaration of war against the 'agents of the 1979 sedition.' They tried to appropriate the solidarity in support of the Iranian people for

their own ends and replace polyphony with a single voice. In doing so, they had no qualms about antagonising other Iranian dissenters or aligning with the racist far-right in the West. The intellectual 'elites' of this tendency, ignoring the slogans of the movement inside the country, quickly elevated themselves to the level of a coherent 'political thought' and founded their 'new' parties. First, they completely denied the uprising that the world was calling the first 'women's revolution,' labelling it a 'nationalist revolution.' Then, in an attempt to neutralise the feminist colour of the slogan 'Woman, Life, Freedom,' they promoted the patriarchal and authoritarian slogan 'Man, Homeland, Prosperity.' This current's problematic nostalgia quickly led to an absolute idealisation of the past regime. Those who initially denied ethnic discrimination in the name of preserving territorial integrity soon labelled ethnic groups as separatists and terrorists. Radical opposition to the Islamic government quickly turned into a hostile antagonism against the 'seditionists of '79'' (Darvishpour, 2023).

The role and impact of the virtual world, with social networks at its core, is another fundamental feature of the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising. Its diverse functions had a profound effect on the movement's nature and power. The #MahsaAmini hashtag, with nearly 300 million uses on Twitter and millions more on other platforms like Instagram and TikTok, broke all records in the history of social media (How the 300 million #MahsaAmini hashtag broke the record on Persian Twitter, 2022). As noted in the analysis of the November 2019 protests, the theory of the 'Network society' and its multifaceted applications for information dissemination, organisation, and meaning-creation are a defining characteristic of recent protest movements, and this reached a new scale in the 2022 uprising. Internet control in Iran became one of the main tools of suppression. In the early days, internet connectivity was reduced to 67% of its normal level. Mobile internet was cut off in large parts of the country, and on 21 September, Instagram and WhatsApp were filtered. The government's Ministry of Communications blocked these platforms to prevent the spread of news about the protests. Google was also temporarily blocked. The disruptions, which NetBlocks reported as the largest since the complete internet blackout of 2019, were a clear indication of the regime's fear of the network society.

From the first sparks of the 2022 uprising, the state's vast repressive apparatus was deployed with its full capacity, unleashing one of the most widespread and heinous crackdowns in Iran's contemporary history. The Human Rights Activists

News Agency (HRANA) reported the death toll as of 17 December 2022 to be 496 people, 68 of whom were under the age of 18. The number of detainees reached 18,452, including 649 university students (HRANA, 2022: 67, 190, 485).

The repressive apparatus is not only a defining feature of the ruling system's nature but also a critical variable in the course and outcome of collective protest actions. Therefore, understanding its organisation, elements, and tools is a key index in the study of protest movements. A brief look at the history of suppression over the last three decades, from the student protests of July 1999 to the Green Movement, the 2017 protests, 'Bloody November' 2019, and the 2022 uprising, reveals the evolution of this apparatus in both its hardware and software dimensions. This evolution includes enhanced training, increased manpower, reorganisation according to police standards, acquisition of new weapons and surveillance tools, and the expansion of security and intelligence agencies (Hamounian, 2022). Following the effective use of cyberspace in protests, a significant portion of the repressive apparatus's capacity was redirected towards monitoring, filtering, and cyber-suppression, with the formation of 'cyber battalions' and agencies dedicated to producing content, monitoring activities, and persecuting online dissidents (Veisi, 2018). The structure responsible for confronting protests in the Islamic Republic is not just the police; it is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional organisation that includes paramilitary, military, intelligence, judicial, media, and financial components (What do we know about the structure and budget of the repressive apparatus in Iran?, 2022). According to a report by 'Iran Open Data', the state's repressive machinery is supported by a budget of over 107 trillion tomans (in 2022), and its actions are preceded by cultural and intelligence groundwork carried out by affiliated ideological institutions. For the past three decades, the Islamic Republic's sole response to any collective protest has been ever more intense and widespread suppression, employing battlefield weapons and unconventional methods, while labelling protests as sedition, riots, and enemy conspiracies. This response starkly displays the repressive and despotic nature of the ruling system and plays a central role in creating the binary of state suppression versus a society demanding overthrow.

The slogans of the 2022 uprising, which articulate the protesters' demands and aspirations, are a key component for understanding its nature. The most prominent slogan was 'Woman, Life, Freedom' (Zan, Zendegi, Āzādi; in Kurdish: Jin,

Jiyan, Azadî). First chanted at Jina Amini's funeral in Saqqez, it quickly became the movement's manifesto, spreading across Iran and resonating globally. The slogan originates from the thought of Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned Kurdish leader, and his idea of the 'free woman', which posits that a society cannot be free until its women are free (Ghorbani, 2022). This concept, central to the Kurdish struggle in Turkey and Syria, entered the lexicon of the Iranian uprising with Jina Amini's death. Slavoj Žižek writes of its significance: 'The slogan is not a mere imitation of Western feminism… it has mobilised millions of ordinary women, but it speaks to a much broader struggle… Iranian men who chant 'Woman, Life, Freedom' know that the fight for women's rights is also a fight for their own freedom, and that the oppression of women is nothing but the most visible manifestation of a wider system of state terror' (Žižek, 2022).

Slogans demanding gender equality, such as 'Tell my mother, she no longer has a daughter', 'I am the free woman', 'Justice, freedom, optional hijab', 'We don't want an anti-woman government', 'We are all Mahsa, fight so we can fight back', 'No to the headscarf, no to subservience, yes to freedom and equality', and 'This story has a happy ending, a woman will kill the leader', were central from the beginning. The most frequent and important slogans, however, were those calling for the overthrow of the despotic regime and demanding freedom and democracy: 'Death to the dictator', 'Death to Khamenei', 'This year is the year of blood, Seyyed Ali will be overthrown', 'Khamenei the Zahhak! We will drag you under the ground', 'This is the final message, the target is the system itself', 'We will fight, we will die, we will take Iran back', 'Don't call it a protest, its name is now revolution', 'Freedom, freedom, freedom', and 'Neither monarchy nor theocracy, democracy and equality'. Slogans expressing nationwide solidarity were also widespread: 'If we don't unite, we will be killed one by one', 'From Kurdistan to Tehran, my life for Iran', 'Sanandaj, Zahedan, the eyes and light of Iran', 'Kurd, Baluch, Azeri; freedom and equality', 'Azerbaijan is awake, it supports Kurdistan', and 'We will fight, we will die, we will take Iran back'. Vulgar and obscene chants were also used, some of which, with their harsh sexual and defamatory content, seemed to contradict the movement's core message. Academics like Mostafa Mehraeen argue that these slogans arise from a closed, monolithic political space, where the language of the dominant power determines the language of the opposition. When you call your opponents 'dust and debris', 'insects', and 'scum', you cannot expect a refined response (Where

do 'obscene slogans' originate?, 2022).

In the analysis of the November 2019 protests, the rise of royalist slogans was discussed. In the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement, the monarchist current, centred on the Pahlavi family and Reza Pahlavi, also entered the fray with all its organisational, financial, and media resources, attempting to position itself as the representative of the movement in the absence of a strong, cohesive opposition. This effort to represent a new, pro-democracy movement led royalists to present a narrative of monarchy compatible with the movement's avant-garde standards, promoting a constitutional monarchy as the main alternative to the Islamic Republic. This attempt, however, was largely unsuccessful and led to significant discord within the movement and the diaspora opposition, negatively impacting its capacity. As noted, the radical Iranian right is alien to the movement's core tenets; it has no affinity with the rise of women or ethnic groups and views the movement's peaceful, pro-democracy nature merely as an instrument (Salami, 2023 & Darvishpour, 2023).

The 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement, from the perspective of the role and status of discriminated identities and minorities, marks the beginning of a new era in Iran's contemporary history. The individual persona of Jina (Mahsa) Amini—as a young, Kurdish, and Sunni woman—is itself a symbol that represented the majority of discriminated ethnic, religious, gender, and even generational groups in Iranian society. These characteristics gave the movement a symbolic and multifaceted nature. A reflection on nationwide uprisings in Iran before 2022 reveals a weak overlap or solidarity between them and the ethnic question. Protests focused on ethnic and religious demands have generally remained confined to their specific geographies, while nationwide uprisings have typically revolved around cross-ethnic demands, at most implicitly covering some ethnic grievances. In the 2022 uprising, however, for the first time, ethnic groups, with Kurds and Baluch at the forefront, became major actors in a nationwide movement, playing a pivotal role in its formation and continuation. Their role was not limited to street protests; they were also central to the discursive construction of the movement. The multi-dimensional role of ethnic groups can be examined from several angles. First, the uprising formed around the death of a young woman from the Kurdish community, whose brother had pleaded at the time of her arrest, 'Don't take my sister, we are strangers here!' (Jina is all our sister, 2022: 12). This story was instrumental in galvanising a sense of

collective outrage and solidarity. Her funeral became the focal point for directing and sustaining the uprising, emerging from the specific socio-political culture of Kurdistan.

Second was the prominent and central role of ethnic groups (Kurds and Baluch) in organising and sustaining the protests. In the geographical atlas of the demonstrations, Kurdish cities in the provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, West Azerbaijan, and Ilam, and the cities of Baluchistan, with Zahedan at their centre, were at the forefront. The intensity and persistence of the protests and the high level of suppression in these areas underscore their significance. In the last week of November, more than 50 protesters were killed in Kurdish regions, where the IRGC, as the main agent of suppression, resorted to using heavy anti-armour weapons and nerve agents (Sayfikaran, 2022). 'Bloody Friday' in Zahedan on 30 September 2022, with nearly 100 victims, marked the deadliest single day of the protests and only strengthened the resolve of the Baluch people. So much so that, more than a year after the uprising began, Baluchistan, with Zahedan at its heart, remained the only unconquerable bastion of protest, and the Friday sermon of Mawlana Abdolhamid, the city's Sunni prayer leader, remains the only voice of freedom still heard from within the country, fearlessly criticising and challenging the ruling system. The suppression in Kurdistan and Baluchistan was not limited to protesters; the daily lives of all citizens were subjected to the strictest security measures for months, in what amounted to a policy of collective punishment. The rates of arrest, torture, and pressure were also far more severe and violent in these regions (The security atmosphere in Kurdish cities…, 2022). This reality was not lost on the people in other cities, and support for Kurdistan and Baluchistan became an important part of the uprising's literature and slogans.

Another aspect of the ethnic groups' role was the meaningful participation of their languages and cultures in the movement's discourse. Many slogans, ideas, and protest methods emerged from ethnic regions and were welcomed throughout Iran, playing a crucial role in creating nationwide solidarity and in positioning Kurdistan and Baluchistan as the 'eyes and light' of the uprising. At the same time, the uprising in ethnic regions provided an opportunity to articulate specific ethnic demands. Many ethnic activists and protesters, while emphasising nationwide solidarity, insisted that the ethnic question should not be forgotten. In the protests in Kurdish cities, Kurdish nationalist tendencies were clearly visible with trademark slogans of the Kurdish struggle such as 'Kurdistan will be the

graveyard of fascists', 'The martyr does not die', 'Qasemlou, Qasemlou, your path continues', and 'As long as one Kurd remains, Kurdistan will remain'.

The authority of influential national-religious figures and opposition parties abroad among the Kurdish and Baluch communities is a distinctive feature of the protests in these regions, which was highly effective in their organisation and management. In the year from the start of the uprising to its anniversary, four calls for protests and strikes by the Cooperation Center of Iranian Kurdistan's Political Parties were met with overwhelming popular support, with strikes in some Kurdish cities lasting for more than 45 consecutive days (Hassanzadeh, 2023: 72).

Under the influence of severe and violent state suppression, after about 100 days, the last centres of protest in the cities of Kurdistan were dismantled. The Friday prayers in Zahedan and the sermons of Mawlana Abdolhamid remained the only internal bastion of the movement that the repressive apparatus could not control. However, this does not necessarily mean the end of the movement, but rather the end of one cycle of protests—protests whose return period has become progressively shorter in the last decade. What distinguishes the current cycle is that it seems to have pushed society onto a 'revolutionary course'. A large part of the population continues to think, imagine, and act based on a different future, or 'revolution'. In this state, people's judgment of the country's problems is often shaped by the deep-seated refrain, 'They are on their way out'. Every daily failure (like a water shortage) is seen as a failure of the state, and every act of protest (over unpaid wages, for example) is seen as a revolutionary act. Such a political psychology deems the status quo temporary and change inevitable; only its timing is unknown. Therefore, in such a society, alternating periods of calm and unrest can continue until they lead to a situation of 'dual power' or a 'revolutionary situation'. Only a radical political reform and a meaningful improvement in people's lives might disrupt this revolutionary course. For example, constitutional changes, a referendum on the desired political system, or extensive socio-economic programs could be such reforms. Otherwise, one must expect either a state of continuous crisis and ungovernability, or a probable trend towards a revolutionary situation. But the emergence of a revolutionary situation is unlikely before the revolutionary movement, such as 'Woman, Life, Freedom', becomes a credible and concrete alternative to the existing regime. A revolutionary movement can become a concrete alternative when it possesses a

kind of leadership organisation and a strategic vision with public trust. In other words, the current fluid movement must at some stage manifest its institutional form as a tangible collective force, crystallised from a coalition of dissatisfied groups, sectors, and personalities, and clarify what it wants… Finally, if the moment of political transformation arrives and the revolutionary movement lacks organisation and a leadership body, other existing organised, entrenched, and opportunistic forces (such as the military, political parties, sectarian groups, or religious organisations) will enter the scene to shape the future in their favour. Such forces can, 'on behalf of' the movement, enter into unwanted deals with power, or simply fill the power vacuum in the event of a political collapse (Bayat, 2023: 54-55).

The 2022 uprising brought about a transformation in the prevailing social attitudes regarding ethnic groups and their relationship with Iranian identity. For the first time, in the context of a collective uprising, an opportunity arose for dialogue, solidarity, and a relative unity of discourse between the ethnic-religious minority and the ethnic-religious majority. Slogans like 'From Kurdistan to Tehran, my life for Iran', 'Mahabad, Kurdistan, the eyes and light of Iran', 'Kurdistan, Baluchistan, the eyes and light of Iran', and 'Kurd, Baluch, Azeri, freedom, equality' are clear examples of a meaningful change in the perception of Iranian society, with Tehran at its centre, regarding the relationship between the ethnic question and the nation's destiny. Of course, this attitudinal shift, however important, is merely a preliminary step. Its consolidation requires sustained discursive and epistemic transformations that move beyond the emotional and rebellious stage to the realm of logic, intellectual reflection, and a belief in the principles of freedom and democracy, thereby turning it into a new paradigm in the country's political culture. Therefore, contrary to some analyses that, influenced by the emotional atmosphere of the uprising, have labelled these changes a 'socio-intellectual revolution'[1], it must be remembered that a transition to a true intellectual revolution on the issue of ethnicity, nationality, and religious minorities requires a slow, step-by-step, and sustainable change in the country's foundational knowledge and attitudes, for which only the preliminary groundwork has so far been laid. The emergence of some intellectual

1. Some essays and discourses during the 2022 uprising refer to the change in the relationship between the centre and the periphery and between ethnic-religious minorities and the majority as a socio-intellectual revolution.

disputes and discursive contradictions regarding the ethnic question in Iran after the protests subsided attests to this state of affairs—a situation that the Islamic Republic, with its catchphrase of 'separatism', and some intellectual currents and opposition parties, both inside and outside the country, with similar arguments, are trying to bring to a stalemate.

The factors behind the 2022 uprising can be divided into short-, medium-, and long-term categories. The actions of the Guidance Patrol regarding hijab and the resistance of women and girls, and more broadly, the conflict of the new generation over the right to choose their dress and lifestyle, fall into the short-term category. These were the sparks that ignited the protests, becoming a catalyst for voicing a torrent of demands rooted in the near and distant past. The accumulation of multiple political, economic, social, and even environmental crises—the result of the regime's performance over recent decades—constitutes the medium-term factors. These have led to a political impasse, increased economic hardship, and widespread social despair. At the third level are the long-term factors, which are the most enduring elements in the construction of the present situation: the conflict between the meaning-system and discourse prevailing in Iranian society today and those of the regime. Over the past decades, the initial elements of a new discourse have gradually emerged, which identifies the ruling political Islamism—or more precisely, the Islamic Republic's reading of Shi'ism—as the country's fundamental problem and proposes moving beyond it as the solution. This new discourse includes components such as the primacy of life, secularism, political and social freedoms, pluralism, and democracy. The 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement can be seen as a new stage in the expansion of this discourse, its entry into the political sphere and the arena of political conflict (Delavari, 2023).

The 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement belongs to a new generation of civil-political movements that, in the first instance, focuses on the gender-based oppression of women in Iran. Its slogans clearly reveal this characteristic. The generational demands of the youth, the grievances of discriminated ethnic and religious identities, and the claims of unions and guilds followed in subsequent ranks. Unlike previous protest uprisings, which were primarily economic, professional, or purely political, this was a social uprising. It arose from a dynamic society constantly undergoing new generational, gender, and identity changes—a society that demands new and appropriate conditions but receives no

positive response, only fierce opposition and suppression. This is because society and the state in Iran suffer from a fundamental conflict. The ideological nature of the Islamic Republic's discourse is the source of many of the conflicts between society and the state over the past decades. From an ideological perspective, the Islamic Republic is a system based on a revolutionary Shia discourse in which national interests are subordinated to revolutionary Shia interests. For over four decades, under the principle of the absolute Guardianship of the Jurist and with the claim of representing the Hidden Imam, the regime has sought to promote its revolutionary Shia ideology with little regard for Iran's diverse society and its demands. While the state's control over oil revenues and its authoritarian management of the economy and social life have allowed it to manage crises and maintain its rule despite its declining legitimacy, in the last decade, international isolation, sanctions, and widespread corruption and inefficiency have led to a functional and managerial crisis. The system has become incapable of performing its basic functions, such as organising the economy and people's livelihoods. In recent years, with the increasing erosion of social and political capital, we are facing a 'detached state' that lacks a meaningful connection with its domestic and international environment and is therefore severely incapable of both correctly identifying problems and appropriately solving them (Delavari, 2023). This profound inability, which is both discursive and functional, results in an accumulation of social dissatisfaction and the outbreak of protests.

The 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising can be described as one of the most extensive post-structuralist 'new social movements' in Iran. Rather than being rooted in economic or class grievances, or inspired by a specific ideology or leadership, it was a pluralistic, horizontal, fluid, decentralised, and spontaneous yet purposeful movement, in which structure-breaking demands such as the freedom of hijab, the elimination of discrimination, and the negation of the system were raised. What took shape was, in fact, a 'super-movement' that, for the first time, stood on its own feet without relying on traditional inherited and religious institutions and their bases, such as the bazaar and the clergy, and by articulating modern, democratic, pro-women's rights, and anti-discrimination discourses. This movement showcased the values of the young generation in challenging traditional, religious, patriarchal, discriminatory, and despotic norms, and was simultaneously alien to authoritarian hereditary, religious, and ideological discourses. None of the nationalist, Islamist, or communist ideologies

were its inspiration. This is perhaps one of the main reasons why not only the government but also a significant part of the opposition was taken by surprise by the emergence of this movement and lagged behind it (Darvishpour, 2023).

Asef Bayat, in a cross-gender and cross-generational analysis, portrays the nature of the movement as follows: 'This unprecedented socio-political event is not merely a feminist revolution, not just a rebellion of the new generation, and not simply about the mandatory hijab. It is an uprising to reclaim life, a struggle to free the lifeworld of the people from the clutches of an internal colonization. In this, women, as the central subject of this colonisation, have risen as the pioneers of this liberation movement. We may be witnessing the emergence of a 'revolutionary course' in the country' (Bayat, 2023: 48). This is not a 'revolutionary situation' in the sense of 'dual power', where an organised revolutionary force with the support of millions stands against a collapsing state and its fragmented security forces. Rather, what we are witnessing today is the rise of a revolutionary movement with its own protest pattern, language, and identity, which can lead society onto a 'revolutionary course' (Bayat, 2023: 50). Taking a positive view of the movement's achievements, he believes that with the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising, a paradigmatic and irreversible change has occurred in the horizon of the Iranian mindset. He writes: 'Whatever the outcome of this uprising, many things have undergone profound changes. It is unlikely that the situation will return to what it was before the uprising. A paradigm shift has occurred in the Iranian mentality. According to polls, the majority of people have clearly moved past the current system and want fundamental changes. In this mental transformation, women have been acknowledged as the agent of change and the 'woman question' as the strategic focus of the struggle. The 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising has demonstrated the absence of religious discourse and the aversion to state religion. New norms have been created in society and are likely to remain. The Guidance Patrol, mandatory hijab, or gender segregation may in practice become a thing of the past. A society that until recently was suffering from a sense of blockage and suspension seems to have found a new life and soul. After a long period of despair and frustration, a kind of hope mixed with ambiguity has emerged; the belief that things might really change. Those who expect a quick result will probably be disappointed and saddened. But there is no doubt that society has set itself on a new path. It is as if a new, albeit unknown, opening has appeared on the horizon of this land' (Bayat, 2023: 56).

## A Reflection on the Future of Identity and Ethnic Issues in Iran from the Perspective of Sustainable Peace

While the chronological and quantitative gap between the publication of the first edition of this research in 2019 and the appended subjects of this second edition (covering the period 2019–2022) is not particularly vast, this seemingly brief three-year interlude was, as our descriptive analysis has shown, the stage for events and transformations of such profound and far-reaching significance that they have fundamentally altered the arrangement of political and social forces and their corresponding discourses in Iran. This section, therefore, aims to elucidate the role, position, attitude, and strategy of the active social and political forces on the contemporary Iranian stage, with specific attention to the developments of these recent, tumultuous years. To achieve this, we will first examine the principal political and intellectual discourses currently in play. Subsequently, given the pivotal and conspicuous role of ethnic groups in the events of the past few years, we will assess the indices of their collective action and their group positions within this new field of transformation. This approach will not only reveal their discursive and behavioural patterns in the post-2019 period but will also allow for a comparative estimation against the patterns observed during the original fieldwork for this study (prior to 2019). The ultimate goal is to re-evaluate and explain the new nature of the debates surrounding collective identity and ethnicity following this period of profound transition.

### A Survey of the Principal Discursive Readings on the Future of Iran

Iran's circumstances on the threshold of a new solar century were marked by unprecedented issues, challenges, events, and changes that have inextricably blended the calendrical meaning of this new era with the historical concept of profound transformation, propelling the nation towards new political and social horizons. The current state of Iran, with all the perils and opportunities that lie ahead, represents a critical and vital focal point. It has compelled the majority of political, social, and intellectual forces in the field, with their diverse tastes, thoughts, and ideologies, to rethink their positions in response to these new conditions. Each current, drawing from its own discursive origins, is now proposing strategies and solutions to address the deep-seated problems of Iranian society and politics and to navigate a path towards a more desirable future. In

this charged environment, the positions taken on identity-based and ethnic issues have become principal and defining components of the meaning-systems and practices of these discourses, acquiring a significant and decisive prominence.

The primary discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran's ruling establishment, under which the majority of contemporary Principlist sub-discourses are now articulated, stands as the hegemonic grand-narrative shaping the political and social landscape of Iran. Although it occupies a position of direct antagonism to all other opposition discourses, it has consistently endeavoured to avoid passivity and isolation. Instead, it has actively and comprehensively confronted its rival and opposing narratives with all the power at its disposal. Over the last decade, and especially following the emergence of a widespread protest-oriented atmosphere in Iranian society, the regime's ideological discourse has been the target of intense criticism from intellectual and opposition currents both inside and outside the country. In response, it has sought to fortify and propagate its own foundational principles, portraying itself as the agent of Iran's advancement and the sole guardian of its security and prosperity. Adopting an exclusionary approach inspired by a pervasive conspiracy theory, it consistently frames any opposition to its discursive current as the product of foreign plots and the actions of their dependent internal agents, who are accused of attempting to disrupt and halt the comprehensive development of Iran and the Islamic Republic.

To achieve this objective, the Islamic Republic, with the Supreme Leader and his surrounding network of power at its core, has mobilised the full media, propaganda, security, military, economic, and bureaucratic capacities of the three branches of government and all other state institutions. The centrality of ideological markers within this discourse—such as governance based on the principle of the Guardianship of the Jurist (Velāyat-e Faqih), the establishment of an Islamic government, the negation of Western culture and lifestyles, and the confrontation with liberal doctrines—are the fundamental and unwavering components that define its stance in the face of the new social and political dynamics. In this fateful period, the revolutionary discourse has placed the principles articulated in the 'Second Step of the Revolution' manifesto (Statement of the Second Step of the Revolution, 2019) at the forefront of its agenda. With complete disregard for the realities on the ground—which it dismisses as artificial, inauthentic, and the result of Western conspiracies—it insists on charting Iran's future solely according to the coordinates of the Islamic Revolution.

Within this discursive framework, Islamic religious identity, with Shi'ism at its core, is placed at the centre. All other forms of collective identity—be they based on ethnicity, gender, or generation—are considered fabricated, insignificant, or, in some cases, tools of the regime's enemies. Consequently, any mobilisation based on these identities is met with a coercive and security-focused response. The regime's ideology and slogans are being advanced at the very moment that Iranian society, more than ever, is searching for its place in the world. Generational shifts, the universalisation of the internet, the expansion of generational and gender awareness, the formation of new collective identities, the emergence of new self-awareness among ethnic and religious groups, and the growing desire of the public—especially the new generation—for freedom of choice in personal matters such as lifestyle and beliefs, all point to a society deeply influenced by global culture. These new social realities stand in stark contradiction to the regime's ideological projects, which seek to impose its own belief system on the public while ignoring the comprehensive epistemic and identity transformations that have permeated the fabric of society. These are the factors that fuel the increasing divergence between the majority of society and the regime. As a result, the strategy of imposing the regime's discourse on rival political forces and the public at large will have no outcome other than the intensification of hostility and the reinforcement of the binary of 'suppression versus overthrow'. This type of confrontation inevitably closes the door to any form of compromise or tolerance, leaving not the slightest opening for a path based on peace and reconciliation.

The Reformist movement and its affiliated political and intellectual currents, such as the Moderates, constitute another significant bloc of internal forces. Despite the severe restrictions and prohibitions imposed on their political and social activities, they continue to insist on the necessity of submitting to a process of reform. However, in response to the political and social transformations of recent decades, their own strategy and understanding of reform have been re-evaluated. As the former reformist president, Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, noted in one of his messages, 'Reformism in its previously experienced form and method… if not declared impossible, has, at the very least, collided with the sturdy rock of a dead end' (Khatami, 2022). Consequently, the spokespeople for this current now present the need for structural and foundational reforms in all pillars of national power and wealth as a vital necessity for navigating the

country's critical situation. They believe that the continuation of the current state of emergency will inevitably lead to a comprehensive collapse.

Following the rise of a discourse advocating for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic in the recent protests, the Reformists have found themselves in a difficult position. With their reformist disposition and their focus on solving problems through gradualist solutions, they have consistently emphasised the need to preserve the fundamental structure of the Islamic Republic. In their defence of the system, they argue that the regime is not on the verge of collapse and that any revolution or overthrow in Iran's current state would result in nothing but destruction, violence, and failure, and would even pose a grave threat to Iran's territorial integrity. On 6 December 2022, at the height of the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement, Seyyed Mohammad Khatami noted in a message that the 'beautiful slogan of 'Woman, Life, Freedom'' points society towards a 'better future'. He advised the authorities of the Islamic Republic to 'correctly recognise the improper aspects of governance and move towards good governance before it is too late'. He had previously stressed that 'overthrow is neither possible nor desirable' and had told students that 'freedom and security should not be pitted against each other, resulting in freedom being trampled in the name of preserving security'. Citing the capacities within the existing constitution, Khatami has even spoken against the need for constitutional change (Khatami, 2022).

The most significant pathological aspect of the Reformist discourse in contemporary Iran is its lack of purchase with either the public or the ruling establishment. A broad segment of Iranian civil society and the general public now believes that the Islamic Republic is no longer reformable and that this strategy has expired—a belief powerfully captured in the ubiquitous protest slogan, 'Reformist, Principlist, the whole story is over!' (Eslāh-talab, usul-garā, digeh tamume mājarā). Furthermore, public opinion holds that the regime uses the idea of reform not as a genuine mechanism for solving problems, but as a political safety valve to release social and political pressure. Consequently, the most effective response is to disregard it. The regime, for its part, refuses to accept the Reformists in any capacity, viewing their activities as a deceptive ploy to gain power. It has therefore consistently rejected their good-faith proposals for national reconciliation and peaceful conflict resolution. A clear example of this was a letter sent by Mohammad Khatami to the Supreme Leader in 2022, which received no response from the leadership and was met with intense ridicule and

attack from hardline Principlists. Mohammad-Ali Abtahi, a prominent reformist figure, wrote: ‘In the recent protests, despite Mr. Khatami’s correspondence with the leadership and meetings between reformists and high-ranking officials to prevent violence and reform affairs, there is no sign that the demands have been considered by the establishment’ (Seyyed Mohammad Khatami’s letter to the Supreme Leader, 2022).

The belief that reformism has failed and is an ineffective strategy for transcending Iran’s current predicament is not limited to street protesters and the political opposition abroad. Some former high-ranking revolutionaries and first-tier figures of the system now also speak of moving beyond the reformist model. Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, the leaders of the Green Movement who remain under house arrest, along with some political prisoners and other disenfranchised activists, are among those who have openly expressed their view that the very foundation of the system should be put to a referendum, the constitution changed, and the Supreme Leader step down. In a message issued on 4 February 2023, Mir-Hossein Mousavi wrote: ‘The bloody events of recent months and years in Iran show that the uncompromised implementation of the constitution, a slogan that held hope 13 years ago, is no longer effective, and a step beyond it must be taken. Iran and Iranians need and are ready for a fundamental transformation, the main lines of which are drawn by the pure movement of 'Woman, Life, Freedom''. In his statement, Mr. Mousavi proposed a three-step plan: first, holding a free and fair referendum on the necessity of changing or drafting a new constitution; second, if the people vote in favour, forming a constituent assembly composed of true representatives of the nation through a free and fair election; and third, holding a referendum on the text approved by that assembly to establish a system based on the rule of law, in accordance with human rights standards, and arising from the will of the people. He wrote: ‘Authority does not lie in weapons and suppression, but in the accompaniment of the nation, the same nation that, if its gaze is turned towards and interested in a new order, the old structure will collapse, whether it wants to or not’ (Mir-Hossein Mousavi calls for a referendum…, 2023).

Despite the severe restrictions on their party activities and the general indifference they face from both the public and the state, the Reformists continue to constitute an active part of the discursive landscape in Iran. They strive to use what few media platforms and social networks are available to them to

present their messages and solutions to the public and the regime. A review of the activities of reformist media figures such as Saeed Hajjarian, Abbas Abdi, Mohammad-Ali Abtahi, and Mostafa Tajzadeh reveals a significant level of intellectual and media effort dedicated to analysing and devising strategies for the country's current situation. This group, despite being deprived of political privileges within the power structure of the Islamic Republic, continues to reject political radicalism, calls for the avoidance of violence, and repudiates the strategy of overthrow, insisting instead on peaceful solutions and a dialogue based on national reconciliation.

The parties, fronts, and currents opposed to the Islamic Republic—often referred to as 'opponents of the Islamic Republic', the 'diaspora opposition', or the 'pro-regime change opposition'—represent another spectrum of discourses. This spectrum is composed of diverse and sometimes contradictory tendencies, ideologies, and beliefs, but the majority have placed the overthrow of the current regime and the establishment of a new one at the forefront of their political agenda. Although these discourses share a consensus on the necessity of the regime's collapse, they are far from united on the structure and nature of a suitable political system for Iran's future. Moreover, they lack clear and practical ideas for how to solve the considerable crises gripping society (The Washington Institute, 2022). This broad spectrum, which includes a wide range of Marxist-leftist, monarchist, nationalist, national-religious, and ethnic parties, advocates for various forms of government for a post-Islamic Republic Iran, from centralised and federal systems to a constitutional monarchy. Another point of contention among these opposition groups is the method of struggle and the organisation of the regime's overthrow, a disagreement that has consistently been an obstacle to the formation of a united and comprehensive front against the Islamic Republic. Some of these currents believe that revolution, popular uprising, and armed action are the only viable solutions. Others insist on a soft, civil struggle in the style of the 'colour revolutions', arguing that any collapse based on armed conflict could lead to a massacre and the disintegration of the country. A third group believes that the overthrow of the Islamic Republic requires the intervention of foreign powers and their comprehensive support for popular movements and the opposition (Nadimi & Clausen, 2018). In sum, because the model of struggle for most diaspora opposition parties is based on revolutionary overthrow or foreign intervention, their path inevitably passes

through coercive and violent means. This strategy, according to its proponents, is not one of choice but of necessity, imposed upon them by an Islamic Republic that has closed off all avenues for peaceful and democratic struggle, leaving the binary of 'suppression or overthrow' as the only possibility in the arena of Iranian politics.

The approach to national and ethnic identity in Iran is a central issue that creates a clear dividing line among the opposition parties. In some cases, this issue is the primary and determining variable in the political alignment of forces opposed to the regime. Ethnic parties and currents—such as the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, the South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement, the Komala Party of Kurdistan, the Kurdistan Freedom Party, the Balochistan People's Party, the Baluch National Movement, the Democratic Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Ahwaz, and the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz—along with some leftist and Marxist parties, believe in the multi-ethnic, multi-national fabric of Iran. Consequently, they argue that this reality must be the basis for both macro- and micro-level political management, and they therefore insist on the necessity of decentralised and federalist models of governance. The Left Party of Iran, a political organisation founded in 2018 in Cologne, Germany, from the unification of three leftist currents, stated in its Third Congress in 2023 that federalism is the most suitable structure for the future of Iran because it is a reliable and historically tested framework that not only secures citizenship rights but also guarantees the collective rights of nationalities and ethnic groups to participate effectively in their own destiny (Message of the Third Congress of the Left Party of Iran…, 2023).

In stark contrast, extremist nationalist, monarchist, and constitutionalist groups argue that Iran is the heir to an ancient monarchical institution that is intrinsically intertwined with its political and social character. They believe that 'Iranianness' (Irāniyat) is a historical essence rooted in the cultural nature of all the peoples of this land. They therefore consider ethnicity to be a modern fabrication and primarily a cultural characteristic with little political or territorial relevance. Consequently, they see the revival of a centralised constitutional monarchy as the most appropriate institution for Iran's future and dismiss ethnic demands with accusations of separatism and attempts to undermine territorial integrity. Mehrdad Darvishpour writes critically of the monarchist organisations' positions on ethnic demands during the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement: 'The

intellectual elites of this tendency, ignoring the slogans of the movement inside the country, first completely denied the uprising that the world was calling the first 'women's revolution,' labelling it a 'nationalist revolution.' Then, in an attempt to neutralise the feminist colour of the slogan 'Woman, Life, Freedom,' they promoted the patriarchal and authoritarian slogan 'Man, Homeland, Prosperity.' This current's problematic nostalgia quickly led to an absolute idealisation of the past regime. Those who initially denied ethnic discrimination in the name of preserving territorial integrity soon labelled ethnic groups as separatists and terrorists. Radical opposition to the Islamic government also quickly turned into a hostile antagonism against the 'seditionists of '79'' (Darvishpour, 2023).

Occupying a middle ground between these two approaches are the liberal and national-religious parties. They envision a democratic country based on civil liberties and the protection of the ethnic and religious rights of all strata of society as the desirable model for Iran's future. Within such a framework, they believe it is possible to resolve conflicts peacefully through dialogue and to navigate the current critical conditions. According to the political thinking of this group, ethnic identity and ethnic groups possess their own political, social, and economic rights, so long as they do not endanger the country's territorial integrity and the unity of the Iranian nation. Paragraph 18 of the charter of the Solidarity of Republicans of Iran, a liberal-democratic secular organisation, states: 'Solidarity of Republicans of Iran emphasizes the preservation of Iran's territorial integrity while respecting the equal rights of all Iranian ethnic groups and the absence of ethnic discrimination. It considers the continuation of Iran's geographical cohesion to be contingent upon adherence to principles such as the observance of citizenship rights, the decentralisation of the country's management structure, the rejection of centralism, and the establishment of just relations between the centre and the periphery' (Charter of the Solidarity of Republicans of Iran, 2020).

Today, in the arena of analysing and devising solutions for Iran's crises and its future, there exists, apart from the political parties inside and outside the country, an active and relatively independent academic and intellectual current. This current strives to set aside the veils of partisan, factional, and ideological interests and, through scientific reason and a commitment to the national interest, to make Iran the subject of its rational deliberation. It seeks, through a holistic perspective, dialogue, and an insistence on non-violent and peace-oriented solutions, to find a way out of Iran's critical situation and to guide the country

away from the abyss of a potential collapse.

In the interpretations of this academic discourse, the current crises are not limited to politics and economics but are an intertwined complex of political, social, economic, environmental, cultural, religious, and ethical crises, most of which have deep historical roots. Therefore, there is no immediate, one-off solution for escaping this vortex. Rather, the tangled web of these problems requires reflection, prudence, tolerance, and a rational movement based on dialogue and reconciliation. While this discourse does not deny the role of the ruling system's nature and performance in creating the current situation, it believes that reducing all these problems to the political dimension is a form of reductionism. Consequently, a sudden and complete change of the ruling regime may not only fail to resolve this impasse but could, in a more convoluted way, reproduce the conditions of crisis.

The sociologist Mohammad Fazeli, the economist Mohsen Ranani, the sociologist of religion Hassan Mohaddesi, the jurist and Islamic scholar Sedigheh Vasmaghi, the sociologist Maqsoud Farasatkhah, the anthropologist Nematollah Fazeli, the political scientist Sadeq Zibakalam, the economist Farshad Momeni, the sociologist Saeed Peyvandi, and the economist Mousa Ghaninejad are among the most prominent and active figures of this academic intellectual discourse in recent years. These thinkers believe that Iran's macro-crisis is composed of numerous interconnected micro-crises, each of which requires scientific reflection and a rational solution. Mousa Ghaninejad criticises the disjointed state of the country's economy by pointing to the absence of freedom: 'Our economy has cancer. Its cancer is that there is no freedom. Its cancer is that everything is done by decree. This is the cancer. Let's see the problem correctly and propose the solution correctly'. He then posits the solution in the expansion of the demand for freedom as a public demand, so that the will of the state ultimately submits to the will of society (Ghaninejad, 2023). Mohammad Fazeli, one of the most prolific academics on the pathology of Iranian politics, society, and economics, particularly since the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising, has extensively analysed the state of Iran in his writings and podcast series. In a critical television appearance, he said: 'We must understand the state of Iranian society. Only 14 percent are from before the revolution; 86 percent were born after. This society has grown, matured, and become educated. It suffers from several afflictions. The unemployment rate is very high. In the last 10 years, the

wealth gap between the richest and poorest deciles has grown from 11 times to 14 times; inequality has expanded. 18.4 percent of this society lives in poverty, meaning one in every five people you pass is in absolute poverty! Its government has a severe budget deficit, and this is its global standing… We have reached a point where in 2018, 54 percent of our trade was with just three countries (China, Iraq, UAE). If you don't call this detachment from the world, what do you call it?! My narrative of today's society is that it has matured immensely… but it is faced with a governance structure that is constantly losing its capacity… The dream of development is fading. Society feels it is losing all its potential. A human being lives in the shadow of the future. The society feels that this model of governance is not building a future for it. Therefore, Iranian society has the right to be restless… We are facing a restless society that is right to be dissatisfied and right to not see a clear future. The people are demanding—over corruption, over employment, over women's rights, over interference in their lifestyle, over environmental destruction. We have become a society of unsolved problems!' (Fazeli, 2022). In another interview, on the possibility of a military attack on Iran, he stated: 'A military attack on Iran is an absolute evil. With the destruction of infrastructure and power plants, we would return to the Stone Age. The question is, is it better to reform the current conditions at a lower cost, or to submit to war with its exorbitant costs?' (Didar's conversation in the Program Article 27 with the researcher and sociologist, Part Two, 2024).

Sedigheh Vasmaghi, an Islamic scholar and a critic of the mandatory hijab, says in an open letter: 'Forty-five years of painful experience living with Sharia laws, which in the author's opinion are nothing more than ancient traditions, and in addition, 45 years of living with the extremist jurisprudence of the Islamic Republic, have led many Iranians to the conclusion that religion must be separated from the state' (Vasmaghi, 2024). As a female religious modernist, Vasmaghi has consistently striven to offer a new reading of jurisprudence and Sharia based on dignity, freedom, democracy, and individual rights, a struggle that has been particularly profound in the realm of women's issues.

Hassan Mohaddesi is another sociologist who analyses the current state of Iranian society in his numerous works. In a note on the three dominant ideologies of Iran's contemporary history—nationalism, Marxism, and Islamism—which he calls 'failed ideologies', he writes: 'We are now facing the remnants of three failed ideologies in Iran. The era of their battles and rampages is over… Now,

to build a new Iran, we need new thought; a social theory that can properly explain our conditions and show a new horizon for the use of constructive and active social forces' (Mohaddesi, n.d.). Dr. Mohaddesi is one of the thinkers who looks hopefully towards the future of Iran's transformations, saying: 'Iranian society is transitioning to a post-religious era. Iran will witness great social transformations. If you are planning to emigrate or commit suicide, wait a year or two!' (Mohaddesi, n.d.).

Dr. Farasatkhah, in an interview with the Shargh newspaper, says: 'The social language must be revived in public domains, and social dialogues must be activated in all fields; then, from the outcome of these dialogues, solutions can be drawn for the constitution, for how to reform it—considering the cost and effectiveness—and based on national interests and territorial integrity… We are in a situation where 'chance' is pushing us forward… I am worried about the future and stability of this society, and the losers of this situation will ultimately be the people of this land… The solution to get out of the current situation is to return to society. If there is a serious return to society and we witness an opportunity for a technical and precise dialogue, a solution will be found' (Jafari, 2023).

Dr. Farshad Momeni, a professor of economics, is one of the most vocal critics of the country's economic policies. He consistently warns officials about the serious dangers of the current path but believes there is still a way to save the economy: 'In a situation where the most worrying and pathetic examples of poverty and backwardness can be found in the border provinces, who benefits from weakening the government's financial capacity by devaluing the national currency?! It is quite clear that the continuation of this policy means crippling the government… I sincerely warn the key officials of the country that with this setup you are creating, you are making the future economic outlook of the country more and more uncertain… The Majles Research Center has published a report clearly stating that both the intensity and depth of poverty in Iran have increased. How can a policymaking system not notice the dangers and damages of this issue?!' Momeni believes that 'if science is made the final arbiter, and if legitimate legal freedoms create the opportunity for a frank and open dialogue with the country's officials, there is still a way to save Iran' (Momeni, 2024: 53).

Dr. Sadeq Zibakalam, a professor of political science, is a well-known public intellectual who, while fiercely criticising many of the regime's policies as

unwise and inefficient, consistently warns against the perilous and uncertain future of radical, structure-breaking movements. He believes that one must resist within the current space, with all its limitations, and strive for the smallest possibility of gradual change. He says: 'We have no other option but change and transformation from within the system… I am not speaking as a politician, but as a history professor… I do not believe at all that if this system is overthrown… and another system, for example, a secular, liberal, or republican one, comes to power, it will make us successful. Democracy is not a revolution; it is not a coup. Democracy is like a plant; this plant grows slowly and over time, whereas a revolution wants to change everything at once' (Zibakalam, April 2023). On the current atmosphere of ethnic issues, he says: 'It is a reality that we are facing an issue called ethnicity in the country… To try to settle the matter with the label of separatism every time we encounter it… will lead nowhere. Rather, we must examine their demands… and just as democratic countries have addressed and solved the issue of ethnicity, we too must try to organise it with the help of democracy' (Zibakalam, February 2024).

Based on the foregoing analysis, and in full acknowledgement of the stark reality that Iranian society now finds itself in a state of profound revolutionary ferment, having decisively transgressed many of its former, more tolerant behavioural norms, the most desirable, compelling, and indeed the only rational solution for escaping the current perilous conditions still lies in a return to the arduous path of dialogue, reasoned deliberation, and an unwavering national commitment to achieving sustainable peace. The descent into a cycle of brutal suppression and radicalised resistance has, paradoxically, not invalidated this conclusion but has instead imbued it with a desperate urgency. While the fires of protest and the intransigence of the state have made the ground for compromise seem barren, it is precisely because the alternative is so catastrophic that the difficult work of cultivating peace must be seen as the paramount political and ethical imperative. The path of reason is not a retreat from the struggle for justice; it is the only strategy that offers the possibility of achieving it without sacrificing the nation itself.

