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The roots and evolution of Iranian nationalism and its historiography

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Nationalism, a multifaceted force, intricately shapes identities and histories across the globe. Iran, with its rich historical tapestry, exemplifies the complex interplay of nationalism, where diverse elements unite to forge a unique national identity. However, while various approaches to studying Iranian nationalism shed light on facets of this identity, each singularly fails to encapsulate its entirety. Through a systematic review, this article aims to amalgamate the factors influencing Iranian national identity, critically evaluating the strengths and limitations of each perspective and highlighting gaps in current research. The paper presents a categorization of existing scholarship into five distinct viewpoints. Beginning with the primordial underpinnings, it underscores their significance while noting their limitations in accounting for the influence of Orientalist narratives. The article subsequently delves into the effects of Western Orientalism on Iranian nationalism, highlighting the oft-neglected impact of global trends like industrialization. It further elucidates the instrumental role of leadership in crafting traditions and national identity. Finally, the study introduces a fresh perspective by emphasizing the centrality of the quest for self-determination in shaping Iranian identity. This analysis not only unveils the layered nuances of Iranian national identity but also proposes a robust framework, accentuating the imperative for sustained research in this continually evolving domain.

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Introduction

Nationalism, an intricate and multifaceted phenomenon, stands as a pivotal force in shaping the identity and history of nations across the globe. Beyond mere political allegiance, nationalism intertwines cultural, social, and economic dimensions, forming a complex tapestry that reflects the aspirations and trajectories of societies. Iran, a nation steeped in millennia of history, bears witness to this intricate interplay of nationhood, where myriad factors have converged to craft its distinct national identity.

Research question. This paper embarks on an insightful exploration into the complex terrain of Iranian nationalism, seeking to address fundamental questions: What are the primary factors that shape Iranian identity? How have these diverse factors influenced the multifaceted construct of Iranian national identity over time? Furthermore, how can these factors be effectively categorized and understood?

Methodology. An apt analogy for understanding Iranian nationalism is found in the classic Sufi tale of the blind men and the elephant. Much like the blind men who touch different parts of the elephant and perceive it differently, Iranian nationalism encompasses a multitude of elements and shaping factors that collaboratively define its essence. Therefore, to comprehensively understand this intricate phenomenon, it is imperative to dissect nationalism into its constituent parts, examining each segment individually before weaving them back together.

To accomplish this, the paper employs a systematic review approach, categorizing a wide range of existing scholarship on Iranian nationalism into five distinct viewpoints. Through this review, the strengths and limitations inherent in each of these approaches—each representing a crucial facet of Iranian nationhood—are meticulously examined to enhance our understanding of Iranian national identity.

Significance of research. In essence, this research aims to unravel the intricate mosaic of Iranian nationalism by dissecting and categorizing its various components, offering a nuanced perspective on the dynamic interplay of historical, cultural, and sociopolitical factors. By critically examining the array of perspectives encompassing Iranian nationalism, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the intricate forces that have shaped and continue to shape the nation's sense of self. Furthermore, by aligning these perspectives with existing frameworks, the investigation provides an introduction in the studying Iranian nationalism.

Lastly, by discussing the strengths and limitations inherent in each of the viewpoints, this research provides a comprehensive foundation for future research endeavors. As we traverse the diverse viewpoints and narratives, it becomes evident that the study of Iranian nationalism necessitates a multidimensional vantage point.

Framework. The framework of this paper is anchored in a comprehensive categorization of the multifaceted factors that have shaped Iranian national identity. Notable contributions within the field, such as Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi's collection of essays titled "Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity," have made significant strides in categorizing the diverse components that shape Iranian identity (2014). This collection of essays categorizes shaping factors into three distinct sections, addressing orientalism and modernity, the primordial aspects of identity, and the role of religion in forging Iranian nationhood. This article of Iranian nationalism builds upon the

framework presented by Aghaie and Marashi to provide a more comprehensive categorization of the core components of Iranian nationhood. In doing so, five distinct viewpoints converge, offering nuanced insights into the contours of Iran's national identity. These viewpoints span primordial interpretations rooted in historical continuity, the transformative impact of Western Orientalist narratives, the imprint of industrialization, the calculated shaping of identity by Iranian rulers, and the catalyzing force of self-determination.

This review will delve into a multitude of complex studies within the field, situating them within these five overarching categories. The objective is twofold: to elucidate the strengths inherent in these approaches and concurrently to critically examine their limitations.

