

**The Production of Iran as a National State Space:
A Historical Geography**

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Abstract:

In existing literature, ‘Iran’ is often represented as a pre-existing and unified (Persian) *nation*, enclosed in a perennial national territory and history. I argue that this conception of ‘Iran’ is rooted in dominant (internalist and ahistorical) conceptions of *space* as static, pregiven, and passive, and *time* as monorhythmic and linear. ‘Iran’ is thus largely understood – even in critical analyses of Iranian nationalism – as a pregiven entity *external* to its constituent elements including Farsi and the ‘spatiotemporal matrices’ of capitalist nation state. This dissertation examines scholarly and other forms of literature, as well as the social practices, that have contributed to the production of Iranian-ness in both popular and scholarly consciousness. I argue that ‘Iran’ did not exist *prior* and/or *external* to the historical formation of ‘Iranian nation’. Iran as a national state space has been made possible through a set of very recent political, scientific, infrastructural, and technological processes in the imperialist and colonial context of late development and formal subsumption of labour under capital. My core research question, therefore, is: how has Iran been produced as a *national state space* within this context? To address this, I critically examine the *historiographic*, *Farsist*, and *cartographic* practices of the state as fundamental mechanisms in the production of Iran. These tripartite practices of the state have resulted in an entrenched Irancentric philosophy of (geo)history translated into the commonsensical Farsist worldview of ‘Iranians’. This has negatively impacted the formation of a progressive political strategy of change. It is then strategically imperative to articulate a radical geohistory of Iran as a multiscalar and multitemporal entity rooted in the everyday lives of the subaltern subjects. My dissertation is an initial step in mapping such a geohistory that highlights the contingent, positively heterogeneous, and open-ended nature of geohistory and spacetime in general, and of the nation state and Iran in particular.

Keywords: Cartography, *Farsization*, Internal Colonialism, Nationalism, Nation State, Spacetime

Dedication

To Farideh, without whose love, sacrifices, and support, this project would not have been possible.

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Introduction

On September 16, 2022, a 22-year-old Kurdish Iranian woman, Jina (Mahsa) Amini, was brutally beaten by the Islamic morality police and subsequently killed¹. Her tragic death sparked unprecedented protests across the country. Women's leadership of the protests and the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" challenged the Shi'ist foundations of the established power. Hijab, which has been imposed on women since the formation of Islamic Republic, became the central focus of the protests. "Iranians" have long suffered from interlinked forms of domination, but as these protests demonstrated, hijab represents the condensation of these repressions. However, the protests were not solely about the hijab. As they expanded, other longstanding issues including the violent history of national oppression emerged, exposing the contradictions inherent in the formation of the Iranian nation state. As Matin-Asgari notes, one of the key achievements of the 2022–23 uprising has been to force national oppression into the political spotlight, making it a point of contention between the Islamic Republic and its opposition – despite persistent denial from nationalist political factions and some within the academic community (Matin-Asgari, 2024: 315).

The compulsory hijab is the most noticeable manifestation of the Shi'ist repression under the Islamic Republic. However, it is not the only form of veiling that exists. Farsism can be considered as an even more entrenched form of hijab serving to conceal non-Persian bodies. Exploring this seemingly colonial practice of veiling I turn to the production of Farsi – as the national language – and Farsist knowledge by the state and argue that a twofold mechanism of

¹ For an extended discussion on the subject see: <https://socialistproject.ca/2022/11/rhythm-of-revolution-iran/>

‘dressage’² has been involved in the production of Iran as a nation state: Shiism and Farsism. By Farsism I mean a nationalist discourse and ontology whose perception of Iran and its history is limited to the ‘specialized knowledge’ produced in and through Farsi by the central state over the past century. Farsism has shaped and limited the epistemological horizon of Iranian intellectuals, and embodies state practices that suppress non-Persian spaces, resulting in internal colonization – a defining factor in the production of Iran. By naturalizing Iranian national state as the only viable form of political organization of space, Farsism thus denies the colonial violence exerted on non-Persian internal colonies.

Societies are composed of groups, of bodies, of classes (Lefebvre, 2004: 42). Bodies possess their own rhythms, and dressage seeks to control these rhythms. More specifically, as Lefebvre argues “to enter into a society, group or nationality is to accept values (that are taught) ... but also to bend oneself (to be bent) to its ways. Which means to say: dressage” (Ibid: 39). The dressage of girls and women was always harsh, because “in femininity the basic rhythms have greater force and reach” (Ibid: 41-42). In the Iranian context, the systematic process of dressage targets not only feminine bodies, but, more broadly, non-Persian bodies.

Accordingly, I argue that there are at least two distinct Iranian “religions” in operation: Shi’ism and Farsism. Despite some major differences, these two dogmas share significant commonalities as well. If the colonality of national space is primarily characterized by *Farsism*, its sexist and gendered dimensions are most clearly understood in relation to *Shiism*. *Farsism* and *Shiism*, however, are interconnected³ and form the *interdependent* patriarchal pillars of Iranian

² According to Lefebvre, one must distinguish between education, learning and dressage or training. Dressage bases itself on repetition: “One breaks-in another human living being by making them repeat a certain act, a certain gesture or movement.” Moreover, repetition, which is mechanical in animals, is ritualized in humans: “Thus, in us, presenting ourselves or presenting another entails operations that are not only stereotyped but also consecrated: rites” (Lefebvre, 2004: 39).

³ For instance, Shi’ism has also been contributing to the colonality of national space. It should be noted that Shiism is not limited to the advocates of the Islamic Republic. The paternalistic idea of *velayat* (guardianship) is a defining

national state. Farsism and Shiism converge to absent subaltern geohistories, a process orchestrated by the national state, which articulates the Farsist and Shiist elements into a single process: Farshiism. Farshiism, which is evident in the dualistic feminization of territory, represents national space as *Nāmūs* (virtue/honor) or the mother of the integral body⁴ of the nation whose ‘territorial integrity’ must be preserved at any cost.

The following section will explore these questions in greater detail, beginning with a critical overview of the Shi’ist foundations of Iranian state formation. I argue that Iranian nationalism and state formation must be understood within a broader historical context, deeply intertwined with the rise and consolidation of Shi’ism. While Shi’ism has played a crucial role in producing Iran, this dissertation specifically examines a lesser-explored veiling practice of the state associated with Farsi and the national-colonial question⁵. More specifically, I contend that Farsi and Shi’a Islam are not merely linguistic, cultural, or ideological constructs; rather, they are actively inscribed in space and time through state mechanisms. Farsism, as a less visible and more hegemonic veiling practice, tames and alienates non-Persian individual and collective bodies (the internal colonies). Furthermore, I argue that the disregard for the spatiotemporal materiality of the national state has led to the reproduction of nationalist conceptions of state space and Iran. Drawing on Poulantzas’ concept of the spatio-temporal matrices of the state (Poulantzas, 1978: 105-106), I argue that the production of Farsi has been historically embedded in the space-time matrix of the nation state.

feature of the monarchy as well. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, was not merely a Farsist. He was also a Shia Muslim. He narrates that Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (600-661 CE), the first Shia Imam, once has healed him when he felt sick. Mohammad Reza also said that Al-Abbas ibn Ali (647-680 CE), prevented him from getting hurt.

⁴ Najmabadi (2005) has discussed this gendered nature of Iranian nationalism and the idea of an Iranian homeland. See also Tavakoli-Targhi (2001). For a Marxist critique of the works of these postmodern historians, see Matin-Asgari (2009b).

⁵ For a historical account on how Persian nationalism forms as a reaction to the cultural hegemony of Shiite Islam, see Kia (1998).

1. Twelver Shi'ism, Farsi, and State Spacetime:

The establishment of Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion during the Safavid era (1501-1736) is usually regarded as a pivotal factor in the emergence of a unified national state. While the characterization of this unity as 'national' may warrant further scrutiny, Twelver Shi'ism has been instrumental in shaping the relatively unified and centralized structure of the Iranian state. One could argue Shi'ism created the conditions of possibility for the emergence of Iranian nationalism in subsequent centuries. As Marashi says, any historical analysis of nationalism "would be incomplete without a consideration of the social-structural apparatus within which nationalism, as politics, comes to circulate" (Marashi, 2008: 10).

Matin's work (2013) – which represents a significant exception within the existing literature on Iranian state formation – emphasizes the transformation of land ownership regimes and their connection to the rise and consolidation of the Shi'a *ulama* as a pre-capitalist class that played a pivotal role in shaping the Iranian modern state and, subsequently, the formation of the Iranian nation-state. In analyzing the international dimension of state-formation Matin highlights "the subjection of Iran's predominantly sedentary-agricultural society to the almost unbroken geopolitical pressures of Turkish tribal nomadism" (Matin, 2013: 31). This nomadism necessitates the establishment of a 'system of military readiness' (Ibid) that was reflected in the Turkic–Mongol institution of 'uymaq' or 'household-state', the backbone of the new *amalgamated* polity (Ibid: 35). The rise and fall of this new polity, manifested in the Safavi state, is closely related to the specific dynamism of nomadic-sedentary interaction⁶. The *uymaq* system "was dialectically

⁶ Here Matin refers to the mutually constitutive relation between two polities: *steppe nomadic* and *Iranian agrarian* polities (Matin, 2013: 35). One should, however, ask: was the 'Iranian' agrarian polity uniformly sedentary prior to the pressures of 'Turkish tribal nomadism'?

constitutive of both the centrifugal tendencies within the mediaeval Iranian polity and its centralized-patrimonial character” (Ibid: 35-36).

Matin argues that the same material interests underlying the *uymaqs*’ dynamism also animated the centralizing state’s attempt to transcend the *uymaqs*. The Safavids first attempted to address this challenge by establishing the Shahsevani institution, appealing directly to the Qizilbash rank and file (Ibid: 38). When this proved ineffective, the Safavi state shifted to a multi-dimensional strategy and established the *ghulaman* slave army, loyal exclusively to the Shah, undermining the military dominance of the *uymaqs* (Ibid: 39). This shift was solidified by replacing Sufism with *ithna-a ’shari* (Twelver) Shi’ism as the state’s ideological foundation during Shah Tahmasp I reign (1524-76), marking a move from ‘esoteric’ Sufism to a ‘legalistic and rational form of Islam’ (Ibid: 41). Twelver Shi’ism was declared as the state religion. The Safavi state “conducted violent persecution of the Sunnis, forcing large sections of the population to convert to Shi’ism. Consequently, the Shi’a ulama were gradually transformed into a semi-hierocracy” (Ibid).

The ulama’s establishment as a distinct social class, and Iranian state formation, were closely tied to land. After the fall of the Safavis, “the ulama’s initial role as the mere custodians of the *waqf* lands was transformed into quasi-ownership” (Ibid: 42)⁷. The ulama’s ownership of vast swaths of *waqf* (charitable) lands, which were customarily exempted from taxation, reinforced their status. Furthermore, the Qajars lacked prophetic descent. As a result, they were dependent on the Shi’a ulama for ideological legitimation (Ibid: 58-59). These processes ultimately resulted in

⁷ This material shift was accompanied by the ideological concomitant of the growing power of the ulama. This was reflected in the increasing influence of the *Usuli* (principlist) school of Shi’ism, as opposed to the dominant Akhbari (traditionalist) school (Matin, 2013: 42). It is also mentioned that “the conceptual, and subsequently institutional, expression of this idea was *ijtihad*, or ‘the endeavour to determine the [absent] Imam’s true opinion’” (Ibid).

the Shi'ist legalization of land relations. More importantly, the growth of land assignment meant that land turned into semi-private property.

Iranian state formation and nationalism should be understood within this broader historical context. The internal class dynamics and international geopolitical conflicts rooted in the Safavid period ultimately influenced Qajar rule. No capitalist class existed in Qajar Iran (Ibid: 46). Under the condition of backwardness, the Qajar state, like some other late developers, resorted to two strategies: 'defensive accumulation' and 'defensive modernization'. Iran's defensive modernization began after the Russo-Iranian wars, marked by significant territorial losses that reduced Qajar tax revenue. Crown Prince Abbas Mirza (1789-1833) responded with the *nizami jadid* (New Order) reforms (Ibid: 59). Consequently, the Qajar monarchy intensified state land sales and granted commercial concessions to Russian and British capital, devastating the bazaar and pushing merchants toward land investment (Ibid: 60).

Another event that contributed to the increasing power of the Shi'a ulema and the establishment of Shi'ism as the ideological framework of the Iranian state was the state's Shi'ist tendency in suppressing Babism. The Qajar state, in defense of Shi'ism, carried out the elimination of the Báb and his followers⁸. Although this subject has not been systematically studied in the literature, it seems that this process played a decisive role in shaping the Iranian state as a Shi'a entity. Following the formation and initial consolidation of Shi'ism within the spatiotemporal matrix of the Safavid state, the massacre of the Bábis and, later, the Tobacco Movement⁹ can be

⁸ In mid-1850, Amir Kabir, deemed the Bábí movement a significant threat and subsequently ordered the execution of the Báb. This act was followed by widespread killings of many Bábis. Bábism originated as a messianic movement in Shi'ite Islam during the 13th/19th century. See: <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/babism-index>

⁹ The Persian Tobacco Protest was a Twelver Shia Muslim uprising in Qajar Iran against a tobacco concession granted in 1890 by Emperor Naser al-Din Shah Qajar to the British Empire. This agreement gave Major G. F. Talbot, an Englishman, exclusive control over the cultivation, sale, and export of tobacco. The protest, led by merchants in key cities such as Tehran, Shiraz, Mashhad, and Isfahan, aligned with the clerical establishment's opposition. It reached its peak in December 1891 when Grand Ayatollah Mirza Shirazi issued a widely obeyed fatwa prohibiting tobacco use.

seen as pivotal moments in the materialization of Shi'ism as the core of the modern Iranian state. This process continued and, particularly with the Constitutional Revolution, paved the way for the emergence of a Shi'ist nationalism in the late Qajar period. As a close ally of the bazaar merchants many senior Shi'a ulama became active supporters of the Constitutional Revolution (Matin, 2013: 61).¹⁰ However, the constitutionalists' attempt to regulate *waqf* (charitable) lands antagonized richer sections of the ulama (Matin, 2013: 60-61)¹¹.

As demonstrated, Shi'ism and landed property were central to the Constitutional Revolution and the subsequent rise of Iranian nationalism. Shi'ism itself became nationalized through the multiscalar process of Iranian state formation (See: Ch. 3 Section 3). Although its prominence declined under the Pahlavi state, Shi'ism had already laid the groundwork for the formation of Iran as a nation-state¹². This structure was a constitutive element of the 'integral' state of Iran, such that within about half a century, it reemerged in the form of the Islamic Revolution¹³ and the establishment of the Islamic national state. In this sense, the Islamic Revolution can be understood as a continuation of the Constitutional-Reactionary Revolution (*Mashruteh-Mashru'eh*), reflecting Shi'ism's long-standing entrenchment in the spatiotemporal matrix of the Iranian state.

¹⁰ The rise of the Shi'a clerics as a social class in the late Safavi period found its logical corollary in the emergence of the *mujtahids*. They were practitioners of *ijtihad* or independent rational judgement in matters of Shi'a jurisprudence (Matin, 2013: 61). The first serious intellectual reflection on the direct political rulership of the *mujtahids* can be found in the work of the prominent Shi'a jurisconsult Mulla Ahmad Naraqi (1771–1829). His work then became an important reference for the formulation by Ayatollah Khomeini of the radical concept of 'Islamic government' (Ibid: 62).

¹¹ Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri is a famous example whose persistent opposition to the secular tone of the new constitution was instrumental in subjecting all parliamentary legislation to the approval of a committee of five leading Shi'a clerics. Nuri's conception of popular sovereignty "anticipated the institution of The Council of Guardians of the Constitution as a key element in the political structure of the Islamic Republic" (Matin, 2013: 62).

¹² Unlike the Pahlavi dynasty, which was marked by secular nationalism, the Islamic Republic advanced a religious nationalism, "whose roots go back to the Safavid Dynasty's 16th-century forcible imposition of Shiism as the state religion." (Mohammadpour, 2023: 89)

¹³ From a spatial point of view, Ehsani (2017: 436) argues that it would be more accurate to designate this revolution as a 'provincial' revolt of the 'peripheral regions' against the center.

1.1. Farsism

Matin (2013) offers valuable insights into the Shi'ist and land-based history of Iranian state formation; but does not address the role of Farsi. In this dissertation I focus on this often overlooked veiling practice of the state: Farsi and the national-colonial question. I argue that Farsi, as another pillar of the state that made Iranian nationalism possible, is not merely a linguistic, cultural, or ideological phenomenon; rather, it is actively inscribed into space and time through state mechanisms. My examination of the spatiotemporality of Farsi and its role in the formation of the Iranian state seeks to complement Matin's work by situating Farsi within the material relations of state formation. I argue that Farsism is linked to the state production of non-Persian internal colonies as integral parts of 'Iran'. Farsism, as a less visible yet more hegemonic veiling practice than Shi'ism, tames and alienates non-Persian individual and collective bodies (the internal colonies).

To understand Farsism, I focus on Farsist practices of the state. At the broadest level, Farsist practices of the state, are defined as veiling practices – an entrenched form of enforced hijab, or more precisely, as a form of dressage that aims to tame individual and collective non-Persian bodies. These Farsist practices are rooted in the production of Farsi as the national language, intended to unify diverse geohistories, languages, and cultures under a single national identity. As I illustrate, Farsi, as a deliberate product of the Iranian nation state, embodies a specific form of what Lefebvre terms 'specialized knowledge'. A defining feature of Farsi as abstract/specialized knowledge is its historical tendency to absent non-Persian differences. I position the production of Farsi within the broader context of the division between intellectual and manual labour and argue that Farsism elucidates how Farsi, as an expression of the intellectual dimension of the nation state, has been produced. Farsi, in this sense, represents the abstract-ideal spacetime of intellectuals of the Iranian state. As the nationalist ideology of Iranian state, Farsism has been produced and

materialized systematically through the violent erasure of non-Persian subaltern geohistories. Farsism is simultaneously the medium through which this erasure is implemented and a product shaped by the very process it perpetuates.

Farsism, like Shi'ism, extends beyond ideological and intellectual domains; it is materialized and activated through the production of national state space. Farsi, as the national language/culture of 'Iranians', has been produced by being systematically inscribed in space and time. Internal colonization of non-Persian spaces is enacted through Farsism as a spatiotemporal process. Farsism therefore is integral to the internally colonial production of Iran. More precisely, the Farsist practices of the state are materialized through the Farsization of spacetimes. I argue that Iran, as an embodiment of a linear temporal regime and an abstract, bounded space has been produced through Farsization. Farsi, therefore, embodies the dualistic linear time and bounded space of the Iranian nation state. Accordingly, I argue that Farsism has shaped and delimited the epistemological horizon of Iranians. Farsist practices of the state in this way work to produce and naturalize Iran as a nation. Accordingly, I define Farsism as the ideology of Farsization; the principal mechanism of the production of Iran.

For Farsi to be inscribed in space and time, two complementary practices have been essential: *historiographic* and *cartographic* practices of the state. Iran is historiographically *written* and cartographically *mapped* in, and as, Farsi. As my research indicates, the coloniality of the Iranian nation-state is inextricably tied to Farsism. By geohistoricizing Farsi, and putting it in its space and time, the concept of Farsism allows us to perceive it not only as a mechanism for expropriating non-Persian languages and cultures but also as a tool for expropriating non-Persian lands, labour, and natures. Conceptualizing Farsi in this spatiotemporal manner, I define Farsism as a dualistic mode of partitioning space and time. I argue that the expropriation of non-Persian

spacetimes through Farsization has served as the main mechanism for establishing a nationalist hegemony over the past century. Farsi as a relationship of hegemony¹⁴ mirrors the linguistic fetishism of Iranian intellectuals and ruling class.

Moreover, I argue that it is through a range of interconnected racial dualisms – such as sedentary-nomadic, urban-rural, and culture-nature – that Farsi has been spatiotemporally materialized. Culturally, organic intellectuals of the state¹⁵ have played a fundamental role in producing colonial knowledge in, through, and as Farsi over the past century. The representations of space and time formulated by Farsist intellectuals (re)produce national space. More importantly, these dualisms are not limited to the cultural production of Farsi as a racist language-ideology; they are embedded within the ‘spatiotemporal matrix’ of the nation state as a colonial-class structure.

Critical scholars such as Asgharzadeh (2007), Elling (2013), and Soleimani and Mohammadpour (2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2022) have usefully addressed similar concerns under terms like ‘Farstoxication’, ‘Persian-Centrism’, ‘Perso-Shi‘i Nationalism’, ‘Perso-Shi‘ification’ ‘Perso-Shi‘a state’, ‘colonial Shi‘i Persianization’, ‘Shi‘i Persianism’, or ‘Perso-Iranian identity’. However, they do not systematically define these terms and use them generally to refer to Iranian state or its ideology. Their usage, therefore, remains largely descriptive. Whenever they approach a definition, their analysis remains limited to the role of the Farsi language and the Aryan “race” in shaping Iranian nationalism (Mohammadpour and Soleimani, 2022: 186). They discuss erasing non-Persian pasts, stripping non-Persians of their heritage, and Persianization of the Kurdish space

¹⁴ Bert Fragner (1999) has discussed the ‘hegemony of Persian language’ and its role in constructing a modern national culture and identity (Fragner, 1999, 33-99 cited in Ashraf 2006b).

¹⁵ Gramsci says, “the intellectuals would be organic to the everyday life and self-activity of the workers” (Boggs, 2007: 14). My argument is that the national state has successfully cultivated its own intellectuals, whom I describe as the organic intellectuals of the national state. The everyday life of these intellectuals renders their influence alien to and against the day-to-day experiences of the subaltern classes.

(Ibid: 190) and sometimes also discuss spatial aspects of nationalism such as land and the frontier (Kashani-Sabet, 1997). However, space as a methodological concept is not central in their analysis. They use Perso-Shi‘ification which is very similar to mine: Farshiism and Farshiization. Referring to Asgharzadeh (2007), they note “archaeological Persianization has taken place within a larger campaign for *Persianizing territory, time, language, and history* (Mohammadpour and Soleimani, 2022: 190). Mohammadpour (2025), also uses the term Persianism to emphasize the central role of the Persian language and culture in shaping Iranian identity. In his analysis of the term “the Persianate World¹⁶,” he critiques scholars who attribute transhistorical agency to the Persian language in the making of Iranian history (Mohammadpour, 2025: 70). Finally, Azimi-Qadim has conceptualized the term *Fars-zadegy*¹⁷ or ‘Farstoxication’ (Asgharzadeh, 2007: 188)¹⁸. Yet his concept primarily emphasizes the role of Farsi as a language without discussing spaces of Farsi and the spatial-temporal production of Iran.

Building on existing critical scholarship on Iranian nationalism, this dissertation develops the term Farsism. I consider Farsism as a new concept, not a mere neologism¹⁹. I theorize Farsism (and Farshiism) as the ideological basis of Iranian state formation, with Farsization referring to the production of Iran through the inscription of Farsi in spatial and temporal matrices of nation state. Moreover, more than the scholars above, my framework problematizes the very notion of Iran. More specifically, my conceptualization foregrounds the central role of Farsi in the production of

¹⁶ Kia (2020).

¹⁷ *Farsa Vurulmaq* in Turkish. According to Asgharzadeh, this term was developed to capture the ongoing linguistic hegemony of the dominant Farsi-speaking group in Iran (Asgharzadeh, 2007: 186). By employing it, Azimi-Qadim, explains “the degree to which non-Persian peoples’ languages, histories, even creativities, and imagination have been colonized by the Persian minority in current Iran (cited in ibid: 186-187). In Azimi-Qadim’s own words, “Farstoxication is a cultural aggression against the Turk and Kurd and Baluch ...” (cited in ibid: 188). As Asgharzadeh elaborates, “Farstoxication takes place in an environment where non-Farsi languages are not allowed to be studied, learned, and used as normal languages of learning and education”. (Ibid: 193)

¹⁸ Asgharzadeh also employs terms such as ‘Fars-centered ethnic nationalism’, ‘Fars-centrism’, ‘Fars-strickenness’, ‘Fars-centered politics of assimilation’, and ‘Persianization’ (Asgharzadeh, 2007: 12, 186, 194, 195).

¹⁹ Notably, Asgharzadeh uses the term *Farsism* once (Ibid: 77), though without offering any definition or explanation.

Iran through its inscription into space and time – hence the use of the term *Farsization*. What distinguishes this approach is its emphasis on the spatiotemporal dimensions of Farsi, positioning it as a key mechanism in the formation of the Iranian nation-state. This intervention aims to bridge critical scholarship on Iranian nationalism with the analytical tools of radical geography.

Lastly, the context in which this dissertation has been written is important. It is not merely an academic intervention but also part of a broader project that aims to engage more broadly with the public – specifically with Iranians who understand Farsi. For this reason, I have deliberately chosen terms like *Farsism* and *Farshiism*, which are more accessible and resonant for a wider Farsi-speaking audience than academic formulations such as “Perso-Shi‘i.” This choice reflects my commitment to making critical theory legible beyond academic circles and to contributing to public discourse in Iran. This underscores the need to conceptualize new terms like Farsism to name and sharpen points others have also raised about Iranian nationalism.

1.2. The Spatio-temporal Matrices of Iranian State

As political scientist, Mehrzad Boroujerdi notes, “examination of the ‘historical’ accounts of nation-state formation in Iran demonstrates the theoretical poverty of this genre of work” (Boroujerdi, 1998: 52). I argue that the disregard for the spatiotemporal materiality of the national state has contributed to the reproduction of nationalist conceptions of state space, Farsi, and Iran²⁰. The spatio-temporal matrices refer to the *materiality* of the *social division of labour*, of the *structure of the State*, and of the practices and *techniques* of power (Poulantzas, 1978: 105-106). Space-time matrix is the material framework of the state that as the “presupposition of the relations of production and embodiment of the labour process, consists in the organization of a continuous,

²⁰ This has even diluted the possibility of revolutionary struggles to imagine and produce different forms of spacetimes. Thus, revolutionary struggles must not only confront nationalism but also endeavor to transform the spatio-temporal matrix of the nation state that suppresses national minorities.

homogeneous, cracked and fragmented space-time”. It is important to note that “it is in this individualization that the institutional materiality of the capitalist State takes root” (Ibid: 64-65). This individualization of space and time “not only serves to mask and obscure class relations (the capitalist State never presents itself as a class State), but also plays an active part in the divisions and isolation (individualization) of the popular masses” (Ibid: 66).

In this dissertation, following Poulantzas, I treat the capitalist social formation and nation-State as equivalent (Poulantzas, 1980: 112). Space matrices vary with the mode of production²¹ (Poulantzas, 1980: 99). By the rise of capitalism, the whole process is inscribed in a fresh space which “involves closures and successive segmentations” (Ibid: 103-104). I will explore this process by focusing on the historical production of Iran as a nation state. There is a difference between the spatial-temporal matrices of pre-capitalist and capitalist social formations in what has come to be known as Iran: between the era of ‘guarded domains’ (characterized by the multiplicity of independent and semi-independent spaces/kingdoms) and the era of the nation state formation (characterized by the production of abstract space-time through the process of Farsist internal colonialism).

I will more fully address Poulantzas’s notion of spatial and temporal matrices of the national state in various places in the dissertation to demonstrate the spatiotemporal dimensions of the production of Iran. For instance, in Chapter Two (Sub-Section 2.4. From Natural to Political Frontiers and Section 5. Production of Abstract Time: The Birth of Tehran), I contrast the qualitative differences between the pre-capitalist social formation of the guarded domains and the capitalist social formation of an emerging Iran as a national territory. I argue that the shift from

²¹ According to Poulantzas, “while we retain the distinction between *mode of production* (an abstract-formal object in its economic, ideological and political determinations) and concrete *social formations* (articulations of several modes of production at a given historical moment), we must not regard these social formations as merely heaped up concretizations of abstractly reproduced modes of production” (Poulantzas, 1980: 25).

natural to political frontiers, indicate a historical transformation from a natural history and geography to a linear time and abstract space. The production of abstract, fragmented spacetime is manifested in the birth of Tehran as the national (abstract) standard against which all other spatio-temporal regimes were compared and hierarchically ranked. In Chapter Three (Section 6. Farsi and Internal Colonization: Farsist Colonization), I illustrate how the spatiotemporal matrices of Iran as a national state were produced, showcasing the historical role of Farsization of time and space in shaping Iran.

The inscription of Farsi in spacetime by the state has resulted in materialization of Farsi in the structure of the Iranian national state. In Chapter Four (Sub-Section 2.3. Frontier Economies), I argue that the transformation from guarded domains (a frontier spatiotemporal regime) to Iranian national state (a national spatiotemporal regime) has also depended on the formation of Iran as a national market. Building on a more comprehensive analysis of the absence of Iran as a national territory, I show how this absence, manifested in the guarded domains, was historically associated with the absence of a national market and the capitalist relations of production.

1.3. Internal Colonization and State Formation

My focus on the spatiotemporality of Iranian state formation underscores the colonial dynamics that produce Iran as a national state. A few critical scholars have utilized the concept of internal colonialism in their critique of the racist nature of Iranian nationalism and beyond (see for example: Asgharzadeh 2007; Soleimani & Mohammadpour 2019b, 2020; Mohammadpour & Soleimani 2020²², Burton 2021). Critical historians have also pointed to the colonial dimensions of the Iranian nation-state. Marashi, for example, examines how the Pahlavi regime functioned as

²² In their critical analysis of the Kurdish region (known as Rojhelat) in Iran, Soleimani and Mohammadpour (2020: 741) treat internal colonialism and de-development as interchangeable concepts. They “equate internal colonialism with what Sara Roy terms as “de-development”: a process through which a hegemonic power adopts hindering strategies to “deliberately block internal economic development and the structural reform” (Ibid: 742).

a *surrogate colonial state*, assuming the role of an external authority against which discursive and political forces came to position themselves (Marashi, 2014: 18). Matin-Asgari also examines national oppression as ‘a constitutive feature of nation-state formation in Iran’ (Matin-Asgari, 2024).

Researchers who have applied the concept of internal colonialism to the Iranian context have typically done so either by invoking it in a general sense or by relying on its traditional definition as the rule of one ethnic group over other such groups living within the continuous boundaries of a single state or a form of uneven development signifying unequal structural relationship manifest in metropole-satellite or center-periphery (Soleimani and Mohammadpour, 2020). My approach seeks to reconceptualize internal colonialism by focusing on Farsist historiographic and cartographic practices of the state. This framework draws on a more refined conception of internal colonialism, developed within the tradition of radical geography and, more specifically, spatial decolonial theory. Focusing on the urban history of oil capitalism²³ in Khuzestan, Ehsani (2014, 2017) implicitly underscores the colonial nature of spatial relations even though he does not use the term colonial. As he shows, “the accumulation of capital in oil was predicated on the production of a new built environment on the ruins of the dispossessed Bakhtiyari society.” (Ehsani, 2014: 202).

Despite these illuminating contributions, a systematically spatiotemporal analysis of internal colonialism in Iran remains notably absent. Marxist analyses of Iranian state formation and Iranian nationalism have been mostly limited to the traditional (mostly economic) perspectives in which questions of internal colonialism and language repression have not received proper attention. Drawing on Lefebvre’s notion of ‘the production of space’, Poulantzas’s notion of the spatio-

²³ For a complementary urban history of oil capitalism focused on Abadan, see Elling (2015).

temporal matrices of the national state, and Gramsci's 'spatial historicism', I argue that internal colonization, through the Farsization of space and time, is a fundamental mechanism of the production of Iran as a national space. I argue that a homogenized and monorhythmic body, characterized by the 'Iranian' nation, is imposed on the differential polyrhythmic bodies through everyday Farsism.

Criticizing a dogmatic approach to a Marxist theory of the state, which reduces the capitalist state to a generic 'State in general'²⁴, Poulantzas argues that this perspective is incapable of analyzing the historical transformations of the capitalist State and therefore cannot address concrete political situations. He argues that "we have to grasp the mode in which the class struggle ... [is] inscribed in the institutional structure of the State" (Poulantzas, 1980: 125-126). Poulantzas thus highlights the class nature of the matrices of the nation state: the spatial and temporal matrices "are presuppositions of the relations of production only because they are concretized in them as class struggle: they appear historically as the product of this struggle" (Ibid: 115). In this light, my research aims to explain one of the historical transformations of the state form exemplified by the production of Iran.

In the late developing states like Iran, the lack of structural possibilities for industrial production and colonizing remote geographies often leads the ruling class to rely heavily on the expropriation/extraction of near nature which is intrinsically linked to the hierarchical relationship between the center and the peripheries; and more specifically, between Persian and non-Persian regions. National oppression and the expropriation of nature are deeply intertwined. National state space is produced through these mechanisms. Iran's geographies are inhabited by Persian *and* non-Persian peoples. The non-Persian geographies are situated in the frontiers of the national territory.

²⁴ As exemplified in debates within the French Communist Party (PCF) and works like Balibar's *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*.

Historically, the formation of Iran as a nation-state was made possible through the violent suppression of the inhabitants of these frontier regions and assimilating them into the Farsi cultural landscape. The production of space and expropriation of nature are internally colonial. Internal (or national) colonization, however, is not limited to the suppression of native labour force or its exclusion from the job market, but it is fundamentally defined by the systematic destruction of the environment of non-Persian peoples. This environment/space includes non-Persian languages and cultures – hence, Farsist colonization.

The reductionist tendencies in existing literature are, to some extent, rooted in ahistorical conceptions of space and the national state in Farsi. Even critical assessments of Iranian nationalism have presupposed the existence of Iran, the form of national state and its seemingly invariable spatial matrix. Consequently, common analyses disregard the colonial logic of the production of national space. The majority of these analyses have conventionally interpreted space as a natural, and therefore, ahistorical phenomenon. This interpretation falls short in capturing the destructive dynamics inherent in the colonial production of capitalist space. As a result, space, nation, and the state are represented as abstracted from their constitutive social relations like Farsi. In his recent work, Keshavarzian (2024) employs a historical conception of space to critically analyze the abstract conception of the Gulf²⁵. While his use of critical spatial theory – ‘a tradition that conceives of space relationally’ (Keshavarzian, 2024: 9) – is innovative, the focus of his analysis does not center on Iran.

The dominant conception of space is based on a fundamental dualism that defines social relations as separated from nature. Accordingly, subaltern classes are not considered part of nature,

²⁵ As Keshavarzian argues, “to disrupt the essentialized, closed, and abstracted representations of the Gulf requires alternative conceptual tools and ways of writing about space and time that make change and contestation visible in all their complexity.” (Keshavarzian, 2024: 6)

as if social classes exist outside of space. As a result, national oppression and environmental crisis are often considered unrelated, if any connection exists at all. In contrast, keeping nature and labour (or more generally, energy) cheap in the internal colonies is *primarily* the product of the systematic dispossession and expropriation of native communal ownership of land and nature; a mechanism that makes accumulation of capital through the exploitation of labour possible²⁶. By excluding the issue of land/nature/body, dominant views (including Marxist analyses) can easily become involved in reproducing colonial relationships between centers and peripheries and turn a blind eye to the systematic destruction of the living environment of workers (which includes their language and culture). Ehsani's spatial history of oil capitalism in Abadan is among a few critical spatial analyses that is focused on the material dimension of the social world. As he argues, the material world can be considered as a social 'actor' (Ehsani, 2014). This approach allows us to go beyond dualistic views of nature-society which objectify nature as inanimate, passive, and subject to the human/social. I go further to say in addition to the exploitation, profit generation and worker compliance have been made possible through linguistic domination, cultural alienation, and assimilation. I argue that this cultural/conceptual moment of the production of Iran is inherently interlinked with Farsist nationalism and internal colonization.

From a strategic perspective, it is thus imperative to counter Farsist Iran-centric historiography by producing non-Iran-centric narratives of Iran. The narration of histories related to the internal colonies or, more precisely, subaltern non-Persian geohistories, assumes strategic significance here. The untold and/or buried histories of internal colonies are among the most significant excluded histories²⁷. Iran-centrism has systematically attempted to eliminate the body of the internal colonies. The removal of histories of these colonies has been made possible by the

²⁶ Here, I draw on Moore's (2015) interpretation of value theory, conceptualized as the 'law of Cheap Nature'.

²⁷ Other excluded histories include histories of women and non-binary individuals.

deliberate imposition of Farsi as the national language. The prevalent interpretation of Iran, as an *a priori* unified nation, has been directly produced through Farsist historiography and Persian supremacy.

As Asgharzadeh explains, ‘Farstoxication’ is “a process through which one’s own identity and language are denied so that one may easily associate oneself with the language and identity of the dominant group. It is a colonial act that entails the complicity and open participation of the colonized within the colonization processes” (Asgharzadeh, 2007: 193) I accordingly conceptualize Farsi as a colonial language characterized by a spatiotemporally dualistic framework manifested in the Persian-nonPersian dichotomy. Produced as ‘specialized knowledge’ this Farsist dualism has formed the everyday worldview of peoples who have been forcefully pulled into the state-produced Persian knowledge/culture/worldview. I explore how this dualism, and more specifically, the dualistic spatiotemporal matrix of the nation state, shape the hegemonic struggles that physically and conceptually reproduce the relations of production.

The brutal murder of Jina Amini and the subsequent revolutionary movement has brought the language and internal colonization to the forefront. One of the most-frequently chanted slogans in the demonstrations was “*Say Her Name: Mahsa Amini.*” Ironically, her name is Jina (a Kurdish name: ژینا), while Mahsa, her second name, is Persian. In the following days, the Islamic regime²⁸ brutally killed more than 90 individuals in Zahedan, Baluchestan (the Zahedan massacre). Baluchestan is one of the deeply colonized regions in Iran. Unfortunately, there is nothing new about the brutal practices of forced displacements and elimination of the mostly non-Persian populations of ‘Iran’. In its the brutal crushing of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan’s autonomous

²⁸ Both the Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic regimes have systematically suppressed, eliminated, or assimilated and forcefully internalized non-Persian cultures, figures, and movements, and normalized terror and murder. Both regimes are characterized by the national state form and the systematic process of internal colonization.

governments (1945-1946) “the Iranian army had executed about 2,500 and killed close to 20,000 persons in Azerbaijan alone” (Matin-Asgari, 2024: 313). Although it was mostly through the imposed and violent formation of nation state under Reza Shah (1925-1941) and Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979) Pahlavi that the independent and (physically) inaccessible regions like Baluchestan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan, Turkmen Sahra, and Azerbaijan were forcefully pulled into the *spatiotemporal matrices* of the national state, the colonial production of space²⁹ has been deepened and intensified by the Islamic Republic. All these regions are inhabited mostly by non-Persian populations. The production of Iran as a national state, thus, seems to be intertwined with the imposition – often violent – of the Persian/Farsi as a national language.

More than ever, today’s political and theoretical fight in and over ‘Iran’ is related to the internal colonization, and more specifically, the national state form and its colonial spatiotemporal matrix. This brings the language question and the colonization of non-Persian spaces to the fore. In this conjuncture, addressing economic exploitation as disconnected from the national question cannot grasp what is at stake. Emphasizing the internal colonization forces us to pay explicit attention to the *spacetime* of emancipatory and transformative political struggles and to learn from the failures of the 1979 Revolution and its disastrous consequences for women, non-Persian peoples, the working class, the precariat, the homeless, tenants, religious and sexual minorities, and all the other subaltern classes.

I accordingly suggest that the everyday spacetimes of repression and domination must be at the center of any alternative political theory and strategy. As methodological concepts, spacetime and geohistory draw our attention to the repression of non-Persian languages, cultures, and nations through the nationally colonial production of Iranian nation state. I put spacetime at the heart of

²⁹ The term *production* is essential here because it “presupposes in *man*, Nature, action and knowledge” (Lefebvre, 2009: 143).

understanding Iran as a nation state and theorizing an emancipatory political strategy. This entails going beyond nationalist conception of rights, and its foundation: the conception of space as an individually owned, parcelized, and territorially bounded form. Thus, collective right to self-determination and multiscalar autonomy should be prioritized³⁰.

2. Research Problem: Taken-for-Grantedness of ‘Iran’

I explore the Farsist production of ‘Iran’ through Iranian nationalism as the ideological core of the Iranian nation state. Nationalist narratives ahistorically represent Iran as an *a priori* existent, fully formed, and unified (Persian) *nation*, territory, and history, or in short, a pre-existing nation state. The hegemony-related questions of national state, national language (Farsi), and the historical production and reproduction of national state spacetime are thus mostly overlooked. The central argument of my thesis is that ‘Iran’ has not existed *prior* and/or *exterior* to the historical formation of ‘Iranian nation state’ with a unified *national* history, language, *and* territory. Iran as a national state spacetime has been made possible through a set of very recent political, scientific (including linguistic), infrastructural, and technological processes in the imperialist context of late development. More precisely, ‘Iran’ has been produced through three fundamental mechanisms: *historiographic*, *Farsist*, and *cartographic* practices of the state. I argue that Farsization of spacetime, as the key mechanism of internal colonialism, has been essential in the production of Iran.

Iranian historiography and cartography are predominantly nationalist, or more precisely, Farsist and Iran-centric. It has been in and through the nationalist historiographic and cartographic practices of the state that Persian/Farsi has been represented and produced as the ‘natural’ language

³⁰ Categorizing all forms of the collective right to self-determination as a secessionist tendency that jeopardize ‘territorial integrity’ of Iran, the right-wing classes prevent collective rights from being recognized. And this is despite the fact that they are passionate advocates of *privatization* and *disintegration* of an abstract ‘economic’ space.

of an *already unified* Iranian nation, and non-Persian peoples are depicted part of the historically ‘uninterrupted’ and geographically bounded Iranian nation-state. The existence of Iran as a nation-state is actually produced and naturalized through these Farsist historiographic and cartographic practices; an assumption that remains largely unchallenged even in critical analyses of Iranian nationalism. By implicitly presupposing the existence of Iran as a geographically fixed space and a historically linear time³¹, the dominant perspective in Iranian historiographies (Marxist³² or otherwise) prevent us from understanding ‘Iran’ as a contingent product of multilayered socio-historical forces and multi-scalar geographies of hegemonic struggles.

I argue that this dominant presupposition stems from an ahistorical and internalist conception of space³³, a problem that is also widespread in theories of nationalism at large. These theories have mainly overlooked the role of territory and space in the formation of the nation-state and its integral ideology, nationalism (Lefebvre, 1991; Yiftachel, 2002). And this is despite the fact that the practice of delimiting and regulating a stable, territorial boundary which fixes territory to sovereignty, is the *differentia specifica* of the modern world system of states (Goswami, 2002: 790). All social forms are spatiotemporal. This applies to the national state a fortiori since national state and space are historically intertwined. The state and territory are mutually constitutive (Lefebvre, 2009: 228). The state is ‘recomposed through the production of territory’, which gains

³¹ Being neglectful of the inherent spacetime of social change processes, treating space (including more-than-human nature) as something pre-given, and disregarding the interrelatedness of society and nature have also contributed to a deep environmental degradation.

³² The existing literature on Iran’s pre-capitalist formation according to Vali (1993) has been defined by two major Marxist strands of ‘periodizations of Iranian history’. Both presuppose a unilinear and teleological schema of *history*. These dominant historiographies are based on essentialist assumptions which insist on the absence of private property, and social classes in Iran. Vali claims that the Soviet and Asiatic historiographies of Iran share the same ‘empiricist’ method of analysis so that “the consistency of the historical argument is thus judged by the supposed correspondence between the concept and the real” (Vali, 1993: 4). It is argued that Soviet and Asiatic historiographies of Iran both interpret Iranian history in terms of the functioning and development of centralized states (Ibid: 18).

³³ Geography in Iran is still hugely limited to a positivist understanding of physical/natural geography in its traditional sense. Therefore, human geography and political geography are in a very marginal and embryonic situation.

‘its material and ideological concreteness through hegemony’ (Ballvé, 2020: 606). Lefebvre and Gramsci “help to provide a nuanced analysis of the mutual production of state and territory” (Ibid).

I argue that overlooking the inherently *spatiotemporal* (multi-scalar and multi-rhythmic) character of social change has led to non-dialectical conceptions of the national state, language (Farsi), and Iran. Nationalist narratives represent Iran as a pre-existing, fully formed, and unified (Persian) nation, enclosed in a pre-existing national territory and history. The dominant conception of Iran has been shaped based on an atomistic and empiricist understanding of spacetime that treats space *and* time as pregiven, passive, and neutral entities (dualistically) *external*³⁴ to each other, *and* to language and state formation. Space and time are thus respectively reduced to a territorially bounded space (national territory) and a linear, enclosed time (national history). ‘Iran’ is then represented as external to Farsi and to the spatiotemporal matrices of capitalist national state. Even in critical analyses of Iranian nationalism, ‘Iran’ is treated as a pregiven entity *external* to the relations of production and therefore to spacetime, language (Farsi), and state formation. However, these relations are neither *spatially* exterior nor *temporally* sequential (Poulantzas, 1978; Harootunian, 2015). Spacetime as a social relation ‘inherent to property relationships’ (Lefebvre, 1991) cannot be separated either from the state or the social division of labour which shapes it.

The problem, I assume, is linked to the class structure of the world. The dualism/division of intellectual and manual labour is vital for the bourgeois class rule (Sohn-Rethel, 1978). As a strategy to retain private ownership of space (Lefebvre, 1991) this division perpetuates the dualist space of the national state. Nationalism, as a fetishized incarnation of the ruling class’s intellectual labour, seems to be the inscription of the dualist division of labour into spacetime. As a hegemonic strategy to retain private ownership of space (including knowledge-language), this class division

³⁴ This spatial exteriority takes the form of temporal sequence when it comes to time.

perpetuates the spacetime of the national state. Spatiotemporal matrices of the national state are the materialization (not merely representations) of this dualist division of labour (Poulantzas, 1978). Drawing on dialectical theories (as organic responses to the structural dualisms of national state) that do not separate spacetime, language, and the national state, I consider ‘production’ in its three-dimensional totality³⁵, not merely in terms of a capital-labour dualism.

Moreover, class relations and colonialism are interlinked. Thus, we need a theoretical framework that accommodates both dimensions. Fanon’s dialectics of counter-colonialism is an extension of Marxist dialectics. As he says, “a Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue” (Fanon, 2004: 5). His dialectics is inseparable from his understanding of colonialism and everyday racism and their foundational dualism. Fanon believes that the theoretical question of colonialism and its Manichaeic logic must be resolved through *revolutionary action* (119). Colonialism is a “systematized *negation* of the other” (182). His dialectics is, therefore, based on a conception of *totality*. Kipfer explains that contrary to false colonial humanism, the genuine humanism of the counter-colonialism ‘concerns *the whole* of humanity’ which includes both colonized and colonizer (Kipfer, 2011: 96). The colonial world is *absolute exclusivity* and Fanon’s dialectics is an attempt to transcend its Manicheanism. Decolonization for him is simultaneously a spatial process as well. Transformation of colonialism is “a strategy of appropriating *space* and breaking with linear-repetitive *time*” (Ibid: 97). Colonization is treated as spatial organization (Kipfer, 2007: 703). The logic of colonization is based on a racial dualism of black and white, but this logic is in fact “a *spatial* relation of separation” (Kipfer, 2011: 97). As a result of colonial logic of Manicheanism, there is a sharp separation between rural and urban movements, even after the so-called decolonization (Fanon,

³⁵ Here, I refer to the trinity formula of land-labour-capital.

2004: 70-71). Fanon refers to urban bias in which peasants are spatially organized in a *top-down inorganic* fashion (Kipfer, 2011: 100) which represents colonial logic of exclusivity. He sees a dialectical relation between rurality and urbanity (Fanon, 2004: 80-82) and does not exclude one to the detriment of the other³⁶.

I see the formation of national territory as a qualitative change in the relations of production. The formation of national territory was so powerful that, as Lefebvre says, it escaped the empire's control. It is thus essential to analyze the reproduction of the relations of production that should be understood as a totality: the land-labour-capital relation (Lefebvre, 1976: 8). The reproduction of the relations of production coincides "neither with Marx's reproduction of the means of production, nor with his enlarged reproduction" (Ibid: 9). It is only at the end of the nineteenth century that the reproduction of social relations appeared. Our concentration should then be on the reproduction of relations of production, which is deeply colonial and land-driven, or more precisely, spatial. The binary opposition (labour versus capital, working class versus bourgeoisie) is thus abandoned (Lefebvre, cited in Hart, 2018: 15).

As I will demonstrate, space and time, commonly viewed as passive and neutral elements, have been inadequately addressed in analyses of the Iranian state, nationalism, and history. They are often considered as neutral elements external to the reproduction of social relations of production (including language and knowledge)³⁷. More importantly, they are treated as absolute

³⁶ Drawing on these theoretical insights, I have extensively discussed the dualisms of Farsi, and their role in Farsization of space and time in Chapter Three.

³⁷ Based on a dialectical conception of spacetime, the past is materially present: "the past, then, helps make the present. But it is a two-way process ... so too does the present make the past" (Massey, 1995: 187). Massey says, in trying to understand the identity of places we should not separate space from time, or geography from history (Ibid). The invention of a glorious past, is about the invention of the coherence of a place, a national territory. National state space is merely one of the many possible ways of organizing social space. This entails that the national space should not be equated with social space. Taking national space as social space is a common trend in Iranian social analyses, which among others, can be found in Mohamadreza Nikfar and his Bourdieusian understanding of social space.

See: <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/688626/>

entities in an *exterior* relation with each other, *and* with the hegemonic struggles. Space has been treated as a pre-given, static framework that social changes happened *on*, *over*, or *within* it. Time has also been reduced to a mono-rhythmic linearity without differentiation. Space is thus de-historicized and represented as an unchangeable fixity, and time is reduced to homogenized linearity. The result is an ahistorical view which removes the uneven, contradictory, multi-scalar and multi-rhythmic production of spacetime in general, and Iran in particular. As Boroujerdi once argued, Iranian intellectuals in general, and scholars of Iranian studies in particular, “need to realize that aversion to new theoretical approaches, fetishization of the past, pompous bravado about ancestors, conspiratorial and chiliastic views of history, and “cult of patriotism” are futile strategies” (Boroujerdi, 1998: 55). This fetishized view has contributed to the nationalist (simultaneously historiographic³⁸, Farsist, and cartographic) production of Iran over the past century. Taking spacetime in general, and Iran in particular, for granted, the existing literature does not deal with the implications of considering Iran as a very recent product.

My dissertation aims to address these deficiencies by concentrating on the role of the actual (historiographic, linguistic, and cartographic) practices of the state in producing a Farsist nationalist ideology and, accordingly, Iran as a national state spacetime. I demonstrate the time-dependency, language-dependency, and space-dependency³⁹ of ‘Iran’ by examining the *historiographic*, *linguistic*, and *cartographic* practices of the state as fundamental mechanisms in the production of Iran as a Farsist dualist spacetime. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s insights on the

³⁸ Historiography in the modern sense of the term was little known in Iran prior to the Second World War (Vali, 1993: 6).

³⁹ According to Bhaskar social structures “are *activity-dependent*, *concept-dependent*, *spacetime-dependent*, and social relation-dependent” (in Hartwig, 2007: 426). The relationships in discussion are multidirectional. For example, the dependency relationship extends to both spacetime and language. This necessitates highlighting the inherent conceptuality of spacetime, as well as the spatiotemporality of concepts. Additionally, both language/concept and spacetime are state-dependent. Therefore, the social realm is intricately tied to our concepts and perceptions of the world, as well as being linked to the state. The state plays a pivotal role in shaping social forms and our conception of them. This dialectical interplay is captured by my Lefebvrian notion of the state’s production of national spacetime.

production of space and time (1991, 2004), I ask, how has Iran been produced as a *national state spacetime* in the context of the colonial expansion of the capitalist state?

In the past four decades, a significant body of historiographic works on Iran (with different focal points⁴⁰) has emerged without a systematic exploration of the constitutive *spatio-temporalities* of their subject matters. Although the existing literature on Iranian nationalism has often reproduced Iran as a self-evident spatial-historical entity, there is also a growing body of critical scholarship that has historicized the conception of Iran and challenged its taken-for-grantedness. Scholars such as Vaziri (1993), Boroujerdi (1998), Asgharzadeh (2007), Marashi (2008, 2014, 2020), Cole (1996), Kashani-Sabet (1997, 1999, 2011, 2013), Fragner (1993, 1999, 2019), Matin-Asgari (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2014, 2024), Elling (2013), Zia-Ebrahimi (2016), and Mohammadpour and Soleimani (2020, 2022), among others, have critically examined Persian-centered nationalism. These interventions provide important insights into the racial and linguistic exclusions embedded in the formation of modern Iran. While critical studies on land reform (Ajami 1973, Hooglund 1982, Najmabadi 1987, Seyf 1992), do exist, the *totality* of ‘the production of space’ has yet to receive a systematic analytical attention.

My work builds on these critical contributions but also diverges by offering a systematic spatiotemporal framework rooted in radical geography for understanding the production of Iran. While many of these scholars expose the ideological underpinnings of nationalist discourse or

⁴⁰ For example: social history (Schayegh 2009, Cronin 2010, Ansari 2014, Amanat 2017), the mode of production (Katouzian 1983, 1997, Floor 1984, Araghi 1987, Foran 1988, Vali 1993, Seyf 1998, 2004), the Constitutional Revolution (Abrahamian 1969, Foran 1991, Afary 1996, Amanat 1989, Bayat 1991, Cronin 1996, Keddie and Richard 2006, Chehabi and Martin 2010, Farzaneh 2015, Ansari 2016.), the Islamic revolution (Abrahamian 1980, Arjomand 1986, Ashraf 1988, Algar 2001), nationalism (Katouzian 1979, Ashraf 1993, Boroujerdi 1998, Marashi 2008, Ansari 2012, Sharifi 2013, Elling 2013, Scot Aghaie and Marashi 2014, Vejdani 2015, Litvak 2017), intellectuals (Floor 1980, Boroujerdi 1996, Gheissari 1998, Behrooz 1999, Cronin 2004, Floor 2009, Mirsepassi 2010, Matin-Asgari 2018, Vahabzadeh 2019), state formation (Cronin 2007, Katouzian 1981, Bashiriyeh 1984, Amanat 1997, Atabaki and Zürcher 2004, Atabaki 2007), and Islamism (Arjomand 1984, Momen 1985, Nasr 1990, 2000, 2001, Moaddel & Talattof 2000, Rajāyī 2007, Bayat 2007, Boroujerdi 2013).

critique its homogenizing effects, few engage with the material production of national space and time as interdependent processes. This dissertation therefore aims to extend the critical literature by theorizing *Iran* as a historically contingent spacetime produced through the Farsization of space and time. Spacetime as a methodological concept has not previously been utilized in analyses of Iran. Given the scarcity of spatially grounded historiographies of Iran, Ehsani's pioneering study marks a significant intervention. Centered on the Iranian oil industry, his work offers a social history of labor that foregrounds spatial dynamics (Ehsani, 2014)⁴¹. Apart from exceptions like Ehsani, the spacetime of Iranian state formation has been mostly taken for granted, leading to a naturalization and de-historicization of the *national* state space. Existing literature often treats space as a static, non-historical thing, thereby naturalizing the existence of Iran since the beginning of human civilizations⁴². To address the issue, I develop an explicitly *spatiotemporal* theoretical framework to systematically study the constitutive spacetime of Iranian nation state.

A consequence of ignoring space is that it makes our theories and practices abstract and disconnected from the material (spatiotemporal) foundations of our lives. Thus, we need both a 'spatial history' (reading and writing history through spatial terms and taking space as a critical tool of analysis, not simply an object of analysis, but a constituent part of the analysis itself) (Elden, 2001b) and a 'history of spaces' (remaining faithful to the concrete spaces themselves and making spaces their objects of study) (Elden, 2001a: 118-19). A "history of the present must also be spatially aware and maps the present (Ibid: 115). I accordingly develop a spatial history of Iran.

As Boroujerdi shows, nationalist Iranian intellectual and political elites have fallen victim to an ahistorical definition of authentic "Iranian identity." (Boroujerdi, 1998) Drawing on critical

⁴¹ Ehsani's theoretical approach blends Marxist thought – particularly the work of David Harvey – with poststructuralist urban/spatial perspectives. For a detailed review of Ehsani's work, see Torkameh (2023).

⁴² Such an aspatial view is inherently related to a linear, teleological conception of time, of which developmentalist nationalism is a social manifestation.

studies of Iranian nationalism, my project challenges the dominant ahistorical narrative of Iran and endeavors to narrate Iran differently, by developing a spatiotemporal, dialectical conception of Iran. To do so, I indicate the deficiencies of existing narratives and highlight the *absences* in the Farsist historiography and cartography of Iran. By foregrounding discontinuities, dispersals, contradictions, and differences – elements that the capitalist national state seeks to suppress and annihilate – this alternative Iran can illustrate the possibility of dismantling the nation state and showing alternative forms of production of space.

3. Geohistorical Scope of the Research

In Chapter One, I address some of the previously mentioned theoretical shortcomings and problematics in the existing literature. After reviewing the literature and discussing the main theoretical problematics of the research, I develop an appropriate theoretical framework to analyze the theoretical problematics. Drawing on Lefebvre's notion of the production of space, Gramsci's 'spatial historicism', and Poulantzas's spatiotemporal theory of the state I will try to geohistoricize the social forms including national state spacetime. What makes the theories of these Marxist thinkers central to my work is their articulation of the complex entanglement of the nation state, spacetime, and language. This theoretical framework enables me to examine the production of Iran by focusing on the major *spatio-temporal* practices of the Iranian state.

I accordingly understand the state as a material condensation of a class relation of forces struggling for hegemony. Drawing on Poulantzas who defines social classes in terms of their expanded/extended reproduction rather than the narrow economic perspective of their place in production, I see Iranian state formation in the context of 'expanded reproduction' of capitalism (Poulantzas, 1980: 108). The extended reproduction encompasses economic, political, and ideological relations; and involves the state and non-capitalist relations of production as well as

the circuit of capital. Viewing from a such a standpoint of totality allows for the recognition of the interconnection between the class struggle, the state, and relations of production. “The state ‘produces’ materially, symbolically, and institutionally the political and imaginative space for the class struggle while at the same time it is constituted by class struggle” (Hadjimichalis, 2016: 138). Talking about the space and time of the relations of production, Poulantzas argues that these relations do not constitute an economic structure *outside* and *before* social classes. The relations of production therefore are not external to class struggle: “social classes ... are not posed ‘in themselves’ in the relations of production only to enter into struggle (become classes ‘for themselves’) afterwards and elsewhere. To situate the State with reference to the relations of production is to chart the original contours of its presence in the class struggle” (Poulantzas, 1980: 27). Poulantzas’s theory of the *extended* reproduction of capitalism resonates with Lefebvre’s emphasis on the *totality* of the reproduction of the relations of production as well as Gramsci’s notion of *integral* state. Thus, the terms ‘extended’, ‘totality’, and ‘integral’ all allude to a similar concept.

I aim to examine the production of Iran as a nation state from a geohistorical perspective. I conceive the production of Iran as a multiscalar and multirhythmic process. Geographical scales are not static fixed phenomena but are socially produced. Dominant views disregard the most characteristic *practice* of the state that is the production of spacetime (which includes the production of scales and periods). Prior to the violent production of Iran as a nation state, which can be traced back to the late Qajar period and foundation of Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, Qajar domains was made up of a range of loosely connected states (*Mamalek*) with a great degree of political-economic independence from the capital, Tehran. This was evident in the plural form of the official name of the Qajar Empire: The Guarded Domains of Iran (*Mamâlek-e Mahruse-ye*

Irân). The central power was not able to exercise its authority over the vast dispersed and island-like geographies of *Mamâlek-e Mahruseh*. Creating a unified political entity required proper technological, physical, and infrastructural conditions which were absent at that period (see Khazeni, 2007: 1407; Kashani-Sabet, 2013: 192, 195). *Iran* as a territorially bounded space was absent in the pre-Pahlavi era.

To accomplish the objectives of this research, my attention is centered on a historical timeframe extending from the late Qajar period (approximately 1870) to the emergence of the Islamic Republic in 1979. I argue the production of Iran as a national state began in the late Qajar era and then continued and consolidated during the Pahlavi era (1925-1979) and after the Islamic Revolution. This consolidation is never complete and is inherently fraught with contradictions, making it unstable. I argue that the production of Iran as a unified nation has been *primarily* realized through the historiographic practices devoted to producing a national history. This process began in the late Qajar era, gained momentum during the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11), become scientifically established under the Pahlavis, and continues to this day. The production of Iran as a national territory, however, is mostly associated with the Pahlavi period (1925-1979), the state infrastructural projects – including the construction of roads and railways – that led to connect the scattered geographies of the guarded domains of Iran (*mamalek-e mahruseh*).

Prior to the formation of the national territory, the dispersed geographies of guarded domains physically precluded the formation of a unified national market. *Mamalek-e mahruseh* at the time were typically defined by a range of regional *frontier* markets – that were largely independent from the center and were mostly connected to centers outside the frontiers of the guarded domains. Only during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, and especially during the land reform (White Revolution) period (1963-79), was the condition of possibility of creating a national market made

feasible. During this period, significant efforts were made by state institutions, including the Plan and Budget Organization (formed in 1948), The National Cartography Center of Iran (NCCC, formed in 1953), The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI, formed in 1965), as well as universities and research institutes, to pull increasingly more and more spaces into the spatiotemporal matrix of the national state. This stage can be characterized by the beginning of urbanization of Iran; a process that aimed to deracinate as many peoples (nomadic or otherwise) as possible from their environment, shape the real estate market, and ultimately enable systematic extraction of nature.

By focusing on a range of historical texts and maps, I aim to examine the most crucial spatiotemporalities of the production of Iran in the context of imperialism. As is evident in historical texts and maps, the physical aspect of the production of Iran, has been made possible by the state infrastructural interventions to produce its own spacetime. The production of Iran over the past 150 years has emerged in the form of a systematic process of internal colonization, which was associated with the statist imposition of Farsi on non-Persian inhabitants of the island-like geographies of *mamalek-e mahruseh* to forge a unified Persian nation. The nation state has been realized by the state inscribing itself in history and geography to produce its own national spacetime. This process of inscription in spacetime has been conducted in and through Farsi, or more precisely, through the Farsization of spacetime.

4. Significance and Implications:

Recent political developments in Iran, which began with the murder of Jina (Mahsa) Amini in September 2022, have had a substantial impact on my research. Although I initially focused on the national state and the colonial production of space, the emergence of the *Woman Life Freedom* movement has amplified the importance of the intertwined relationship of the state and Farsi in my work. The rise of the pro-fascist tendencies among royalists (supporters of the Pahlavi dynasty)

has brought to light numerous factors. Besides the critical matter of the hijab, several key debates have emerged: the situation of colonized (non-Persian) peoples/nations in Iran, the adverse impact of the state's Farsist practices over the past century, and the possibility of shifting away from the current form of the central state.

Mohsen Milani, the Executive Director of the Center for Strategic & Diplomatic Studies and Professor of Politics at the University of South Florida, tweeted⁴³ that “those who dream of weakening the central state in Iran are thinking of dividing Iran.” This is only one example of growing nationalism, nation-state-centrism, and obsession with territorial integrity in Iranian/Farsist politics. This trend should be seen in connection with the rise of the far-right (neo-Sasanian) ideology of *Iranshahr* which functions as a nodal point of reference for various forces from the Islamic Republic to its Pahlavists and even the so-called *Chap-e Mehvar-e Moghavemat* (The Axis of Resistance left). All agree on the necessity of preserving the current form of the nation state and its territorial integrity, whatever the cost may be. More importantly, the ideology of *Iranshahr* (not always under this title though) has penetrated the public sphere as a worldview for justifying the current form of the national state. All these, I argue, should be seen in the historical contexts of the hegemonic struggles aiming at producing Iran as a nation state.

The violent reactions of Farsist Iranians⁴⁴ to ordinary protesters, subaltern classes, and progressive intellectuals also indicate the need to address the issue and to nurture a systematic critique of the theoretical core of the ideology of *Iranshahr* as a pro-fascist approach. My research

⁴³ https://twitter.com/milanimohsen/status/1513288571448406018?s=20&t=yLf7Bnh-Q_94p3cBNWzCEw

⁴⁴ For example, supporters of the Pahlavi dynasty on Twitter refer to anyone who speaks about regional autonomy/independence or federalism as separatists [*tajzieh talab*]. Pahlavi supporters launch sickening attacks on non-Persian activists, subjecting them to the worst forms of obscenities and sexual insults. Such insulting behaviors are not limited to the virtual space. One of the most common examples of such insults is related to the issue of the national flag. Pahlavi supporters attack and harass any individual or group that carries a flag other than the ‘official’ flag of pre-revolutionary Iran. Pahlavi supporters, similar to the advocates of the Islamic Republic, suppress different approaches to Iran, national state, and social change by relying on a narrow Iran-centric view of reality.

aims to analyze Iranian state formation through a geohistorical study and by developing an explicitly spatiotemporal theoretical framework. Such an analysis has significant implications for our understanding of the revolution and political strategy. For instance, it shows that replacing the Islamic Republic with a new pro-Pahlavi regime is another step towards consolidating and reproducing the current form of the nation state and, consequently, continuing internal colonization. The proposed theoretical framework which sees the production of spacetime as the most crucial dimension of the nation state also offers a new perspective on historical events. It particularly sheds light on the Islamic Revolution and the Constitutional Revolution, illustrating how these events significantly contributed to the production of Iran as a national state spacetime, and thus, they may be regarded as anti-revolutionary.

Statism and the associated nationalism have been a fundamental barrier to revolution⁴⁵. The very definition of revolution has not escaped this dominant statism. As a result, the majority of revolutionary theories and practices have ended in the reproduction of the national state form, its colonial nature, and, subsequently, of the relations of production. The state form itself thus remains intact. The influence of omnipresent statism has been so profound that it has absorbed and internalized even the theories of the revolution and has made them into theories of the reproduction of the relations of production. In this situation, it is necessary to rethink the ideas of revolution. As Lefebvre argues, “today such limited definitions of revolution no longer suffice. The transformation of society presupposes a collective ownership and management of space” (Ibid). It indicates why pressure from below must “confront the state in its role as organizer of space, as the power that controls urbanization ... the construction of buildings and spatial planning in general”

⁴⁵As Lefebvre says, revolution was long defined either in terms of a political change at the level of the state or else in terms of the state ownership of the means of production. Under either of these definitions the theory and the practice have degenerated into an ideology of growth (Lefebvre, 1991: 422).

(Ibid: 383). My dissertation in this context contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of spacetime in the production of nation state in general, and ‘Iran’ in particular.

5. Research Questions:

I ask how Iran has been produced as a national state spacetime. My initial assumption is that Iran has been produced through three intertwined processes: historiographic, linguistic (Farsist), and cartographic practices of the state. The main question can thus be divided into three sub-questions: How has Iran been produced through the historiographic practices of the state? What has been the role of Farsi in the production of Iran? How has Iran been produced through the cartographic practices of the state? These questions have formed three substantive chapters of my dissertation. More specifically, I ask how Iran has been produced as a national state spacetime in the context of the colonial expansion of spatiotemporal matrices of the capitalist state and nationalism.

My dissertation can be considered as an initial step in writing a history of Iran without taking its existence for granted in advance. How should we write this history as a geohistorian in the 21st century? An alternative/radical history of this kind will be multiscalar and multirhythmic. It should avoid taking any geographical scale or temporal regime for granted as a neutral and static background in exterior relation to other social phenomena. Instead, it should geohistoricize them. In this way we can hope that we develop an emancipatory political strategy of change which is not already fixated on a particular spacetime. Such a task will be possible only by problematizing the ubiquitous and dominant taken-for-grantedness of Iran and spacetime.

The main argument of this dissertation is that Iran, as a national state space, has been historically and cartographically produced through the colonial Farsization of spacetime. Iran has been written *and* mapped *in, through, and as* Farsi. Farsism therefore has been a fundamental link between nationalist ideology and national state-formation. Farsi has been inscribed in spacetime.

I aim to address the research questions by concentrating on the role of the actual (historiographic, linguistic, and cartographic) practices of the state in shaping a Farsist nationalist ideology and, consequently, the production of Iran as a national state space. The historiographic, Farsist, and cartographic practices of the state have crucially contributed to the taken-for-grantedness of Iran as a nation-state. So, my research analyzes what the Iranian state actually does and how it has formed materially in practice. To do so, I focus on the state's time, state's language, and state's space.

6. Methodology:

Guided by my dialectical theoretical framework, which emphasizes the multi-scalar, multi-temporal, and therefore, contradictory processes inherent in Iranian state formation, this study critically examines both primary and secondary sources to uncover tensions, contradictions, and shifts in Iranian nationalism. The dialectical method allows me to explore how these sources reflect competing interests, hegemonic struggles, and ideological contradictions in the production of Iran. Aligned with my dialectical theoretical framework, this qualitative study employs a multidisciplinary methodological approach, combining historical and archival analysis (Schwartz & Cook, 2002), conceptual history (Koselleck, 2002; Elden, 2013), and critical cartography (Harley, 1989; Crampton, J.W., & Krygier, J. 2006) .

Historical analysis involves the study of past events, contexts, and texts to understand the development and impact of ideologies like nationalism. I utilize this method to examine historical records, documents, writings, and maps to trace how *Iranian* nationalism, nation, and territory have been formulated and propagated. I subject the claims of historians and their use of primary sources to critical scrutiny by examining their methods and interpretations. I critically assess how

the historical texts and maps reflect not only the dominant ideology of Iranian nationalism (Farsism) but also its contradictions and the tensions between social forces in shaping it.

Archival analysis involves examining historical documents like maps to understand the past, historical context, and authenticity of these documents. I analyze original documents from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to gain firsthand insights into the period's discourse. More specifically, the socio-political environment of the late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods – the extent of the infrastructural development, technological advancement, educational system, etc. – are investigated to gain an understanding of the context in which historical texts and maps were created. According to my dialectical approach, I examine how these documents reveal not just the dominant state's dualist view of territory, but also the contradictions inherent in these representations which are rooted in the nomadic spatiotemporal regimes. Maps from the early Pahlavi period represent a unified national territory, yet they often mask longstanding divisions, conflicts, and contested frontiers that were actively being produced through discursive and bodily struggles. By critically analyzing these tensions, I show how the historiographic, Farsist, and cartographic practices of the state to represent territorial unity and continuity often clashed with the multiple realities of non-Persian peoples, regional autonomy, and external pressures from neighboring powers. The contradictions between a unified national territory and contested borders shows how historiographic and cartographic representations – in accordance with the homogenizing and reductionist tendency of the state – represent an imagined Iranian territory, while there were huge contradictions on the ground. This archival exploration reveals that the state's depiction of Iranian territory was fraught with tensions and contestation, rather than being a static or universally accepted representation.

Conceptual history offers a unique lens for examining the usage and transformation of key concepts within analyses of Iranian history, nation state, and nationalism. It allows me to explore how the concepts of the nation, state, territory, border, and nationalism have transformed in Farsist historical narratives. This method involves examining different periods (pre-modern, late Qajar, and Pahlavi) to understand the shifts in the conceptualization of Iran. By studying these changes, I can see how conceptions of Iran shifted in the context of hegemonic struggles. I explore how the key concepts of nation, territory, border, and Iran reflect contradictions between imperial understandings of territory and emerging nationalistic ideologies in the late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods. The educational texts, political treatises, and yearbooks are central to understanding how the key concepts evolved during this time. These texts, produced by the state intellectuals, reflect the ideological shifts in the production of Iran. In this way, I can trace how these concepts were adapted and contested during the state formation. The dialectical lens allows me to trace how contrasting ideologies about what constitutes the Iranian nation state both converge and conflict. For instance, the concept of the nation does not evolve in a linear manner; rather, it emerges as a site of tension between religious and secular discourses manifesting the hegemonic struggles between religious and secular classes. There is also a contrast between imperial and national conceptions of territory. The former is porous, heterogeneous, and multi-centered, fluid boundaries and diverse centers of power. The latter however is bounded, homogenized, and mono-centered emphasizing fixed borders and a unified national identity.

Critical cartography offers a powerful analytical tool for interpreting historical maps. In alignment with the notion of the production of space, critical cartography goes beyond seeing maps as mere representations of geographic information; it considers them as political artifacts that play a crucial role in producing national space. Recognizing that maps are not neutral but embedded

within the ideologies and power structures, this method is helpful in analyzing the symbols, scales, and other features used in maps and how they represent or omit certain aspects of reality. Through critical cartography I examine who created the map and for whom. I explore ancient maps to understand how early mapping practices conceptualized space. This helps us understand how empires visualized their realms and how these visualizations influenced understandings of Iran. By tracing changes in territorial representations, I can examine the shifts in the portrayal of territorial frontiers and their transformation to borders. I also analyze how new cartographic technologies influenced the depiction and production of Iran since late 19th century.

Consistent with my dialectical theoretical framework, I explore the contradictions in territorial representations, such as how maps reflect both the aspirations of the central state and the resistance of peripheralized non-Persian regions, revealing the competing ideologies in the production of national space. By focusing on maps from the late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods, I explore how cartographic representations – created by state intellectuals – were used to legitimize territorial claims of the state against the regional non-Persian claims to their indigenous lands. So, historical maps serve not only as political tools, projecting state power and shaping public perceptions of national space, but also reveals the contradictions in the cartographic practices of the state.

The selection of archival materials from the late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods is central to this study because they capture a pivotal moment in the production of Iran. By focusing on these historical sources, I can trace both the intertwined ideological and spatial dimensions of Iranian nationalism and state formation. This study is anchored in a rigorous critique of secondary literature on Iranian state formation and nationalism. This critique is further enriched through an in-depth analysis of primary materials. These primary sources encompass a diverse collection

including historical maps, historical texts (political treatises, and yearbooks), geographical works (encyclopedias and atlases), and textbooks (of late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods). All these sources implicitly or explicitly attempted to represent ‘national’ state space in general or its constitutive elements (nation and national history, national language, and national territory) in particular. The primary sources of the late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods are especially valuable, as they capture the state practices to forge a unified national identity through the cartographic representations and the promotion of nationalist ideology in schools and public discourse.

While previous research on Iranian state and nationalism has focused primarily on textual sources, the role of cartography in shaping national consciousness remains largely underexplored. By analyzing historical maps alongside political and educational texts, this study fills a critical gap in the literature, providing an analysis of how spatial representations influenced both state-building and the construction of Iranian identity. The selected historical maps are uniquely positioned to reveal how Iran has been cartographically produced over a century-long history. They highlight the contradictory and contested character of national territory. Unlike purely textual records, these maps provide an explicit spatial dimension to the discourse of nationalism. While the texts reveal the ideological and educational mechanisms through which Iranian national identity was constructed, the maps provide a visual articulation of historical and territorial claims. Together, these sources allow for a multi-dimensional analysis of how Iran’s national space was imagined, produced, and contested.

7. Structure of the Dissertation:

Iran as a territorial space has not existed *prior* and *exterior* to the formation of Iranian nation state with a unified national history. The production of Iran will be examined in three substantive chapters centered on historiographic, Farsist, and cartographic practices of the state. I accordingly

study time-dependency, language-dependency, and space-dependency of Iran in three interconnected chapters: Iran's time, Iran's language, and Iran's space. My dissertation proposes a program for writing-mapping an alternative geohistory of Iran.

Chapter One integrates my literature review and theoretical framework and is organized around the primary conceptual categories that underpin this research. I have divided chapter one into three sections of state time, state language, and state space. The structure of this chapter emanates from the tripartite organization of the dissertation's main chapters and corresponds to the core themes addressed in them. Within each section, I begin by conducting a review of the most pertinent existing literature, critically evaluating key insights, and identifying notable gaps.

This study engages with a wide range of secondary literature to review existing critical scholarship on 'Iranian' nationalism and state formation. Key works include those by Vaziri (1993), Boroujerdi (1998), Fragner (2019), Marashi (2008), Matin-Asgari (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2014, 2024), Elling (2013), and Zia-Ebrahimi (2016). More specifically, I examine critical accounts that underscore the colonial dimensions of Iranian nationalism, such as Asgharzadeh (2007), Marashi (2014), and Mohammadpour and Soleimani (2020, 2022). In addition, I draw on the contributions of scholars like Kashani-Sabet (1997, 1999, 2011, 2013), Khazeni (2007), Cronin's (2007), Ehsani (2014), and Grigor (2009, 2021, 2025) whose work addresses the spatial dimensions of Iranian nationalism and/or state-formation.

I argue that the neglect of the spatiotemporal materiality of the national state has seemingly led to the reproduction of nationalist conceptions of Iran, even within critical literature. I attribute this methodological oversight to broader problematics in Marxist literature, demonstrating how dominant Marxist *readings* of capitalism and Marx play a crucial role in reinforcement of a dualistic perspective and neglect of internal colonization. I show that the disregard for the material

elements of the nation state and its spatio-temporal matrices has also been influential in the emergence of postcolonial theories. I then introduce dialectical approach(es) to nationalism, historiography, language, and space to further clarify my argument. To provide a geohistorical analysis of Iranian state formation my research aims to develop an explicitly spatiotemporal theory of the nation state. To achieve this, I will design a conceptual framework grounded in the dialectical theories of the state space. The proposed theoretical framework offers a critical understanding of the spatiotemporal dimensions of the production of Iran as a Farsist state spacetime.

In Chapter Two, I ask how has Iran been produced through the historiographic practices of the state? What has been the role of the national state's intellectuals in the process? This chapter examine the rise of racialized (Aryan) conception of people and the transhistorical conception of statehood. The chapter begins with a review of the most recent historiographic scholarships that cover Qajar periods. I then discuss a class dimension of the production of knowledge by intellectuals of Iranian state and their role in the hegemonic struggles. By studying historical texts, atlases, encyclopedic works, and educational textbooks produced during the late Qajar period by the prominent intellectuals of the state I will show how nationalist representations of geohistory started to produce in and through Farsi. I demonstrate how Aryan racism facilitated the production of a Farsist temporal regime as a material foundation of Iranian national history. Here, I study the birth of Persian 'scientific' racism (and Persian supremacy) that was achieved by the state intellectual's emphasis on language purity and the Aryan hypothesis. The international (colonial, imperialist) backdrop of Aryan racist nationalism along with both discursive and physical moments of Aryan racism will be discussed. I analyze how the intellectual products of the Iranian state intellectuals have resulted in an ahistorical conception of Iran, and naturalization of a linear

history. I examine how Aryan racism, in alignment with the broader racist framework that dualistically separates ‘civilized’ from ‘uncivilized,’ gradually led to the production of some of the most influential, racist dualisms of Farsi. And thereby reinforces the dominant narrative of linear development. I accordingly explore how the state produces a specific temporality to repress other temporal regimes and prevent the emergence of subaltern (non-Persian) temporalities.

Farsist historiography was not confined to the educational textbooks. It was inscribed into the temporal matrix of the emerging nation state through different but interconnecting mechanisms. Given the dialectical relationship between time and space, the production of abstract time is inextricably connected to the production of abstract space. In this context, I indicate how the production of Tehran as the nation’s capital was pivotal in the spatialization of the abstract temporal regime of the nation state.

Focusing on the relationship between the Irancentric representations of spacetime and Farsi, Chapter Three asks what has been the role of Farsi in the production of Iran? Building on the findings of the previous chapter, and by focusing on the link between Farsization and knowledge production, I examine the hypothesis that Iran as a nation state could not have formed without Farsization of spacetime. So, this chapter deals with the emergence of racialized ways of narrating the history through Farsi, and the process through which Iran is identified with Farsi. In addition to the field of Iranian studies, a range of encyclopedias, language textbooks, calendars, and yearbooks will be explored. It is important to note that the production of all these sources was built upon administrative and infrastructural integration of Iran’s dispersed geographies. This chapter begins with a short history of Persian language or Farsi. Next, it explores translation as a particular colonial politics and strategy of Farsization of Iran. To investigate spaces of Farsi, I analyze the underlying assumptions of the *Iranshahr* ideology as the culmination of Farsist Irancentrism. I

then examine spacetime-, concept-, and state-dependency of social structures including Iran by discussing a conceptual history of nation and territory in Farsi. By comparing spaces of Iran in specific historical texts – *Shahnameh*, and *Safarnameh* – I explain how a selective focus on specific historical texts and ignoring others has contributed to the Farsization of *Iran*. Dualist spatialities of Farsi is also examined in the context of imperialism to highlight the colonial nature of Farsi as produced by the state.

Ultimately, I will examine three instances of internal colonization and the pivotal role played by the Farsi in these processes. First, I analyze how the more recent discourse of ethnicities in Farsi has been trying to ‘scientifically’ neutralize the racist history of the production of Farsi. Then, I will examine the Farsization of time as the key mechanism in of the internal colonization. I explore the calendar reform as a Farsist practice of the state aiming at the suppression of non-Persian temporal regimes. I conclude with discussing the Farsization of space as an associated mechanism of the internal colonization, to analyze how Farsization is inscribed into the spatial matrix of the state.

Building on the previous chapter, I argue that the national territory, as a distinct layer of the state space, has been infrastructurally produced. The national history and Iran as an ‘imagined nation’ had to be *physically* inscribed in spacetime to provide the foundation for the production of Iran as a national territory. To achieve this, the central state required the implementation of specific infrastructural projects (like railways and energy pipelines⁴⁶) that imposed the necessity of cartographic technologies and practices. I argue that Farsi as a colonial worldview, and Iran as a Farsi/Persian nation, gradually gained a ‘scientific/objective’ appearance through cartographic practices and representations. Accordingly, in Chapter Four, I ask how has Iran been represented

⁴⁶ As Ehsani (2017: 432) shows, pipelines exert a transformative socio-spatial impact by enforcing the hegemony of new legal regimes of property.

and produced through the cartographic practices of the state? What is the relationship between the cartographic production of Iran and the infrastructural practices? To address these questions, I will systematically examine a wide range of historical maps⁴⁷ that chronologically cover the pre-Qajar period up until the Islamic Republic (1979-). I analyze the emergence of territorially unified, bounded, and subdivided conceptions of Iran as state-nation, in maps, encyclopedias, and schoolbooks. After reviewing over 3000 unique maps, a carefully selected range of maps has been chosen on a thematic basis including frontiers and border formation that shows the absence of Iran as a territorially bounded space prior to the 19th century, infrastructural communication projects, land expropriation, militarization, administrative divisions, ethnicization, and urbanization.

I explore the trajectory of cartographic representations of Iran in different historical sources to see whether Iran has been represented as a unified entity in the maps, and if so, since when. More specifically, I study the presence/absence of Iran as a national territory in late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods. The crucial material aspects of the Iranian nation state – borders, infrastructures, land (nature), and urbanization – will be examined. This part underscores the influence of cartographic practices of the state in transforming the natural frontiers to political borders, and the production of a national territory as a bounded space. Focusing on the cartographic practices of the state since late 19th century, I examine the role these practices have played in the materialization of Iranian nationalism within the context of imperialism. I discuss the gradual

⁴⁷ The maps analyzed in this chapter have been collected from various sources. A portion of them were physically collected and photographed from resources available at the British Library. Another set was obtained through online searches, encompassing a wide range of digitized historical maps. In addition, some maps have been acquired from the Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (with the assistance of a friend based in Iran). Maps found in various geographical atlases also serve as primary sources for this chapter. The collected maps are predominantly in Persian, English, Turkish, and Arabic, while some of them are drawn in Latin, German, Russian, or French. Chronologically, these maps can be categorized into five distinct periods: 1. the pre-Qajar period, which includes maps of ancient and medieval times up until the maps of the Safavid periods, 2. the Qajar period (1789-1925), 3. the first Pahlavi period (1925-1941), 4. the second Pahlavi period (1941-1979), and finally 5. the Islamic Republic period (1979-).

formation and consolidation of national economies in general, and Iran as a national market/economy in particular, in the context of imperialism.

Then, I investigate the infrastructural production of Iran by focusing on the colonial formation of *communication infrastructures* and their role in interweaving the island-like geographies of ‘Iran’ to create a national territory in and through the cartographic representations of space. Cartographic practices of the state are essential in expropriation and production of space and nature. Drawing on the notion of the production of nature, the urbanization of Iran and the associated process of the extractive production of Iranian nature will be explored as they are unfolded in cartographic representations. At the end, this chapter delves into White Revolution, emphasizing its pivotal role not only in showcasing various facets of land reform, oil-driven urbanization, and the subsequent production of nature-space but also in marking a transformative phase in cartographic practices of the state.

All the main chapters of this dissertation are focused on the state. One examines historiographic practices, another focuses on Farsist practices, and the last explores the cartographic practices of the state. Thus, the state serves as the recurring theme across these chapters. In line with the dialectical conception of state space outlined mostly in Chapter One, time, language, and space are not separate entities; rather, they are intricately woven together by the nation-stat. Consequently, while the first chapter is theoretically centered on history, time, and temporality, it also addresses issues of language and space as they relate to the state’s historiographic practices. Similarly, the second chapter, although primarily focused on language and knowledge production from a theoretical perspective, simultaneously examines time and space in light of the state’s Farsist practices. The final chapter is theoretically centered on space and territory, yet it also incorporates time and language in connection with the state’s cartographic

practices. The main chapters of this dissertation are cumulative, both empirically and theoretically. While the historiography chapter focuses on theories of time and history, the chapter on language employs a combination of theories related to time-history, and theories of language. In the cartography chapter, although space is central, time, language, and space are analyzed together. This cumulative approach is also reflected in the theoretical framework chapter.

Chapter One

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework⁴⁸

Introduction

The primary objective of my research is to problematize ‘Iran’. Building on the existing critical literature on Iranian nationalism and state formation – Vaziri (1993), Asgharzadeh (2007), Matin-Asgari (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2014, 2024), Zia-Ebrahimi (2016), Kashani-Sabet (1997, 1999, 2011, 2013), Cronin’s (2007), Ehsani (2014), Soleimani & Mohammadpour (2019b, 2020), Mohammadpour & Soleimani (2020), and Burton 2021 – I challenge the dominant taken-for-grantedness of ‘Iran’ in the literature and geohistoricize it to emphasize that Iran is a historical product. Conventionally, Iran is perceived as a unified nation-state characterized by a shared *history, language, and territory*. These elements have not been historicized in the existing literature and are represented as natural. Although a few studies have targeted single elements such as the nation, to date, no research has historicized the *totality* of Iran as a national state. The central argument of my dissertation is that Iran as a nation state, or more specifically, as a national state spacetime, is a recent political form which has been produced through the historiographic, linguistic, and cartographic practices of the state. Iran, as a national state space, has been historically and cartographically produced through the colonial Farsization of spacetime. Iran has been written *and mapped in, through, and as* Farsi. I argue that the Farsist production of knowledge

⁴⁸ I have chosen to merge the literature review and theoretical framework into a single chapter. I introduce my theoretical framework concurrently with my review of existing literature, addressing the identified shortcomings. I will show how the theories of Poulantzas, Gramsci, and Lefebvre offer unique lenses to view the the production of Iran, which previous literature has not explored.

as part of the wider process of the racial production of space has been a crucial state mechanism to abstractly produce Iran as a ‘unified’ Persian/Fars nation. For Iran to be produced as a Farsist national spacetime, Farsi needed to be inscribed in the temporal and spatial matrices of nation state. I will demonstrate that this process of inscribing Farsi in space time (or Farsization of spacetime) was made possible through the historiographic and cartographic practices of the state. This specific mode of production of space is characterized by internal colonization. In this study, the concept of internal colonialism is grounded in Lefebvre’s theory of colonization as developed by Kipfer and Goonewardena (2013). Colonization in this sense refers to *multi-scalar*⁴⁹ strategies for organizing territorial relations of domination: as a statebound form of organizing hierarchical territorial relations or a state strategy of producing space (Kipfer and Goonewardena, 2013: 76). Internal colonization – as a relation of domination between a center and a periphery – must be incorporated into any analysis of colonization (Ibid: 95).

Moreover, colonial hierarchical territorial relations are predominantly, if not entirely, structured along racial lines. Kipfer’s dialectical reading of Fanon alongside Lefebvre is highly relevant here. According to Kipfer (2022), racism for Fanon is a modality of modern colonialism. As he elaborates: “Shaped by the modality of racism, colonial relations are characterised by a combination of super-exploitation and everyday humiliation that reduces the colonised to sub-human and non-historical status” (Kipfer, 2022: 100-101). I thus employ this Fanonian conception of colonization as a form of hierarchical territorial organization, which “is shaped by modalities of racism and racialization” (Ibid). I see racialization as a *colonial* process involving expropriation and define racial colonialism as the hierarchical relationship between a center and peripheries

⁴⁹ Lefebvre insists that rather than a specific stage of capitalism (as Lenin suggested), imperialism develops together with capitalism (Kipfer and Goonewardena, 2013: 94). He criticizes Luxemburg since she understands peripheries only in the non-capitalist sense and therefore neglects the constitution of center-periphery relationship at different spatial scales both in capitalist and non-capitalist regions (Ibid: 95).

which is implemented and (re)produced through – in our case, Farsist – racialization. Therefore, colonization and racialized hierarchization of space are analytically distinct but historically difficult to separate. The centers colonize the racialized peripheries by expropriating their energies (nature, land, language, etc.). Typically racialized in modern times, colonialism embraces different modes of production with capitalism being the dominant one. Nationalism and the nation-state are integral to understanding how capitalism is spatialized and temporalized. The nation-state is defined by a specific spatio-temporal matrix, which reflects the *international* division of labour⁵⁰. This division of labour is defined by various articulations of imperialism and nationalism, which serve as the ideological framework that legitimizes this matrix as the desirable form of production of space.

With that said, I have organized this chapter in a tripartite format, in alignment with the substantive chapters, on *time*, *language*, and *space*⁵¹. Starting with state time, I review a relatively broad spectrum of works about Iran and pointing out their methodological shortcomings. I analyze the dualistic assumptions of historiographic works on Iran. By situating my discussion within the hierarchical production of global space, as well as state-centric knowledge production and its colonial foundations, I discuss how Marxist and postcolonial theories have also contributed to a dualistic conception of history. I argue that dominant readings of Marx and capitalism, which primarily focus on the binary relationship between labour and capital while overlooking the land

⁵⁰ Most of the French historians of the *Annales* school “tend to seek the production of space-time either in the sphere of commodity-exchange ... or in the co-ordinates of technology ... and demography. Most of the time, only a marginal role is assigned to the relations of production and the social division of labour” (Poulantzas, 1978/1980: 98). