

The Iranian Spirit: Existential Logic and Existential Threat

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Abstract

This study conducts a genealogical and ontological inquiry into the contemporary question of Iranian identity, positing that the ratio essendi (existential logic) of the Iranian nation is defined by a historical unity-in-plurality. Contrary to the modern sociological-ideological reduction of Iran to a "multi-ethnic" mosaic, this manuscript argues for the "Idea of Iran" as a transcendental spirit that sublates linguistic, religious, and regional particularities into a unified civilizational whole. The inquiry traces the genealogy of "ethno-nationalism"—identified here as the primary existential threat to Iranian unity—demonstrating its roots in the imported terminologies of Soviet Marxism-Leninism (specifically the Stalinist taxonomy of "peoples" and "nationalities") and its subsequent metamorphosis into the post-Cold War discourse of "identity politics" and "multiculturalism."

By analyzing historical developments, including the Soviet-instigated Azerbaijan crisis of the 1940s and the distinct mechanisms of Pan-Turkist and Pan-Kurdish currents, the text reveals how these ideologies function as a "Trojan horse." They impose standardized, monolithic "ethnic" categories upon Iran's complex, "compound social pluralities," effectively erasing the organic nuances of local identity to construct artificial political antagonisms. The study concludes that the intellectual and political defense of Iran requires rejecting these superstructural, foreign-derived categorizations in favor of a reassertion of the National Universal, in which the rights of the individual citizen are prioritized over the fabricated claims of the ethno-tribal entity.

Keywords: Iranian National Identity; Existential Logic; Ratio Essendi; Ethno-Nationalism; Identity Politics; Unity In Plurality; Civilizational Continuity

1. Introduction

Identity has emerged as a subject of paramount significance in public life over the past few decades. This phenomenon is largely attributable to the spillover of social and cultural transformations from Western societies into other communities, culminating in the formation of political and international-

al agendas that position identity as the axis of political action. In this sense, whereas from the early twentieth century until the final quarter of that century, socio-economic differences—interpreted as "class conflict"—were posited as the driving force of political struggle, from the late twentieth century onwards, following the collapse of class struggle ideology consequent upon the attenuation of the labor-capital antagonism within Western welfare states, the arena of contestation shifted to the domain of culture (Inglehart 2018, 1997, 1990, Inglehart & Welzel 2005). Throughout this transitional process, "identity" and identity-based differences were transformed into the propelling element of socio-political struggle. In both aforementioned historical periods, Iranian national unity and identity have been subjected to assault by combatants and propagandists alike.

Initially, with the advent of Marxist-Leninist ideology and its Iranian adherents in Iran during the early 1920s, and particularly from the 1940s through the 1980s–1990s when the activities of parties and factions espousing similar doctrines were widespread, the official terminology of that ideology was applied in a formulaic and unfounded manner to Iran's social structure. Terms such as *mas'ale-ye meli* ("the national question"), *melliyat-hā* ("nationalities"), and *khalq-hā* ("peoples") or *melal-e sāken-e Irān* ("nations residing in Iran"), "national oppression," "the right of nations to self-determination," and similar expressions constituted the key lexicon of identity-seeking ideology during that era. With the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, the transformation of cultural values in the West, and the shift of the arena of contestation from "economy" to "culture," identity-seeking ideology underwent a superficial metamorphosis; it was compelled to divest itself of the threadbare garments of Marxism-Leninism and don the attire of "multiculturalism," "ethnicism," and "identity politics". Its essence underwent no substantial alteration, yet it assumed a more sophisticated and nuanced form to embed its desired policies within conventional educational, cultural, social, administrative, and human rights agendas. Its antagonistic nature vis-à-vis Iranian unity and identity remains unaltered, with the sole distinction that it has now concealed itself within a Trojan horse.

2. Iranian National Identity: National Unity and Existential Threat

Iran possesses an ancient, extensive, and intricate history and culture; accordingly, elucidating Iranian national unity and identity is a complex subject that cannot be adequately addressed through mere formulaic application of social science theories and concepts. In what follows, we must briefly delineate certain fundamental dimensions of Iranian national identity that constitute the epistemological foundation of our discussion concerning Iran.

2-1. The National Idea

Iran, from the time of the formation of its national culture in remote antiquity and the establishment of the first Iranian state order in the second half of the sixth century BCE, has consistently existed as a unified and integrated politico-cultural concept—a complex reality that certain Iranologists and scholars have denominated the "Idea of Iran" for purposes of description and elucidation (Gnoli, 1989; Daryaei, 2010; Curtis, 2005; Shahbazi, 2005; Ashraf, 2006). In this sense, throughout history, Iranian society, notwithstanding its various and evolving configurations, and the Iranian state institution, despite its diverse ancient and modern forms, has been founded at its most profound stratum upon a "hard core" (Ahmadi, 2009) or national concept. The national identity of Iranians—a people comprised of diverse lineages and groups throughout the long and tumultuous history of this country—reflects

the forms of their consciousness of this constitutive idea; an idea or spirit whose various dimensions have manifested themselves in national history—as the locus of the formation of national consciousness—and in the national language—as the expression of the experience of national consciousness.

It is upon this foundation that it has been asserted, and must be asserted, that Iranian identity, unlike the majority of the contemporary nations which are late products of the modern world, possesses an ancient foundation. This national foundation preserves social and cultural pluralities and diversities as parts in relation to a whole, while simultaneously endowing them with a unified form and identity. In this sense, Iran as a country, culture, and civilization has not been the negation of its internal differences; rather, it has been a nation that has "sublated" (*Aufhebung*) its diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and geographical subsets while preserving their particularity within a national totality, thereby conferring upon them identity at a transcendental level. Thus, Iran constitutes a meaning-bestowing idea that constructs the unity of pluralities: a complex unity that preserves within itself interwoven social pluralities (combinations of individual interests, civic-urban identities, regional differences, religious diversity, local cultural customs and traditions, local languages and dialects, and other non-political components) while simultaneously integrating them within a unified politico-cultural identity (national identity).

By analogy, we may refer to the combination of two natural elements, chlorine and sodium, each of which, in isolation, is harmful to the human body. However, from the combination of these two elements emerges a substance without which human beings cannot survive—namely, table salt. Nevertheless, table salt cannot be comprehended through its individual components—or through the decomposition of its constituents.¹ Iranian national identity is similarly constituted. It is a unity that contains pluralities and diversities within itself, yet simultaneously, it is a transcendent spirit that cannot be apprehended through the separation of its interwoven components. As an example of such misleading and spurious disaggregations, one may point to a narrative that has been propagated in recent decades, which regards and presents Iran not as a nation of citizens, but as a "society composed of ethnic groups" or a "multi-ethnic country" (*sic*)—that is, an aggregation of several independent ethnic units, the substance of which is nothing other than an alternative expression of the term "multinational" (*kasr al-melle*) in the discourse of Marxist parties of the previous century. Such a narrative, in effect—whether intentionally or unintentionally—seeks to decompose a unified totality into separate components. Over centuries, the internal particularities of this totality have been dissolved into one another and into the national whole—that is, into Iranian civility, culture, and identity—while preserving certain local characteristics. Through this process, they have been sublated as the unified Iranian nation. However, the aforementioned ideological narrative attempts to disintegrate Iranian unity into components that, aside from local language or dialect, share robust commonalities in most collective characteristics, values, and social attitudes. (It suffices to compare the cultural proximity and commonality of a Kermanshahi and Sanandaji with an Isfahani, Khorasani, Ahvazi, and Ardabili, against their cultural difference from a Syrian Kurd.)

1. This analogy derives from Jamshid Gharajedaghi (2011) in his description of Iranian culture. According to his own account, he owes such an understanding of Iranian unity-in-plurality to what he learned from Walter Bruno Henning during the period when the German Iranologist was teaching at Berkeley.

2-2. National Unity and Compound Pluralities

Iranian unity-in-plurality, as an existential principle in the formation and continuity of the Iranian nation, pertains at the level of unity—or the universal—to the comprehensive and constitutive elements of national identity (the Persian language, national territory or country, national history, etc. Cf. Attarzadeh and Seyodini, 2022), and at the level of plurality—or particularity—denotes "compound pluralities" in social life. Herein, the relationship between the whole and its parts is configured thus: on the one hand, the universal—that is, the national—preserves and guarantees the compound parts or social pluralities; on the other hand, the existence of interwoven pluralities is possible only within national unity, which provides the conditions of possibility and actualization for civic rights and freedoms and for the existence of an independent sphere of civil, social, and economic activities (CF Tabatabai, 2018).

In explicating pluralities, two fundamental realities must be observed. First, pluralities are compound. Every Iranian citizen is the bearer of a combination of differences and diversities that constitute their individual identity: personal goals and aspirations, religious beliefs, social opinions, cultural interests, lifestyle, urban lineage, local dialect or language, professional and occupational affiliations, stratum-class habits and habitus, and so forth. Therefore, society as the domain of plurality cannot and must not be disaggregated into standardized collective units—such as "ethnicities"—thereby distorting its nature.

The second reality is that pluralities in national life are simultaneously integrated into the national society while preserving their particular existence and are elevated to the general and comprehensive level of national identity. Certain social diversities, although they become sources of difference by virtue of particular traits, simultaneously possess general characteristics, shared identity, and national bonds—because they are parts that have been integrated or sublated within the unity and national process of becoming civilized. For example, the substantive content of the values and attitudes of a Kermanshahi, a Khorasani, and a Gilani typically resides within a shared semantic system, even if expressed in different languages or dialects.

In the historical process of the formation of Iranian identity, comprehensive identity-bestowing elements, shared characteristics, and national institutions have been strengthened and expanded. At the same time, diverse and compound socio-cultural particularities have found their dwelling within this totality. The domain of plurality has always been living and generative in Iran; however, the concrete instances of the parts have undergone transformations throughout the course of Iran's social history. In traditional social configurations, the domain of plurality pertained to communities, groups, cities, regions, religious denominations, and tribes. In the modern era, however, although civil communities and groups continue to be recognized as social entities, the primary unit of the domain of plurality is constituted by individual citizens of the country, as persons who are the subjects of rights and obligations in relation to society and the nation.

In summarizing the above logical and historico-social premises concerning Iranian identity, it must be stated: in the relationship of unity-in-plurality, the universal and its elements possess a political nature—that is, they pertain to national political life. In contrast, the parts possess a non-political nature; however, as individual citizens possessing rights, they are capable of political action—that is, they may participate in political life whose end and purpose is the securing of public and national interests.

Today, the most significant existential threat against Iranian national identity and unity is the factor or

factors that negate the Iranian principle of unity-in-plurality, as a fundamental pillar of Iran's ratio es-sendi-existential logic. The most conspicuous instance of this existential threat in recent decades has been ethnicism or ethno-nationalism.

3. The Ideology of Ethnicism and Ethno-identitarianism

3.1. Distorting Narrative Mechanisms

Ethnicism, as the core of secessionist ideologies—once fabricated under the rubric of "internationalism of peoples" and today concealed behind guises such as "ethno-identitarianism"—threatens Iranian national identity through two distorting mechanisms.

We stated above that in explicating the domain of plurality in Iran's historical society, two fundamental realities must be observed: (1) pluralities are compound, and (2) pluralities, in national life, while preserving their guaranteed particular existence, are integrated into the national society and elevated to the general and comprehensive level of national identity.

Corresponding to these two fundamental principles and realities, the ideology of ethnicism distorts the reality of Iranian society and the unity-in-plurality through two narrative mechanisms. These two narrative mechanisms operate simultaneously and in conjunction; however, they may be analytically distinguished in the following logical sequence.

(1) The First Mechanism: Fabrication of Standardized Ethnic Units

The first mechanism isolates one element (such as language or dialect) or more (such as dialect and religious denomination) from the interwoven domain of societal plurality and, on this basis, constructs standardized ethnic units, fabricating for the desired ethnicity a unified history, culture, mythology, and territory. Naturally, in the construction and elaboration of this ideological narrative, ethnic competition and conflict—in which the self and other, or friend and enemy, are defined—constitutes an essential axis.

For example, in one version of the false ethno-nationalist narrative propagated by Marxist-Leninist parties such as Komala and PDKI—which portrays the plurality of citizens in Iran's western-north-western belt entirely under a single ethnic unit (formerly designated as a "people" [khalq] or "nationality" [melliyat])—the manifold social diversities are collectively rejected and negated. These include linguistic diversities (Kurmanji, Ilami, Sorani, Kermanshahi, Gorani, Kalhor, etc.), class stratifications, religious denominations, trade affiliations, cultural variations, and differences arising from lifestyle and individual interests in those regions—the majority of which, taken together, bear a very close resemblance to other Iranians in other parts of the country. Concurrent with this rejection and negation, ethno-nationalism presents a standardized image of a unified ethnicity with a unified language, identity, and territory, which, as a self-subsistent entity, is posited as a "we" standing against—in competition and conflict with—other "ethnicities." This distorting mechanism can also be identified in other versions of ethno-nationalism and identitarianism, such as Pan-Turkism and Pan-Arabism.