Commencing our investigation, we begin by probing the foundational concept of "Iranshahr Thought," unraveling its implications for comprehending the historical bedrock of Iran's identity. Subsequently, our exploration turns towards the intricate interplay between Western Orientalism and Iranian self-perception, dissecting the nuanced ways in which external narratives have influenced and shaped internal constructs of identity. Concurrently, we delve into the transformation of Iran's identity in the face of industrialization and modernization, spotlighting the impact of world trends on Iranian nationalism.

The ensuing sections unravel the intricate methods through which Iranian rulers have adroitly manipulated traditions, monuments, and practices to solidify their power and legitimacy. Here, we scrutinize the fusion of pre-Islamic history with Pahlavi ideologies, constructing a compelling portrait of identity politics in action. This exploration extends to the Islamic Republic, examining the intriguing amalgamation of religious and state ideologies. Amid these perspectives, the proactive agency of self-determination emerges as a central force, invoking Dov Ronen's paradigm and thereby broadening our comprehension of the origins and motivations underpinning Iranian nationalism.

As our discourse traverses these multifaceted perspectives, it becomes evident that the study of Iranian nationalism necessitates a multidimensional vantage point. This perspective seamlessly integrates historical, cultural, and social lenses, fostering an understanding of the forces that have not only shaped but continue to shape Iran's sense of self.

Foundational identity: "Iranshahr thought"

Throughout history, human beings have consistently exhibited a tendency to categorize themselves into distinct groups, often defined as "us" versus "them." These categorizations, grounded in factors such as geography, language, and even race, have played a pivotal role in shaping historical narratives and sociocultural dynamics (Grosby 2005). In modern times, this line of thought forms the core essence of the theoretical construct known as primordialism, elucidated by Edward Shils (1957) in the study of nationalism and identity. Primordialism conceptualizes the notion of nation as an intrinsic and enduring construct, engendered across centuries and epochs through variables such as geographical determinants, cultural constituents, linguistic attributes, and even racial affiliations. Stated differently, this perspective endeavors to discern the genesis of contemporary national entities within their historical antecedents and construes them as an evolutionary extension of their historical continuum.

Among contemporary Iranian scholars, a perspective akin to primordialism regarding the concept of Iran could perhaps be discerned through the lens of Seyyed Javad Tabatabai. Tabatabai stands as a prominent theoretician and historian noted for his contributions to the realm of political thought in Iran. From his works, one can deduce his endorsement of Iran as a conceptual

construct deeply rooted in history, and its enduring continuity until the present is attributed to what he identifies as “Iranian political thought.”

Tabatabai, influenced by Hegel, views history from an evolutionary perspective and the result of a dialectical interaction of Iranian politics, and the religion which has created Iranian political thought. In his initial book (2015) titled “History of Political Thought in Iran,” he provides an introduction to the history of political thought in Iran and seeks, not in a strictly chronological manner, to examine some of its vital aspects from a philosophical standpoint. His subsequent major works are also built upon these ideas, culminating in the theory of “Iranshahr Thought.” He argues that various civilizations constructed over millennia within historical periods such as the Achaemenids and the Sassanians in the geographical realm known as “Iranzamin” were fundamentally grounded in a kind of political thought, which he labels as “Iranshahr Thought.” Through an analysis of historical texts, including pre-Islamic admonitions like ‘Pahlavi Andarz-nāmak,’ he identifies the key aspect of this political thought as the establishment of a delicate balance among religion, myths, and politics. The primary aim is to harmonize the governance affairs within the vast expanse of land known as “Iranzamin.” According to Tabatabai, this political thought persisted even after Islam’s entry into Iran and remained a pivotal factor in preserving Iran as a distinct civilization apart from the Arab civilization. He contends that Iran’s entry into the modern era was also influenced by this historical background and examines the influence of this millennia-old political thought on shaping modern Iran.

Tabatabai’s viewpoints are significant in that they have served as a major source of inspiration for a considerable portion of today’s Iranian nationalists. However, what his analyses overlook is the impact of Western Orientalist narratives on Iranians’ awareness of their own national identity.