Although the probability of the current ruling establishment voluntarily adopting such peace-oriented positions has grown demonstrably weaker, perhaps to the point of near impossibility, the necessity for them is now felt more acutely and urgently than ever before. The widening chasm between the state and the nation

has created a volatile vacuum, and the logic of the street, born of desperation and rage, is now locked in a deadly embrace with the logic of the state, which knows no language other than coercion. This is the moment of maximum danger, the point at which the very idea of a shared future is in jeopardy. It is in this crucible of conflict that the call for a sustainable peace becomes not a naive aspiration, but a pragmatic and urgent strategy for national survival.

A sober glance at the experiences of societal transformations accompanied by violence, military confrontation, and civil war in the countries of the surrounding region over the last two decades provides a harrowing and undeniable cautionary narrative. The devastating futures that have befallen nations like Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq serve as a stark reminder of the abyss that lies at the end of a path defined by irreconcilable conflict. The spectre of state collapse, of fragmentation along ethnic and sectarian lines, of the hollowing out of civil society, and of protracted civil conflict is no longer an abstract fear but a tangible and horrifying possibility that must be avoided at all costs. These are not merely historical case studies; they are living testaments to what happens when the mechanisms for peaceful change are completely dismantled, when the social contract is irrevocably broken, and when violence becomes the sole medium of political discourse. To ignore these warnings would be an act of historical amnesia and profound irresponsibility.

Therefore, sustainable peace must be understood as something far more profound and transformative than a mere tactical strategy confined to the rarefied realm of high politics and state-nation relations. It cannot be a top-down pact between elites, a fragile compact between factions seeking to re-divide the spoils of power while leaving the underlying structures of injustice intact. It cannot be a temporary ceasefire in a long-running conflict, a mere pause in hostilities that allows both sides to regroup and rearm for the next inevitable confrontation. Such superficial arrangements would do nothing to address the deep-seated grievances of the Iranian people, particularly the ethnic, religious, and gender minorities who have borne the heaviest burden of the system's inequities. A simple political settlement that fails to deliver justice will, inevitably, be a prelude to an even more violent conflict in the future.

It must, instead, be reconceptualised and operationalised as a comprehensive and foundational discourse that is reproduced, nurtured, and institutionalised at every level of politics and society. It must become the new common sense of

the nation, rewiring the very social contract that binds its citizens to one another and to the state. This is a project not just of political negotiation, but of cultural and social transformation. It means creating a society where pluralism is not viewed as a threat to national unity but as its greatest source of strength; where dissent is not treated as sedition but is welcomed as a vital component of a healthy democracy; and where the rights of the individual are not seen as being in opposition to the needs of the collective, but as their essential foundation. It requires a fundamental shift from a political grammar of domination and submission to one of negotiation, compromise, and mutual respect.

It is only within the framework of the possibilities and principles inherent in such a discourse—the non-negotiable pillars of mutual recognition, genuine pluralism, a meaningful decentralisation and devolution of power, substantive social justice, and equal and universal citizenship—that the opportunity can be created to find genuine and lasting solutions. It is only through the difficult but essential work of building institutions based on these principles that Iran can hope to escape the current dire and hostile conditions with the minimum possible human and social cost and the maximum possible collective achievement. This is the only path that promises not just the absence of war, but the presence of a just and equitable order in which all Iranians can flourish.

The choice before Iran, at this fateful juncture in its long history, is therefore a stark one. It is a choice between two irreconcilable futures. On one side lies a commitment to the difficult, uncertain, but ultimately life-affirming path of a comprehensive and inclusive peace—a path that requires painful compromise, difficult dialogue, and immense political courage, but one that holds the promise of national renewal and a shared, democratic future. On the other side lies a continued descent into the vicious and self-consuming spiral of suppression and resistance, a war of attrition that the state wages against its own people, a path that threatens to exhaust the nation's human and moral resources and, ultimately, to consume the very soul of a civilization.

## Re-examining the Study's Core Components in Light of Recent Transformations: A Concluding Analysis

From a purely quantitative and chronological perspective, the interval separating the publication of the first edition of this research in 2019 from the appended subjects of this second edition, which cover the period from 2019 to

2023, is not particularly vast. However, when this same period is measured by the historical indices of profound social and political change, the events that have convulsed Iranian society have carved a meaningful and decisive chasm between these two moments in time. This is not merely a continuation of history, but a paradigmatic shift in the country's socio-political consciousness, a rupture that has fundamentally altered the pre-existing arrangements of power and the rules of social engagement. The emergence of such radically new conditions inevitably challenges the validity and applicability of the interpretive and explanatory findings of previous research. For a prospective study such as this, where a foundational part of the research model is to map the horizons of the future by analysing the present, this re-examination serves a dual purpose. It is at once an act of intellectual honesty, interrogating the predictive power and continued relevance of its original thesis, and a crucial scholarly obligation to provide an updated and actionable analysis of a society in flux. This final section, therefore, aims not only to assess the durability of the study's original findings but also to offer a new and more nuanced explanation of the challenges and opportunities that define the contemporary landscape of identity and ethnic relations, viewed through the essential and increasingly urgent lens of sustainable peace.

In the conceptual model that formed the backbone of this research, the absence of justice—in all its interconnected political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions—was identified as the central, unifying concept for explaining the precarious status and persistent demands of ethnic groups within the broader socio-political fabric of Iran. This foundational injustice, we argued, is not an accidental or peripheral feature of the system; it emanates directly from the intrinsic nature of a political order that is fundamentally undemocratic, ideologically rigid, rentier-driven, clientelistic, and structurally discriminatory. This is the great malady of the Iranian state, a systemic pathology that has not only infected the specific domain of identity and ethnicity but has woven itself into the entire political and social order, poisoning the wells of public trust and national cohesion. Over decades, it has cultivated a dependent, exclusionary culture and a corresponding form of identity politics that casts a menacing shadow over the possibility of a healthy and pluralistic collective existence. This ruling paradigm, by systematically enabling the repudiation of meritocracy, democracy, rationality, free elections, and the most basic individual and social rights, has served only to deepen and expand the nation's crises in every conceivable dimension. It

has plunged nearly every facet of social, political, cultural, environmental, and psychological life into a quagmire of accumulated, festering, and unresolved problems, creating the very 'society of unsolved problems' that thinkers like Mohammad Fazeli have described.

Therefore, the lack of justice and the dangerous syndrome of intersecting crises that it produces—one of the core findings of our original research—remain foundational concepts whose validity and relevance for understanding Iran's current situation have not diminished. Indeed, their importance, their explanatory power, and the urgent need to address them have only grown more acute in the intervening years. The description and analysis of the existing conditions, along with the proposed strategies and policies formulated on the basis of these two central concepts, have demonstrated a remarkable and sobering degree of accuracy and applicability when measured against the tragic trajectory of Iranian society's recent evolution. The predictive power of the original thesis has, unfortunately, been borne out by events on the ground.

In the initial analytical and pathological approach of this study, which carefully considered the profound interplay between specific ethnic demands and the country's general, nationwide crises, the future of ethnicity in Iran was forecast through the prism of two distinct scenarios. Both of these scenarios pivoted on the central public demand for justice and its ultimate consequences for the nation's stock of social capital.

In the first, or desirable, scenario, it was posited that the state, the various ethnic groups, and the public at large would collectively acknowledge the profound and existential dangers of the status quo. In a strategic act of collective rationality and national self-preservation, they would commit to a path of meaningful reform, guided by the principles of democratic governance and peace-oriented solutions. This path would involve concrete, tangible steps towards realising political, social, economic, and cultural justice for all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic, religious, or gender identity. As a consequence of this courageous turn, it was argued, society would manage to control its critical conditions, move towards stability, preserve and rebuild its depleted social capital, and foster a new era of peaceful coexistence under the aegis of a sustainable, internally generated peace. This was the path of hope, of dialogue, and of national reconciliation.