(2) The Second Mechanism: Elevation of the Standardized Ethnicity as a "Whole"

The second mechanism elevates standardized ethnicity as a whole and presents it as an entity rivaling Iranian identity. Iranian unity-in-plurality means that national identity constitutes the universal, and its comprehensive elements belong to all Iranians; simultaneously, the parts or compound pluralities

are situated within or under the universal, not as its equivalents or antecedents. In the ethno-nationalist narrative, the desired ethnicity is represented as a self-subsistent entity with its own territory, culture, history, and society—internally homogeneous and externally independent and distinct from other units or "ethnicities." In this manner, the attribute "ethnic" no longer denotes a part of the manifold and compound social strata within society; rather, it is itself regarded as a universality—a false whole that, whether explicitly stated or not, necessarily negates the universality of Iranian national identity and its constitutive elements—as the dimension of unity in the relationship of "unity-in-plurality of Iranian society." This mechanism, since it presents itself as a whole equivalent to and rival of Iranian national identity, effectively negates the very foundation of Iranian unity-in-plurality—the relationship between the whole and its parts.

For example, one may point to the case of Pan-Turkist activities in the northwestern regions of the country as another instance of ethno-nationalism. Azerbaijan has always been a region at the forefront of Iranian patriotism, national resistance, and the promotion of the Persian language and Iranian culture. Socially, the only difference it has with other regions of the country is the prevalence of the Azerbaijani language in this area. Pan-Turkism—whether overt or under the guise of "identitarianism"—has in recent years endeavored, by relying upon literary and theoretical sources and fabricated histories manufactured by neighboring countries, and through the construction of false narratives (for example, the distortion of the event of the liberation of Azerbaijan in 1946 and the elevation of a secessionist figure such as Jafar Pishevari and the Democrat Party [Ferq-e Demokrāt] as "national" figures and servants of Azerbaijan), to cobble together a history counterposed to Iran's national history. Alternatively, by relying upon and promoting literary works from Central Asia and Turkey, or by fabricating and appropriating the great cultural figures of the Iranian world, it seeks to construct for itself a culture and mythology separate from and opposed to Iranian culture.

3.2. Ideological Fabrication versus Socio-Historical Reality

The content of the term "ethnicity"—or "qowm" in Persian—in the dominant political discourse of recent decades in Iran is fundamentally different from, and essentially contradictory to, the meaning of qowm—or its plural form aqwām—in Iran's social history. The first meaning essentially pertains to migrant groups with distinct national origins rooted in contemporary Western history. In contrast, the second meaning has denoted a stratum of the compound characteristics and identities of Iranian citizens.

Therefore, what is referred to as aqwām-e Īrānī, if understood and conceived in the sense of "ethnicities"—whether through conscious or unconscious borrowing from the terms ethnic and ethnicity—which, regrettably, has gradually gained currency over the past two to three decades—constitutes an interpretation entirely contrary to the existential logic and socio-historical reality of Iran and logically leads to separatist ideologies.

The word qowm in Iran has historically had a meaning different from the one that has gained currency in recent decades. In its archaic sense—that is, the meaning that was in circulation prior to the accretion of today's ideological connotation—qowm has carried several meanings. One is "kin and relatives" (khīshān va khīshāvandān), which remains current in expressions such as qowm va khīsh (kith and kin) (Dehkhoda, 1998; Mo'in, 2007). Another, which is obsolete in Persian, is a group or congregation of men, a meaning found in the Holy Quran: "Let not a people (qowm) ridicule another people (qowm),

nor women ridicule other women" (Q. 49:11). Yet another is a group or category of people in a general sense—for example, *qowm-e fil* (the people of the elephant), synonymous with *ashāb al-fil* (the companions of the elephant); or "I saw a people who set fire to whatever they cultivated" (Balkhi [Rumi] 1986).

In both the Dehkhoda and Mo'in dictionaries, no reference enumerates the word *qowm* as meaning a linguistic or racial group with a distinct set of characteristics. Nevertheless, we know that at least until the first half of the fourteenth century (solar Hijri), the term *qowm* or *qowmiyyat* was occasionally employed in combination with "Iranian" in the public sphere and written texts—such as "the Iranian people" (*qowm-e Īrānī*) or "Iranian ethnicity/peoplehood" (*qowmiyyat-e Īrānī*), which was synonymous with the Iranian nation. (For example, see Persian writings from before the Constitutional Revolution in the 19th century CE such as treatises written by Zeyn al-Abedin Maraḡe-i and Abdorrahim Talebov; works from the early 20th century such as Forughī (1925, 157); and more recent writings such as the article by the Professor Sheikholeslami in the 1970s entitled "The Persian Language: The Noble Emblem of Iranian Peoplehood" (*Zabān-e Fārsī, Neshān-e Vālā-ye Qowmiyyat-e Īrānī*); Dariush Ashuri (1997, 189); Shahrokh Meskoub (2000); Moayyedi (1976, 11) and other works.

It appears that from the middle of the second Pahlavi era onward, the term *qowmiyyat* gradually acquired an ideological semantic charge synonymous with the vocabulary prevalent in the literature of leftist parties and grouplets of the time—terms such as "people" (*khalq*) and "nationality" (*melliyyat*). These were fabricated terms borrowed from official declarations and directives of Russian Marxism, which, for the first time, divided Iranians into "peoples" (*khalq-hā*) and "nations" (*melal*) based on certain linguistic and dialectal differences. With the bankruptcy of Marxist-Leninist currents after the Islamic Revolution, the literature of "peoples and nationalities" (*khalq-hā va melliyyat-hā*) also became obsolete—and is now employed solely among secessionist currents such as Pan-Turkists and parties like Komala and Ba'athist Harkat al-Nizal.

These latter terms, due to their radicalism, could not find purchase within Iranian society. However, the content of those terms had adherents among political activists and later found promoters in an imitative social science milieu—one that, heedless of Iran's social realities, considered itself obligated to translate the theories, concepts, and findings of the new social sciences. It is on this basis that in the early 1370s (1990s)—when the term *qowmiyyat* in its late and ideological sense had not yet become established—an article in the research journal *Jam'iyat* (Population), published by the National Organization for Civil Registration, correctly deemed the application of the concept of "ethnicity" in the terminology of the new social sciences (equivalent to ethnicity) irrelevant to Iranian society:

The very designation of ethnicity (*qowmiyyat*) may not be applicable in our country. The people who live with various dialects in our great country are not considered closed societies. This matter does not pertain to yesterday or today, nor to Western influence. Iranian society is as open to Kurds as it is to Lurs or Baluchis. Their dialectal differences, which are currently diminishing rapidly, are a natural consequence of the lack of extensive communication in the past. (Parande 1993, p.27)

This correct awareness in the social sciences, however, was gradually marginalized. The easier path of imitation resulting from uncritical translation flourished, to the extent that today, some sociology instructors at universities, in order to dispel any ambiguity between the archaic meaning of *qowm* and its new, non-Iranian content as ethnic, speak of vacuous terms such as "the ethnics residing in Iran"

(etnik-hā-ye sāken dar Īrān). In reality, this terminology has no substantive difference from the ideological literature of secessionist currents that speak of "the nations residing in Iran" (melal-e sāken dar Īrān) as an alternative to the unified Iranian nation. (For clarification, one may compare this with the discourse of expatriate leftist and secessionist political groups that have, in recent years, continually spoken of something called "the ethnic question in Iran" [mas'ale-ye etniki dar Iran], whose intent is nothing other than the dismemberment of Iranian national society.)