External narratives and internal constructs: orientalism and self-perception

A significant portion of scholarly work in study of Iranian nationalism has been profoundly inspired by Edward Said’s innovative concept of Orientalism (1978). Orientalism refers to the Western construction of the “Orient” as a homogenous and exotic “Other,” perpetuated through colonial ideologies and cultural depictions. Said asserted that colonialist ideologies did not fade away with the end of colonial rule in the twentieth century; instead, these ideologies and constructs continued to influence perceptions of the Orient. In Iran, a nation that grappled with stronger colonial powers for centuries, the dominance and perceived superiority of Western powers led to the internalization of Orientalist narratives. In essence, the prevailing notion regarding the genesis of ideas such as Aryanism is that the imposition of Western perspectives and stereotypes has compelled Iranians to contend with a sense of cultural dissonance, oscillating between their rich historical heritage and the distorted lens through which the West has often observed them.

In his 1993 work titled “Iran as Imagined Nation,” Mostafa Vaziri draws upon Edward Said’s perspective on modern nationalism to undertake a critical assessment of Iranian national identity. Vaziri (1993) contends that this identity is molded by a “notorious,” “authoritarian,” and “racist” paradigm of Orientalism. He posits that even the very term “Iran,” as it signifies the land and its people, has been misconstrued by numerous nationalist orientalists, representing a twentieth-century construct devoid of historical authenticity. According to Vaziri, this “virus” of an orientalist approach has permeated and contaminated the works of Iranian historians, leading to the formulation of

contrived secular traditions that overshadow the religious history of Iran and undermine the validity of unbroken monarchic traditions. Furthermore, Vaziri reproaches European and American scholars for propagating a distorted rendition of Iranian identity, driven by their interests influenced by the concept of “Aryanism.”

About the myth of Aryanism in particular, German historian and political scientist Matthias Kuntzel in his 2009 book titled “The Germans and Iran: History and Present of a Fateful Friendship,” delves into the intricate connection between Nazi Germany and the infusion of Aryanism into the Iranian identity. Kuntzel asserts that Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran, sought to counter the influence of the British and Russians in his country by aligning with Hitler’s Germany. The fact that the Germans identified themselves as “Aryans” made this alliance particularly appealing to the Shah. Kuntzel (2009) contends that the collaboration between the two nations centered on the exchange of oil and raw materials for assistance in establishing and advancing industrial infrastructure in Iran. However, this collaboration was intertwined with a systematic endeavor by Nazi Germany to export doctrines of racial supremacy and anti-Semitism to Iran. The Farsi broadcasts of Radio Berlin propagated the idea of solidarity between Germans and Iranians based on their shared ethnic heritage. These notions were so ingrained that many in the general population erroneously believed that the “German” tribe had its origins in the Iranian region of “Kerman.”

In another captivating piece of scholarship, Reza Zia-Ebrahimi (2016) delves into the influence of European racism during the nineteenth century on Iran. His 2016’s book, titled “The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation,” extensively explores the formation of current Iranian nationalism during this era. Zia-Ebrahimi introduces the concept of “dislocative nationalism,” which involves a form of nationalist ideology where Iranians are depicted based on their historical connections to distant ancestral groups, such as the mythical Aryans, rather than being portrayed in alignment with their contemporary identity and reality. This concept asserts that prevailing orientalist historiography, through an emphasis on Iran’s pre-Islamic past and connections to distant origins, has effectively “dislocated” Iranians from their current state. The term “dislocative nationalism” highlights the divergence between the historical representation of Iranians and their actual present-day identity.

Zia-Ebrahimi’s study centers on two Iranian intellectuals, Akhundzadeh and Kermani, and meticulously illustrates their incorporation of European racial theories within the Iranian context. His analysis demonstrates how influential works like Pedro Teixeira’s “Kings of Persia,” John Malcolm’s “History of Persia,” and Montesquieu’s “Persian Letters” shaped the intellectual trajectories of Akhundzadeh and Kermani, enabling the fusion of European concepts with the Iranian milieu. Zia-Ebrahimi’s narrative uncovers how these two Iranian intellectuals transcended mere nationalism, infusing European notions of supremacy into Iranian nationalism and fostering an environment of racism, particularly directed against neighboring Arabs.

Using Edward Said’s perspective often encounters critique for its perceived one-sided approach to comprehending Iran’s interaction with the Western world. Notably, Vaziri’s scholarship has been challenged on the grounds that he equates “imagined” with “false” or “unreal.” This interpretation has led him to attribute the historiography of Iranian nationalism solely to orientalists and Aryan supremacist ideologies. Consequently, this viewpoint has resulted in an oversight of the active involvement of Iranians themselves in shaping their historical narrative and national identity (Tavakoli-Targhi 1994). Furthermore, what remains overlooked in such analyses is the influence of global trends such as industrialization and modernization on shaping national identity in Iran.

Modernization and industrialization

During the 19th century, debates between Marxists and Liberals unfolded, both of whom erroneously predicted that the growth of industrialism would diminish nationalist sentiments (Waldron 1985). However, Ernest Gellner's influential perspective in "Nations and Nationalism" (1983) challenged this notion, asserting that industrialization, in fact, fosters nationalism by necessitating a mobile, literate, and culturally standardized population. Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" further expanded this view, presenting nations as imagined political entities formed for various reasons, including print capitalism. This refers to the circulation of reading materials in a common dialect among the masses, nurturing a shared collective identity among them (Anderson 1983).

Another strand of scholarly inquiry within the realm of nationalism studies is oriented towards examining the ramifications of industrialization and modernization in shaping modern nations. Afshin Marashi's 2008 title, "Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State 1870–1940," takes inspiration from Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" as it delves into how elements like print capitalism, state-sanctioned monuments, shifts in public spaces, the establishment of museums, and commemorative rituals have contributed to the emergence of modern Iranian nationalism. Marashi (2008) argues that the molding of Iranian nationalism can be traced back to the late Qajar era, characterized by the introduction of political, social, and cultural practices under Nasir al-Din Shah, which were subsequently conceptualized by Iranian intellectuals in the mid-nineteenth century.

In his work, Marashi places significant emphasis on delving into the intellectual figures of that era. He uncovers how Iranian nationalists such as Jalal al-Din Mirza, Akhundzadeh, and Hasan Taghizadeh emphasized Iran's ancient heritage while linking it to modernity. Notably, Marashi's analysis differs from that of Vaziri and Zia-Ebrahimi. While he acknowledges that these nationalist intellectuals drew insights from European scholarship and Orientalist perspectives, Marashi argues that they strategically politicized Western scholarship as an integral component of their nationalist agenda (Vejdani 2009). What sets Marashi's work apart is his focus on the continuity between the late Qajar era and the early Pahlavi period, rather than viewing the Constitutional Revolution as a distinct dividing line. In essence, these intellectuals consciously harnessed Western perceptions of Iran to pave the way for an official nationalism, a phenomenon evident during the era of Reza Shah.

Following in Marashi's footsteps, Ali M. Ansari, in his work titled "The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran," places nationalist ideologies within their historical contexts. Ansari (2012) crafts a dynamic and somewhat chronological narrative, tracing the trajectory of nationalist ideas from the Qajar dynasty to the present-day Islamic Republic. While acknowledging the influence of Western thought on Iranian nationalism, he departs from the notion of "intellectual colonialization." Instead, he contends that Iranians embraced the Aryan myth and established a symbolic rapport with Europe, positioning themselves as a burgeoning center of the human race. Ansari pinpoints the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 as a significant turning point, spurred in part by the earlier Tobacco Revolt of 1891–92. Notably, intellectuals such as Taghizadeh, Afghani, Mirza Malkam Khan, and Dehkhoda linked Iran's mythic heritage to modernity. Even during Reza Shah's reign, intellectuals like Taghizadeh and Forughhi continued to champion nationalism, modernization, and the cultivation of a national and civic culture.

In Ansari's analysis, Mohammad Reza, the successor to Reza Shah, shifted the focal point of the national identity from Shah-name to Cyrus the Great as a historical emblem. Furthermore, in

a bid to counter Marxist influences, the new Shah deliberately propagated Islamic ideals through figures like Shariati. This deliberate redirection led the youth of the time to turn to Shi'ism for inspiration instead of traditional Iranian myths. It was within this context that Khomeini assumed the role of a mythical savior, a role Mohammad Reza Shah was unable to fulfill. Ansari maintains that Ayatollah Khomeini's projected nationalism represented a continuation of the Shah's nationalism, and he even delves into the parallels between President Ahmadinejad and the Shah's positions.

However, Farzin Vejdani's "Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture", more than others is influenced by Anderson's approach. He explores how Iranian sense of identity shaped by the changes in historiography. Centering on the transformative trajectory of historiography within Iran, Vejdani's investigation focuses on the shift from flattering narratives penned by court chroniclers, primarily intended to extol the reigning dynasty, to the establishment of history as an academic discipline disseminated through the educational framework (Vejdani 2014).

Spanning the period from 1860 to 1940, Vejdani scrutinizes the nuanced process of historical production and dissemination within Iran, shedding light on the paradigm shift from court-centric historiography to a more comprehensive pedagogical engagement with national history. His analysis examines various influential factors, including the roles of historians, educational institutions, and the advent of print technology. Collectively, these factors played a crucial role in catalyzing the evolution of Iran's historiography and the overarching perception of Iranian nationhood.

The utilization of Benedict Anderson's approach is highly effective in elucidating the impact of modernization and industrialization. Nevertheless, what remains to be explored is the influence exerted by powerful elites and governments on shaping national identity.

Traditions and state manipulation

Within the realm of nationalism studies, a distinct line of inquiry investigates the influence of privileged groups in shaping national identity and nurturing the development of nationalism. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's seminal work, "The Invention of Tradition," presents a markedly Marxist perspective on the phenomenon of nationalism (Hobsbawm, Ranger 1983). Notably, it is pertinent to acknowledge the relatively modest body of research within the domain of Iranian nationalism that draws upon Hobsbawm's approach and employs his theoretical framework to scrutinize the Iranian context. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam's 2017 publication, titled "Psycho-Nationalism: Global Thought, Iranian Imaginations," stands among the select few works that extend Hobsbawm's argument, particularly emphasizing the role of the modern state in fomenting nationalist sentiment. Central to Adib-Moghaddam's thesis is Hobsbawm's concept of "social engineering," a framework wherein political leaders leverage state institutions to manipulate public perceptions of the past and cultivate loyalty to the nation (Adib-Moghaddam 2017).

The crux of Adib-Moghaddam's analysis lies in his examination of nationalism within Iran during the Pahlavi era and the initial decade of the Islamic Republic. A pivotal assertion in Adib-Moghaddam's thesis is the contention that right-wing politicians, whom he categorizes as "psycho-nationalists," strategically employ populist narratives to garner popular support. His argument underscores that these psycho-nationalists wield emotions, notions of identity, and the concept of differentiation from others as potent tools to cultivate divisions within society. By way of

illustration, Adib-Moghaddam draws parallels between the Shah of Iran's assertion of Iranians as Aryans, emphasizing pre-Islamic Iran, and contemporary politicians in the United States and Europe, such as Donald Trump and Marie Le Pen. In both contexts, the deliberate manipulation of fears related to immigrants has been employed as an electoral strategy, illustrating the shared tactics of these psycho-nationalist politicians across different contexts.

According to Adib-Moghaddam, the pivotal events of the 1979 Islamic Revolution did not mark the cessation of the psycho-nationalism advocated by the Shah; rather, this sentiment persisted and adapted within the framework of Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of "velayat-e-faghih." Adib-Moghaddam asserts that the velayat-e-faghih ideology, with its emphasis on Islam's central role in governance while rejecting alternative forms of governance, perpetuates a trajectory akin to that of psycho-nationalism. He concludes that the psycho-nationalist tendencies persist, as this ideology, like its psycho-nationalist predecessor, fosters divisions by constructing an abundance of 'others'—both in domestic and foreign contexts. This proliferation of 'others,' Adib-Moghaddam contends, engenders a fragmentation of foreign and domestic policies.

Despite Adib-Moghaddam's thesis, an unexplored terrain exists concerning the deliberate efforts of different Iranian rulers to establish "time-tested" legitimacy through the creation of traditions and institutions. This gap encompasses the transformation of monuments into vehicles for promoting specific traditions and practices, aimed at crafting new national identities and garnering allegiance to the state. This area stands as a crucial juncture for deeper investigation, given its potential to shed light on the intricate interplay between power, history, and identity formation.

Stephanie Cronin's book, "The making of modern Iran: State and society under Riza Shah" explores how during the first Pahlavi era, a strategic utilization of ancient Iranian cultural artifacts, encompassing poems, heritage sites, antiquities, and historical texts, was orchestrated with the intent of forging a lasting legitimacy for the Shah (Cronin 2003). This orchestrated expanded during his successor, Mohammad Reza Shah to create a reservoir of traditions and practices that would portray the Shah as a seamless extension of pre-Islamic Iran. Noteworthy illustrations abound; within the 1961 edition of the *Aryan Yearbook*, Zabihullah Ghadimi Rizvani meticulously traced Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's lineage, ingeniously weaving a blood connection between the Shah and Darius the Great, a prominent ancient monarch. The 2500 Year Anniversary of the Persian Empire in 1971 is another example. The zenith of this aspiration was encapsulated in a resonant address by the Shah, invoking Cyrus the Great with the proclamation "rest in peace, for we are well awake."

Continuing from the Pahlavi era's trajectory, one could argue that the Islamic Republic has also utilized crafted traditions and manipulated national identity to bolster its legitimacy. Following the 1979 revolution, the newly established regime integrated religious observances into the Iranian calendar, intertwining state ideology with religious devotion. This aimed to position the leadership as both spiritual and temporal successors to the Shia Imams, evident in the term "naeb-e-imam-e-zaman," designating Ayatollah Khomeini and his successor Ayatollah Khamenei as deputies to the final Shia Imam.

Proactive agency of self-determination

Up to this point, various methodologies in the study of nationalism have predominantly treated it as an outcome arising from various factors. These factors encompass historical connections,

Western Orientalist perspectives, worldwide trends like modernization, and rulers seeking to validate their authority. However, a notable gap exists in studies that fail to adopt an approach that perceives nationalism as a proactive force influencing social, economic, and cultural movements.

Dov Ronen's 1979 book, "Quest for Self-Determination," stands as a pivotal contribution in this field, contending that the driving force behind movements in the modern era is the individual's aspiration and determination to govern oneself, rather than be governed. Ronen posits that anti-colonial struggles, resistance against monarchic oppression, the dissolution of feudal societies, and the emergence of nationalism all represent distinct expressions of the pursuit for self-determination. This impetus to liberate the "self" from the influence and exploitation of external entities for a more desirable existence unites individuals with shared aspirations, irrespective of the actual presence of such "exploitation of others." This collective energy of individuals forms the bedrock for the formation of social movements aimed at ending genuine or perceived forms of exploitation (Ronen 1979).

Firouzeh Kashani-Sabet's work can be aligned with Ronen's approach, even though she does not explicitly mention Ronen's name in her book. Her 1999 publication titled "Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation" focuses on an aspect often overlooked by other scholars delving into nationalism—territory. Kashani-Sabet contends that the discourse of modern nationalism in Iran often emerged as a response to territorial losses (Kashani-Sabet 1999). Iran's border conflicts involving Russia, Britain, and the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century compelled Iranian intellectuals to forge a robust national identity and construct a narrative that mobilized various segments of society under the banner of Iran's greatness. According to Kashani-Sabet, this newly formed identity revolves around key elements: the primacy and authenticity of the Persian language, the utilization of grand narratives and mythologies that exalt the past, the harnessing of print media, the establishment of national institutions including an army and schools, and the resettlement of both Persian and non-Persian ethnic communities. Covering the period from 1804 to 1946, Kashani-Sabet's book elucidates the ebb and flow of patriotic pride that characterized Iran's transformation from being a monarch's possession to becoming the homeland of Iranians.

While Kashani-Sabet's work resonates with Ronen's approach, further comprehensive investigation is warranted into the Iranians' pursuit of self-determination and its profound impact on shaping their national identity. Within the Pahlavi era, a pivotal juncture emerged with the oil nationalization movement, representing the zenith of Iranians' aspirations to reclaim what they deemed their historical entitlement. This movement witnessed the convergence of secular nationalist factions such as the *Jebhe-ye Melli*, Islamist groups led by Ayatollah Kashani, and leftist entities like the Tudeh Party. Their unifying factor was a shared stance against perceived foreign exploitation. However, this endeavor was thwarted by the 1953 coup, orchestrated with support from the United Kingdom and the US, thereby establishing Mohammad Reza Shah's dominion over Iran until the 1979 revolution. The failure of the movement, emblematic of Iranians' self-determination pursuits, culminated in a broader struggle against the Pahlavi regime's internal despotism, rather than foreign exploitation.

Following the 1979 Iranian revolution and the ascent of Islamist forces, the Iranian populace continued their resolute quest for self-determination. The Islamic Republic of Iran, holding sway, found itself entrenched in an ongoing struggle against foreign powers. Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1981, bolstered by foreign government backing, along with perceived threats posed

by the US military presence in the Middle East and stringent Western economic sanctions, fortified the paradigm of self-determination against Western powers. The narrative of “resistance” against “global arrogance,” as espoused by Iranian revolutionaries, encapsulates the enduring Iranian pursuit of self-determination, a trajectory set in motion during the oil nationalization movement.

Conversely, leftist and secular factions, who collaborated with Islamists during the oil nationalization movement and the 1979 revolution to oppose foreign exploitation and the Shah, found themselves marginalized in the post-revolution government structure. Many among them, and their compatriots, were subjected to execution or imprisonment, fueling their ongoing struggle for self-determination against the Islamic Republic’s authority.

One could argue that central to the evolving landscape of Iranian nationalism has been the enduring thread of self-determination that has woven its way through since the inception of the oil nationalization movement. This unrelenting pursuit of self-determination has been the cornerstone upon which the intricate mosaic of Iranian nationalism has been constructed, an element curiously absent from the array of complex studies addressing the shaping factors of Iranian nationalism. A comprehensive study encompassing the aspirations of the oil nationalization era through the tumultuous days of the 1979 revolution, alongside the ongoing endeavor of the Iranian populace to assert control over their destinies, could serve as a promising avenue for future research in this domain. This quest has not only provided the impetus for resisting foreign interference and oppressive rule but has also shaped the collective consciousness of Iranians, cementing their identity as a resilient nation determined to shape their own fate.

Conclusion

In addition to the five primary shaping factors of Iranian nationalism elucidated within this discourse, several other contributions offer distinctive viewpoints to expound upon Iranian national identity. Vennessa Martin’s scholarly examination concerning the convergence of Islam and the Constitutional Revolution accentuates the substantial role of religion in molding Iranian identity. Departing from the convention of focusing solely on Tehran and Tabriz, Martin’s study centers on lesser-explored cities such as Isfahan, Shiraz, and Bushehr. Her introduction of the concept of “Islamic nationalism” scrutinizes the interplay between Islam and Iranian identity (Martin 2013).

Yaghubian’s analysis of the Armenian minority group constitutes another noteworthy endeavor in comprehending Iranian nationalism (2014). He posits that a comprehensive understanding of Iranian nationalism necessitates an exploration of how minority groups have been influenced by this overarching ideology. By concentrating on the experiences of five Iranian-Armenians, Yaghubian underscores the success of Iranian nationalism with this minority, attributing it to the government’s recognition and respect of their distinctive cultural, linguistic, and religious attributes.

Lastly, due recognition must be accorded to Sussan Siavoshi’s contribution, which directs attention to the shortcomings of liberal nationalism in Iran. By centering her investigation on the Iranian National Front as the principal advocate of liberal nationalism and its subsequent setbacks, Siavoshi employs analytical concepts like Tilly’s “political conflict” and Beblawi and Luciani’s “rentier state” to elucidate the origins of the Islamic Revolution and provide insights into the cyclical authoritarianism that has characterized Iranian politics during various epochs (Siavoshi 2019).

In addition, while these approaches have served as foundational frameworks, the dynamic nature of nationalism demands ongoing evolution in research methodologies. One of the relatively uncharted territories in the exploration of Iranian nationalism is the post-revolutionary period. The Iranian Revolution’s emphasis on Shia values as central to identity-building has, surprisingly, been given scant attention in the research arena. Utilizing Ronen’s framework of the “quest for self-determination,” the Islamic Republic’s stance on “Resistance” emerges as a promising avenue for understanding the nuances of Iranian national identity in the post-revolutionary phase.

Furthermore, while scholars like Gellner and Anderson have primarily focused on the influences of global trends like industrialization and modernization, the rise of digital communication and its pervasive reach signals the onset of a sixth approach. This approach recognizes the symbiotic relationship between traditional Iranian values and the global digital milieu. In an era where powerful nations wield media as a tool to influence the national identities of other countries, future research should be adaptive. It should incorporate global communication trends and digital influences to ensure a comprehensive understanding of Iranian nationalism.

Finally, a recurring oversight in the study of Iranian nationalism is the diminished role, or even the portrayal of religion, especially Shia values, as antithetical to Iranian nationhood. A more holistic approach to future research on Iranian nationalism necessitates the inclusion of Shia values as a cornerstone, acknowledging its profound influence on molding Iranian national identity.

By incorporating these perspectives and adapting the current frameworks, we can pave the way for a more robust and encompassing understanding of Iranian nationalism, capturing its essence amidst the changing tides of global and domestic influences.

Data availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

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Author contributions

There is only one author.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent

Informed consent was not required as the study did not involve human participants.

Additional information

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