The second scenario, which grimly depicted the continuation of the ruling paradigm, predicted a far more calamitous outcome. It argued that given the

unprecedented convergence of crises across the political, social, economic, environmental, and cultural spheres, a persistent failure to alter the state's rigid, ideological approach to problem-solving—especially its securitised and exclusionary approach to ethnic demands—would lead to disaster. A continued disregard for the escalating domestic and international threats facing the country would, in the not-so-distant future, lead to the terminal erosion and ultimate collapse of national cohesion, peaceful coexistence, and the very fabric of collective life in Iran. Social capital, and with it the political order itself, would face a terminal decline, consigning the nation to a dark, fragmented, and violent future. This was the path of intransigence, of suppression, and of eventual disintegration.

The devastating events that have unfolded in the years following the completion of the original research confirm, with tragic clarity, that Iranian society has moved decisively down the path of this undesirable second scenario. This outcome, based on the sober analysis of the study's field data, appeared almost inevitable. The systematic failure of the ruling establishment to address the root causes of the nation's crises, and its callous neglect of the multitude of problems plaguing the social, economic, and political spheres, pushed a deeply dissatisfied society over the edge. It transformed what was a society of grievance into a protest society, and ultimately, into a movement society. This transformation has catastrophically widened the social fissures and the chasm between the public and the ruling establishment, to the point where the relationship can now be accurately described by the theory of state-nation antagonism.

As a result, the dominant public discourse on change has now crossed a critical threshold, moving far beyond the boundaries of reform and compromise that were once imagined possible within the existing legal and structural framework. The idea of overthrowing the regime (sarneguni), once a fringe concept, has now emerged on the horizon of the public discourse not as a radical fantasy, but as the sole viable and morally necessary path out of the nation's critical state. The street has replaced the ballot box as the only perceived arena for meaningful political expression. As our detailed examination of the events between 2019 and 2023 has shown, despite the increasingly clear and alarming signs of systemic crisis—manifest in successive waves of protest that have grown in frequency, scope, and intensity—the regime has demonstrated no capacity for introspection or change. Even as the combination of a shattered economy and a dysfunctional

state apparatus rapidly diminishes the possibility of a peaceful collective existence, the ruling establishment has not only failed to adjust its approach but has, with an unprecedented and self-destructive stubbornness, insisted on the aggressive implementation of its core ideological policies. This intransigence inevitably serves only to harden the resolve of its political opponents and the protesting public, reinforcing their conviction in the necessity of moving beyond the Islamic Republic. The unavoidable outcome of this dynamic is a head-on collision of irreconcilable strategies, a deepening of societal divergence, and an escalation of conflict that, above all else, forecloses any possibility of moving along a path towards sustainable peace.

The tension-inducing and crisis-generating factors that have created this new and perilous situation permeate every pillar of society, from politics and the economy to the environment. However, it is within the crucible of identity-based and ethnic conflicts that these factors hold a gravitational centrality. This is the arena where all other national grievances and crises—economic deprivation, social marginalisation, political disenfranchisement, and cultural suppression—intersect, accumulate, and take on their most concentrated, potent, and explosive form. An ethnic group, while being an identity group subjected to specific forms of ethnic discrimination, is simultaneously and invariably among the most economically deprived strata and the most systematically disenfranchised in terms of social and cultural rights. This is the bitter reality of internal colonisation, where the resource-rich peripheries are exploited for the benefit of the centre, while their populations are denied the fruits of that wealth and the right to their own cultural and political expression.

Therefore, within a protest-oriented society, it is these communities that possess the highest potential for mobilisation and articulate the broadest and most comprehensive range of demands. It is for this reason that today, identity groups—whether defined by generation, gender, or ethnicity—have acquired a greater prominence and a more central role among all social strata. Their needs, their grievances, and their aspirations for justice are now among the issues that must be given the highest priority in any serious analysis of Iran's future. The recent social movements, particularly the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising—in which ethnic groups, women, and the youth of 'Generation Z' were the undeniable epicentre—provide eloquent and irrefutable testimony to this new identity-based arrangement in Iranian society.

The dramatic rise of collective self-awareness among different identity groups, fostered by increased access to global information and the powerful communication possibilities of the virtual world, has, in Manuel Castells' terms, given birth to a new network society. For the members of this society, especially its younger cohorts, the demand for fundamental rights, for the freedom of choice, and for a life lived with dignity is not a negotiable privilege to be granted or withheld by the state. It is a self-evident, inherent, and inalienable precondition of their existence. Consequently, these globally-connected and rights-conscious identity groups will no longer accept the tutelage of a ruling regime born of an exclusionary religious ideology and predicated on the archaic idea of absolute guardianship. Faced with a state that seeks to impose its will, they will choose the path of resistance.

This toxic dynamic of imposition and resistance, so long as the state continues to rely on the brutal mechanisms of coercion, threat, and punishment to enforce obedience and ensure its own survival, will only postpone, and perhaps render entirely unattainable, the development of a future based on democracy and sustainable peace. The continuation of this path leads only to one destination: collective ruin and national failure.

Based on the foregoing analysis, and despite the stark reality that Iranian society now finds itself in a state of revolutionary ferment, having transgressed many of the former, more tolerant behavioural norms, the most desirable, compelling, and indeed rational solutions for escaping the current perilous conditions still lie in a return to the path of dialogue, reasoned deliberation, and a steadfast commitment to achieving sustainable peace. Although the probability of adopting such peace-oriented positions has grown demonstrably weaker, the necessity for them is now felt more acutely and urgently than ever before. A sober glance at the experiences of transformations accompanied by violence, military confrontation, and civil war in the countries of the surrounding region over the last two decades provides a harrowing and cautionary narrative of the devastating future that such a path entails. The spectres of state collapse, Balkanization, and protracted civil conflict are no longer abstract fears but tangible possibilities that must be avoided at all costs.

Therefore, sustainable peace must be understood not merely as a tactical strategy confined to the rarefied realm of high politics and state-nation relations. It cannot be a top-down pact between elites or a temporary ceasefire in a long-

running conflict. It must, instead, be reconceptualised and operationalised as a comprehensive and foundational discourse that is reproduced, nurtured, and institutionalised at every level of politics and society. It must become the new common sense of the nation. It is only within the framework of the possibilities and principles inherent in such a discourse—principles of mutual recognition, pluralism, decentralisation, social justice, and equal citizenship—that the opportunity can be created to find genuine and lasting solutions for escaping the current dire and hostile conditions with the minimum possible cost and the maximum possible collective achievement. The choice before Iran is a stark one: a commitment to the difficult, uncertain, but ultimately life-affirming path of a comprehensive and inclusive peace, or a continued descent into a spiral of suppression and resistance that threatens to consume the very soul of the nation.

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This book offers one of the most comprehensive examinations of Iran's multi-ethnic landscape and the enduring question at its core: Are the peoples of Iran ethnic groups within a nation-state, or nations within a contested political geography? Bringing together extensive fieldwork, rigorous analysis, and a wide body of empirical evidence, *Iranian Ethnicities or Nations in Iran* interrogates the historical formation of identities and the contemporary tensions that define them.

The study reveals how—despite expectations that globalisation and national integration would weaken ethnic distinctions—identities among Persians (Fars) Kurds, Azeris, Baloch, Arabs, Turkmen, and others remain vibrant and politically significant.

This updated edition situates the book within the profound transformations of recent years, including the 2019 nationwide protests and the 2022 uprising following the death of Jina (Mahsa) Amini. These events, stretching across provincial and ethnic lines, have challenged long-standing narratives of national unity while illuminating the structural tensions embedded in Iran's governance of diversity.

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