4. Observations on the Logic of Iran's Formation and Continuity

Iran's formation and continuity are governed by a logic whose recognition and observance constitute the most fundamental strategic principle of statecraft. As is well known, the preservation of the state represents the supreme telos of government and its public institutions. In accordance with this logic, the diverse groups of Iranians who have historically inhabited various cities and geographical regions of the country, who have descended from manifold tribes and clans, who have adhered to differing Iranian creeds and religions, and who—in contemporary parlance—have been the kith and kin (aqwām va khīshān) of a single nation, have all contributed to the preservation and enrichment of the national culture and identity, and to the safeguarding of the Iranian state. In the domain of culture, from Tabriz and Khoy to Kermanshah, Hamadan, and Ray; from Tabaristan and Gorgan to Tus, Bayhaq, and Sabzevar; from Sistan and Kerman to Shiraz, Shushtar, and Ahvaz—innumerable sages and scholars have labored to enrich Iranian learning, culture, and Persian literature. These enumerated regions fell within the contracted national geography of the contemporary period; if one rightly considers the broader expanse of the greater cultural Iran—that is, the historical national geography—then Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia must likewise be taken into account. In the domain of politics and warfare, in the bureaucracy and the army, Iranians from all these regions have similarly contributed, to varying degrees and from the most ancient historical periods to the present day, and in their collective consciousness, the ultimate purpose has been the preservation of the Kingdom of Iran (mulk-e Iran).

Moreover, in Iran—particularly among the culturally and politically prominent strata—one observes a pervasive pattern of intermixture among diverse groups. A supreme illustration of this widespread phenomenon may be found in the Safavid dynasty. Shaykh Safi al-Din Ardabili, the progenitor of the Safavid royal house, traced his lineage to Firuzshah Zarrinkollah, a notable among the sādāt (descendants of the Prophet) of Kurdistan, who had settled in Gilan and passed away there. The descendants of Firuzshah subsequently migrated to Ardabil and the village of Kalkhuran, where Shaykh Safi was born in 650 AH (13th century CE). His mother tongue was Azeri Pahlavi, which at that time still prevailed in Azerbaijan and Ardabil; several couplets composed by the Shaykh in this language have survived (Savory, 1980; Riahi, 2002).

At that period, Iran was under the sovereignty of the Mongol Ilkhanids, who, as it happens, officially designated their dominion as Iranzamin (the Land of Iran). The Ilkhanid state collapsed in 1356 CE, and thereafter the weak and short-lived dynasties of the Chupanids and the Jalayirids—both of Mongol extraction—ruled over Azerbaijan, followed by the rise to power of the Turkmen tribal confederations, the Qara Quyunlu and the Aq Quyunlu. Throughout this period, the Safavids, as a house possessing considerable power and public esteem, witnessed the rise and fall of successive rulers and the gradual spread of the Turkic language in Azerbaijan (Savory, 1980).

In the fifteenth century CE, Shaykh Abu al-Nasr Junayd, the head of the Safavid house, married the sister of Uzun Hasan, the formidable chieftain of the Aq Quyunlu confederation. From this union, several children were born, among them Haydar. Upon the death of his father, Shaykh Shuja' al-Din Haydar was recognized as the Perfect Guide (murshid-e kāmīl) and the Supreme Sufi (sūfi-ye a'zam), a period that coincided with Uzun Hasan's rule over Azerbaijan. Uzun Hasan, the Turkmen, had a daughter named Marta, born of his marriage to the Christian Despina Catherine, daughter of the Emperor of Trebizond. Marta was wed to Shaykh Haydar and, unlike her mother, embraced Islam, thereafter being known as Alamshah Begum. From the union of the Safavid Supreme Guide—whose lineage extended to Kurdistan, Gilan, Azerbaijan, and the Turkmen Aq Quyunlu house—and the Byzantine-Turkmen Marta, a son, Ismail, was born in 1487 CE. Possessed of unparalleled genius, Ismail, at the age of fourteen, assumed the crown of the Shahanshahi and proclaimed himself Shah of Iran, establishing Shi'i Islam as the official religion of the realm (Savory, 1980; Newman, 2006).

The young Ismail, like his predecessors and successors, possessed a profound consciousness of Iranian nationality as the political and cultural identity that unified all Iranians. A fervent believer no less than a sovereign, he regarded himself as an Iranian, the ruler of the country of Iran, and the political heir of Iran's ancient kings and champions, figures who occupied a position of supreme reverence and dignity in the historical consciousness of the Iranian people. In a poem, he declares:

Today I have descended upon the earth: I am the sovereign, I am the Shah! Know that I am the son of Haydar; I am Fereydun, I am Khosrow, I am Jamshid; I am Rostam, son of Zāl! (Shah Ismail 2009).

His invocation of Haydar carries an arresting double entendre. On the one hand, Haydar is the name of his father; on the other, as a Shi'i king and the spiritual guide (murshid) of the Shi'is of his age, he professes a profound devotion to Ali, the first Shia Imam, whose epithet is Haydar (the Lion). In this brief passage of his poem, Ismail thus presents himself as fortified by the Shi'i faith. At the same time, his self-attribution to the ancient kings and heroes of Iran articulates the explicit foundation of his political and national legitimacy. In other words, what conferred identity upon him was not an ethnic lineage, but rather Iranian nationality and religious conviction.

During the reign of Shah Abbas—the greatest sovereign of Safavid Iran, who elevated culture, statecraft, and the art of war to their apogee in the Safavid era—one likewise witnesses the robustness of Iranian identity, the interweaving of national Iranian elements, and the contribution of Iranians from diverse regions and lineages to the preservation of the state. Shah Abbas ascended to power three years after the Ottoman Turks' occupation of Azerbaijan and the massacre of the people of Tabriz in 1585 CE. Over the course of years of sustained effort and perseverance—reorganizing both the civil and military forces of Iran—he at last marched against the formidable enemy in 1603 CE. Leading an army composed of Iranians drawn from various regions and tribes of the realm, he liberated Tabriz and Azerbaijan from Ottoman Turkish domination and subsequently campaigned toward the Caucasus, reclaiming those territories as well (Floor and Herzog 2015; Matthee, 2012; Savory, 1980).

Following the fall of the Safavids and the Afghan insurrection, amid years of tumult and disorder, Nader Shah rose to power, styling himself "Nāder-e Irān-zamīn, Khosrow-e Gītīstān" (Nader of Iran, Sovereign of the World). He united the entirety of the Iranian people under the banner of Iran and succeeded in suppressing and repelling the Afghan rebellions. Even recent scholarship and the re-examination of archival documents reveal that Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar—notwithstanding all the accounts of his severity and ruthlessness—understood his campaign to establish a government as

aimed at the restoration of the integrity of the Iranian state, rather than the pursuit of personal or tribal power (Zargarinejad, 2023).

In the contemporary era as well, from the Constitutional Revolution to the present—encompassing the constitutionalist movement, the suppression of the Soviet-installed puppet regimes in Azerbaijan, the Islamic Revolution, and the Iran-Iraq war—all strata and groups of Iranian society, irrespective of languages, dialects, and religions, have contributed and participated in the preservation of the country. The martyrs, war veterans, and soldiers of Iran in the Imposed 8-year War bear tens of thousands of names—Khala'tbari, Sattari, Abshanasan, Sayyari, Doran, Monfared Niyaki, Aryafar, Hushyar, Yasini, Mokhberi, Eskandari, Adami, Mohaqqueqi, Heydariyan, Heydari, Samadi, Zarghami, Hemmat, Bakeri, Fallahi, Fakuri, Ardestani, Mokhtari—natives of the most diverse regions of the country: from Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Kermanshah to Ilam and Khuzestan; from Khorasan and the shores of the Caspian to the foothills of the Alborz; from the heart of the desert to Isfahan and Yazd; from Sistan-and-Baluchistan to Kerman, Fars, and the flanks of the Zagros; and from shore to shore of the Persian Gulf. Iranian men and women sacrificed their lives in the path of Iran, and we must not reduce them to their local, so-called "ethnic", class, or confessional affiliations.

The people of Iran have likewise been valiant and self-sacrificing on the field of battle in safeguarding Iranian national culture. The province of Azerbaijan, in particular, has been one of the foremost cultural poles in the defense of national identity and in the research, reinforcement, and promotion of Iran's national history, culture, and language. A conspicuous example of this may be seen in the resistance of the Azerbaijanis during the period of the puppet government of the Azerbaijan Democrat Party (Ferqa-ye Demokrāt) and in the subsequent liberation of Azerbaijan in December 1946. From the master Iqbal Azar—the great artist of Tabriz who courageously stood before the leaders and agents of the aggressors, and in his sonorous and resolute voice sang of the "boundless transgression" (ta'addī-ye bī-hadd) of the xenophiles and of "the borders of our homeless homeland" (hodūd-e khāna-ye bī-khānmān-e mā)—to Shahriyar, who on numerous occasions composed verses in celebration of patriotism, territorial integrity, the history and glories of Iran, the Persian language, and other elements of Iranian national identity, and who fiercely inveighed against ADP, ethno-nationalists, and those hostile to Iran.

Among Shahriyar's numerous patriotic poems are compositions written in the spirit of critique and repudiation of the ethno-nationalists during the ADP sedition and following the liberation of Azerbaijan. In an ode opening with the hemistich "It is a day of self-sacrifice, O wretched Azerbaijan", composed during the period of ADP's domination over Tabriz and addressed to "Azerbaijan" (and, by implication, to the people of Iran at large), he draws a line of nullification across the flimsy claims of the secessionists—those claims that, by making a pretext of the diversity of local languages and relying upon historical fabrications and false ideological propaganda, sought to represent Azerbaijan as an entity separate from Iran and to lay the groundwork for its dismemberment:

*Thou art the auspicious cradle of Zoroaster, and thy sons
Are the children of Iran, of the pure-faithed Aryan people.
The difference in dialect begets no nationality for anyone.
Rarely does the age recall a nation with but a single tongue.
If by such logic they told thee thou art not Iranian,
They have called the morning "evening" and the sky "a piece of string."*

In another courageous verse, Shahriyar delivers his definitive riposte to the ethno-nationalists who have made language the axis of separation and rupture among Iranians:

Our Turkish is most dear to us—it is our mother tongue;

However, if it will not say "Iran," may this tongue be struck mute.

Shahriyar, following the collapse of the Ferqa and the deliverance of Azarabadegan, in a poem of stern resolve, calls the ethno-nationalists "uninvited guests" devoid of gratitude, and rejoices at the flight of "Ahriman":

The uninvited guest has plundered the feast and now departs.

That ingrate, having shattered the salt-cellar, now departs.

Though he battered the roof and door upon the head of the master of the house,

The house stands flourishing, for from the ruined abode the owl departs.

Say to the Seal of Jamshid: in the time of the Asef of the age, Qavam

I beheld that from the kingdom of Solomon, Ahriman departs.

The concluding words of this section, too, we render in the voice of Shahriyar of Tabriz:

My message to the valiant and the brave,

The youths and the chivalrous men of Iran:

If the enemy spills my blood, O Shahriyar,

Know you what I shall inscribe in blood? – "Iran."

5. National Unity and Socio-Local Pluralities in Iran Prior to the Twentieth Century

Ethnicism or Ethno-nationalism is a relatively recent phenomenon in Iran. Historically, until the last century and the fruition of the modernization process—including the expansion of urbanization and sedentarization—approximately one-quarter of the country's population was composed of tribal confederacies (īlāt)¹; collectivities that harbored considerable internal diversity and could not be divided into several discrete "ethnicities" based on language or religion. Among those tribal confederacies in which a particular local dialect prevailed, not only was social homogeneity absent, but striking diversities and even conflicts existed. For example, the Bakhtiari confederacy was one of the groups among whom the Lori dialect was spoken, and this confederacy was itself subdivided into the branches Haft Lang and Chahar Lang, each with its own constituent clans (ṭawāyef), which had a long history of mutual conflict. The Khamse confederacy was formed of five tribes with diverse internal languages and dialects. Among the tribal confederacies in which various Kurdish languages and dialects prevailed, not only social differentiation and heterogeneity but also striking linguistic and religious diversity obtained: from the Jalali in the northwest of the country, who were predominantly Kurmanji-speaking and of the Shafi'i creed, to the Kalhor—speakers of the Kalhori dialect and Shi'a—in the West, and the Arkavazi confederacy in Ilam, who spoke Southern Kurdish and were predominantly Shi'a, there existed numerous large and small confederacies and clans (Houshmand, 2024). These Iranian tribal confederacies, while generally partaking of and cognizant of the treasury of Iran's cultural and identity-bestowing heritage, differed from their settled co-patriots in adjacent regions in their social struc-

1. *īlāt (tribal confederacies)*: The term *īl* (pl. *īlāt*) in the Iranian context designates a large-scale tribal confederacy comprising multiple clans (*ṭāyefe*, pl. *ṭawāyef*) and sub-clans (*tīre*), organized around shared pastoral-nomadic or semi-nomadic modes of subsistence and bound by shifting allegiances to paramount chiefs (*īlkhānī* or *khān*).

ture, mode of life, and livelihood. Iranians who spoke the local Turkish language, although dispersed across various regions of the country, were for the most part concentrated in the province of Azerbaijan, situated south of the Aras River in the northwest. Although in this province, too, various tribal confederacies—including the Afshar, Shahseven, Shaqqaqi, and Donboli—had maintained a presence, the extent of sedentarization and urbanization in Azerbaijan was greater than in the aforementioned regions.

Apart from the tribal confederacies, among the urban and rural Iranians who constituted the majority of the country's population—and who, for various reasons and to varying degrees, maintained unstable relations with tribal and clan-based groups—a distinct mode of life and, consequently, particular social diversities obtained. Among other things, this settled majority defined its local identity not by tribe and clan, but most often by district, town, village, hamlet, and the like—a form of identification that was manifestly non-political and non-primordial. Nevertheless, what is observed among the majority of Iranians throughout the ancient history of Iran, in a manner that is nearly exceptional and remarkable, is a powerful collective consciousness and memory of a unifying political-cultural identity and civilization, one that had been constituted and perpetuated under the idea of Iran and its constitutive manifestations and elements. Iranians apprehended their internal social, local, and religious plurality not in opposition to Iran, but under the canopy of Iran and of being Iranian. It is in this manner that "unity in plurality" may be regarded as an essential element in the very existence of Iran.

At the threshold of the nineteenth century, apart from the powerful Iranian national identity prevalent both among urban and rural populations and among tribal confederacies and clans alike, the local identity of individuals was most often defined based on town and district, as well as family, clan, and tribal affiliation: for example, Tabrizi, Kho'i, Kermanshahi, Razi, Khorasani, Tusi, Shushtari, Kashi, Isfahani, Rashti, Kermani, Shirazi, and so forth; or Afshar, Ardalan, Zolfaqari, Sanjabi, Bakhtiari, Qashqa'i, and the like. Until the threshold of the fourteenth century Sh. (early twentieth century CE), the concept of "ethnicity" (qowmiyyat) in the sense that has gained currency in Iran today was virtually absent, and no political signification of qowmiyyat is to be found. This reality can be ascertained from the vast body of historical documents, including the records of the earliest censuses and statistical surveys of the Qajar era, the written sources of that period, and the transcripts of the deliberations of the first constitutional legislative assemblies.

With the entry into the modern era of Iranian history—particularly after the Constitutional Revolution—we witness a turning point in the formation of Iran's "unity in plurality." The *Zeitgeist*, the will of the nation, and the natural order of Iranian society demanded that the collectivist structures and tribal forces—whose very growth had been the product of centuries of turmoil during the medieval age of Iranian history—be weakened, and that, in their stead, civil society and civic individuality of the "persons of the nation" become, respectively, the principal locus and the primary unit of the "domain of plurality" in Iranian society.

6. Transformations in Social Structure and the Emergence of Anti-Iranian Ideologies: The Coincidence of Two Variables

From the beginning of the twentieth century, concurrent with the expansion of sedentarization and the growth of cities, tribal diversity gradually gave way to the social structure of the new society. By virtue of state policies and the internal dynamism of society, the structure and social organization

of tribal confederacies and clans progressively yielded their place to the organization of modern society and civic individuality.¹ Formerly, tribal individuals gradually came to identify themselves as members of towns and villages, or, conversely, of smaller clans and pastoral groups. Nevertheless, since the velocity of transformation in the social structure outpaced the gradual and not altogether continuous process of integrating tribal collectivities into the civic structure, a portion of this population—residual from the weakened tribal confederacies—became the object of political mobilization on the part of tribal chieftains disadvantaged by the course of social reform, as well as other domestic and foreign adventurers. One consequence of such a situation was, for example, certain tribal uprisings in the 1940s (1320s Sh.) and the insurrections following the land reforms, led by large landowners and tribal chiefs. However, from the standpoint of long-term analysis, with the gradual decline and disappearance of the tribal confederacies, several elements belonging to their complex, plural, and diverse social structure remained extant and, as it were, suspended within the public life of Iranian society, among them dialects, languages, kinship affiliations, and religious denominations. These social elements, which would in all probability have been naturally accommodated as diverse components of Iranian society within the framework of civic structures and relations—just as, prior to this period, the natural order of Iranian society among its settled majority had indeed so accommodated them—were, by virtue of new factors, particularly contemporary ideologies and foreign interventions, made the object and basis of the construction of an independent identity. In this manner, one component among the many social components of Iranian society—most often language and dialect—was transformed into the pivotal and cleavage-producing element in the politics of identity and ethno-nationalist narrative-making, which, at the cost of effacing the manifold diversities of Iranian local communities, sought to homogenize and standardize a population that was plural in its linguistic, dialectal, religious, and lineage-based diversities, and to create for them an independent and self-subsistent identity with a political content. Henceforth, for example, individuals descended from the numerous tribal confederacies and the urban and rural populations adjacent to them—who, notwithstanding the striking local differences and diversities among themselves, spoke cognate yet distinct local dialects and languages—had become the principal addressees of emergent ideologies that sought to create independent political identities in conflict with the national identity and unity of Iran. In this fashion, ethno-nationalism simultaneously effaces the local plurality and diversity among a portion of Iranians in favor of a constructed socio-political identity—or, stated otherwise, a standardized ethnicity—while, on the other hand, it challenges and combats Iranian national unity and identity. The consequence is that the Iranian unity-in-plurality, which has been and shall remain an essential element in the formation and continuity of Iran, is subjected to assault and attenuation. This is precisely what ethno-nationalist currents accomplish.

Consider, for example, the two armed Pan-Kurdish secessionist groups—namely, the Democratic

1. It is during this very period that the tribal elites and notables possessing power and privilege find their position imperiled by new social groups and the growing power of the state. Simultaneously, the foreign colonial powers, which in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had exploited influence over the tribal confederacies as a means of containing the Iranian state, set about seeking new instruments of power with which to undermine the workings of the state. In this manner, ethnic activists and foreign powers found a coalition in the construction of ethno-nationalist and, subsequently, secessionist ideology (see. Ahmadi, 2016).

Party of Iranian Kurdistan and the Komala organizations—both of which claim leadership over an illusive collectivity under such titles as "the Kurdish people" (khalq-e kord) and "the Kurdish nation" (mellat-e kord), which, in their view, possesses a vast homeland extending from Anatolia and the Levant and Iraq to Iran. The founders and leaders of these parties, over the course of half a century of political and armed activity, have been almost entirely Sorani-speaking and originating from a single, circumscribed geographical region.¹ The illusive "nation" or "ethnicity" of these parties is the product of homogenizing and standardizing Kurmanji, Sorani, Kermanshahi, Feyli, Ilami, Ahl-e Haqq, Shi'a, Sunni, and other communities and populations into a single, Sorani-Kurdish version committed to partisan ideological ideals. Moreover, since these plain versions have no roots in historical and social reality, they harbor in practice serious internal contradictions that at times find expression in bloody intra-party and inter-party battles, and at other times in the sacrifice of Kurdish-speaking populations and the slaughter of Iranian compatriots. Such a mechanism, of course, also obtains among Pan-Turkist groups and Turkish ethnicism, which in recent years has undertaken extensive activities, particularly given that it commands relatively considerable domestic resources and has also enjoyed the support of certain regional powers.

From the standpoint of historical development, and particularly from the 1940s onward, destructive ideologies constructed ethno-nationalism in two distinct forms. One form enlisted it as a component of a broader political agenda aimed at undermining the foundations of Iranian national unity; the other elevated it to the central axis of political struggle and secessionist action. The ethno-nationalist currents initially derived the conceptual apparatus of their narrative from Soviet Marxism-Leninism, designating Iranians—on the basis of fabricated cleavages—as "peoples" (khalq-hā) or "nationalities" (melliyyat-hā), each of which was to "determine its own destiny." Subsequently, with the transformation of power relations and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc's political order and ideological system, the terms "people" (khalq) and "nationality" (melliyyat) gradually ceded their place to "ethnicity" (qow-miyyat), followed in turn by such meaningless constructs as "ethnic and national rights"; likewise, softer euphemisms such as "identity-seeking" were deployed instead of "secessionism". Nevertheless, the adversary of the ethno-nationalists was not solely the Iranian nation and state; other ethno-nationalist rivals and ethnic "others" were likewise deemed enemies—though, depending on circumstance, collaboration with them against Iranian national unity remained a viable option.

An exemplary instance of such power relations may be observed in the Azerbaijan crisis following the Second World War. On Moscow's orders, two ethno-nationalist parties—one Turkic, one Kurdish—were established in Tabriz and Mahabad, respectively, each proclaiming an autonomous government to lay the groundwork for the dismemberment of Azerbaijan from Iran. However, ADP under the leadership of Pishevari and the Democrat Party under the leadership of Qazi Mohammad maintained a co-

1. By way of example, the names and birthplaces of the founders of the first congress and the current leaders of Komala: Abbasi, Sanandaj; F. Soltani, Marivan; Karimi, Saqqez; Vatandoust, Sanandaj; Moradbeygi, Boukan; Rahimi, Naqadeh; Iraj Farzad, Sanandaj; Ebrahim Alizadeh, Mahabad; Omar Ilkhanizadeh, Boukan; Mohtadi, Boukan. And likewise, the names and birthplaces of the founders and leaders of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan: Qazi Mohammad, Mahabad; Ahmad Towfiq, Mahabad; M. Saraji, Mahabad; Soleyman Mo'ini, Mahabad; Molla Avareh, Sardasht; Qasemlu, Urmia; Sadeq Sharafkandi, Boukan; Mostafa Hejri, Naqadeh; Khaled Azizi, Naqadeh; A. Hasan-zadeh, Sardasht.

alition against Iran, with the fall of the Ferqe and the deliverance of Azerbaijan, that coalition dissolved among the client successors of the two ethno-nationalist currents. The conflict between Pan-Turkist and Pan-Kurdist currents—which conduct their activities, both openly and covertly, within and beyond the country's borders, whether under such rubrics as "identity-seeking" and "ethnic rights" or within explicitly secessionist groups and parties—over the territories claimed in their respective illusive maps is of a character too fundamental for any prospect of long-term coalition to prevail over the acute tensions between them.

In this context, the province of West Azerbaijan has, in recent decades, constituted one of the most significant arenas of tension between these ethno-nationalist currents within Iran—currents that are the principal agents of the politicization of "ethnicity" and the attenuation of national unity, national identity, and social order and cohesion in the province. The path to confronting them, accordingly, passes through the strategic revitalization and reinforcement of the elements of national identity and the institutions of Iranian national unity.

7. The Construction of "Identity-Seeking" against Iranian Identity in the Contemporary Period

As we stated in the introduction, the question of "identity" gradually became a site of contestation in the Western world—from the second half of the twentieth century onward—in both the field of political action and theoretical studies oriented toward such action. In recent decades, the specter of "identity politics" has cast its shadow over the public life of Iranians, and its ideological concepts have secured a foothold within the social sciences. What naturally elevates this phenomenon beyond a merely academic discussion is its intimate nexus with projects and models of political action that, for the most part, possessed no roots in the historical lifeworld of Iranian society, but rather arose from long-term social transformations and the dominant paradigms of political struggle in Western societies. Just as, prior to this, the fabricated identity-demarcations that appeared in the twentieth century under such headings as "peoples" (*khalq-hā*) and "nationalities" (*melliyyat-hā*) were the handiwork of the Eastern Bloc and a weapon in what was called "class struggle". In both of the aforementioned cases, the categories of identity have been, and remain, not concepts for the description of social and cultural phenomena, but rather instruments for the redefinition of power relations, the rearrangement of social boundaries, and the legitimation of particular political objectives—objectives that are, more often than not, in profound rupture and tension with the unity, national identity, civility, and logic of historical continuity of Iran.

It was for the first time, in the wake of the Russian Revolution, that a group of Iranians resident in the Caucasus who had given their hearts to Marxism-Leninism established the Communist Party of Iran—the Ferqe-ye 'Adālat (Justice Party)—based on Comintern principles (the international platform of communist parties). Through a false representation of Iranian society within the framework of Leninist and Stalinist doctrines, they constructed a schema of fabricated identities under the title "nations of Iran" (*melal-e Iran*) and spoke of the dismemberment of the country. At the second congress of this party, convened in Urumia in 1927, Iranian society was explicated within the framework of what Stalin had termed "the national question, and the fragmentation of the Iranian nation into "nations"—or, in a later idiom, "ethnicities" (*qowmiyyat-hā*)—was openly broached. In 1913, Stalin had written a pamphlet entitled *Marxism and the National Question*, in which—with particular reference to the multinational Russian Tsarist Empire, which he had called "a prison of peoples"—he designated linguistic groups

possessing a territory attributed to themselves and a unitary economic life as "nations" (melal), and deemed support for their separation from existing states an ideological duty on the path of class struggle and socialist revolution. After the liberation of the "nationalities" from "national oppression", the turn would come for the international union of the proletariat. In this manner, the question of "identity" at this juncture, and in the view of classical socialism, was a superstructural phenomenon resting upon the substratum of class relations, and the militants availed themselves of it as a "tactic" for the advancement of their objectives.

When the Iranian socialists, as imitators of Bolshevism, sought to establish a party conforming to Comintern standards, they imprudently applied the official terminology and definitions of the elder brother—including the term "the national question"—to Iranian society, the result of which was such ludicrous formulations as the following:

The Communist Party of Iran must include among its program the demands and general slogans of all communist parties of the world regarding the question of nationalities—namely, the slogan of the right of every nation to complete independence, even secession from the central government—and act accordingly. (quoted in Atabaki, 1994 and Seifodini, n. d.)

At this same congress, for the first time, the term "multinational country" (keshvar-e kasir al-melleh)¹ was used to describe Iran. The said party declared its objective to be the establishment of a "republic"—one whose foundation would rest "upon the free union of the nations that are presently within the territory of the state of Iran."

In the early years of the fourteenth century, (the 1920s–1930s CE), Such utterances found few buyers. The realities and perceptions of Iranian society were so remote from the new ideologies that the communist slogans concerning "the liberation of nations" gained no purchase among either the common people or the elite. However, with the Allied occupation of Iran in September 1941 and the nearly five-year presence of the Red Army across a vast expanse of Iranian territory, the Tudeh Party of Iran commenced its activities with unparalleled power and resources, and propagated the doctrine of "the national question"—this time under the personal supervision of Stalin himself, who had by then donned the mantle of leadership of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics/ The Soviets and their devotees went so far that in 1945, under the ideological tutelage of Russian Marxism and with the backing of the Red Army, they undertook the creation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP) and the Republic of Mahabad for the purpose of dismembering northwestern Iran—a venture that, one year later, collapsed in ignominious defeat. Azerbaijan returned to the motherland of Iran.

From that time until approximately the 1980s, the discourse of "identity-seeking" and its stock concepts—such as "nationalities" (melliyyat-hā), "peoples" (khalq-hā), "the national question" (mas'ale-ye mellī), "double oppression" (setam-e moẓā'af), "the right of nations to self-determination" (haqq-e ta'yīn-e sarnevesht-e melal), "national autonomy" (khodmokhtārī-ye mellī), and the like—remained, for the most part, the inheritors of the doctrine that the imitators of the Comintern had first propounded.

Following the decline and subsequent collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the field of contestation gradually shifted, yet the essence of the conflict persisted. The arena of struggle had now shifted from politi-

1. It is a direct calque of the Russian *mnogonatsional'noe gosudarstvo*, the official Soviet designation for the USSR.

cal economy to culture, and "class struggle" had yielded to "identity politics." The new discourses of identity-seeking preserved the grammar of traditional ethno-nationalism, but replaced the classical vocabulary of Marxism-Leninism with an arsenal of new terms—terms buttressed by more elaborate mechanisms of justification and more sophisticated fallacies. The "political grammar" of identity-seeking is now what it always was; it is the terminology, however, that has changed. "The politics of difference," "multiculturalism," "differentiated group rights," "ethnicity and the ethnic," "the mosaic society," "linguistic rights," "ethnic federalism," and "the non-national state"—such terms, when applied to Iranian society, carry the very same ideological significations as the ensemble of terms "nationalities," "peoples," "the right to self-determination of the nations of Iran," and "national autonomy" once carried, only in a newfangled guise. This shift in discourse is far more than a sign of substantive metamorphosis; it is an indication of a turning in expression and form. Both modalities rest upon a mechanism of distortion, fallacy, and dissimulation, based on which certain elements of the interwoven plurality of Iran's historical society are distorted and depicted in the guise of elements of "difference" and "conflict"; thereafter, this false and anti-Iranian image is dissimulated as something natural, emancipatory, and subsumed under the rubric of human rights.

8. Conclusion

The extensive inquiry into the ontology of Iranian identity and the genealogy of the threats posed against it leads us to a decisive theoretical and practical resolution. The text has demonstrated that the contemporary question of ethnic identity in Iran is not an organic product of internal social friction, but largely the result of a superstructural imposition of imported ideologies—ranging from the Comintern's "National Question" to the postmodern formulations of "Identity Politics."

The fundamental premise established in this study is that Iran operates on a *ratio essendi* (existential logic) defined by unity-in-plurality. Unlike the modern nation-states of the post-Westphalian or post-colonial order, the Iranian nation constitutes a historical civilization-state. The Idea of Iran serves as a transcendental spirit that does not negate diversity but sublates it.

Therefore, the intellectual fallacy of ethno-nationalism lies in its attempt to reverse this historical alchemy. By seeking to decompose the "salt" of the Iranian nation back into the toxic isolation of its elemental components ("sodium and chlorine"), ethno-identitarianism acts as an agent of entropy. It seeks to reduce the complex, interwoven layers of the Iranian individual—who is simultaneously defined by city, trade, religion, dialect, and national culture—into a flattened, one-dimensional "ethnic" subject. This is not a liberation of the subject, but a mutilation of their complex historical identity.

Our historical analysis confirms that the conceptual toolkit currently employed to challenge Iranian unity is deeply rooted in the strategic arsenals of foreign powers and totalizing ideologies.

The taxonomy of "peoples," "nationalities," and "multinational state" was a specific fabrication of Stalinist Russia, designed to disintegrate the Tsarist empire and later applied formulaically to Iran by the Iranian Communist Party and the Tudeh Party. With the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, this anti-unitary mechanism shed its Marxist skin. It donned the liberal guise of "multiculturalism" and "human rights" as well as cultural leftism's "identity politics."

However, the mechanism remains identical: the Fabrication of Standardized Ethnic Units. By homogenizing the internal diversities of a region (e.g., erasing the differences between a Sorani, a Kurmanji, and other Kurdish language speakers, or a Shia and a Sunni) to create a monolithic "Nation-in-wait-

ing," these ideologies construct a "Trojan Horse" designed to dismantle the Iranian state from within. The evidence presented regarding the Azerbaijan crisis of 1945-46 and the ongoing rivalries between Pan-Turkist and Pan-Kurdish currents reveals the geopolitical dangers posed by these fabrications. These are not movements seeking civil rights within a national framework; they are competing irreconcilable projects that view Iranian territory as a contested vacuum.

Consequently, the defense of the Iranian nation cannot be passive. It requires a vigorous intellectual and political reassertion of the National Universal. Scholars and politicians must reject the nomenclature of "multi-nationalism," "ethnicism," "ethnic federalism," and the like, recognizing them as linguistic traps that prefigure disintegration. At the same time, the legitimate sphere of plurality in the modern era is the individual citizen, not the corporate "tribe" or "ethnos." The path to justice lies in the full realization of the rights of Iranian citizens—regardless of linguistic, regional, or religious background—under the rule of law and in Persian, the ancient medium of the Iranian collective consciousness.

Ultimately, Iran is not a mosaic of glued-together pieces; it is a solution in which the solutes have merged to create a distinct, historically continuous substance. To entertain the ideology of "ethnicism" is to invite the dissolution of this substance. The imperative for the contemporary Iranian state and intelligentsia is to strip away the "Trojan horse" of identity politics and reaffirm the civic and cultural unity that has sustained the Idea of Iran through millennia of distinct but unified existence.

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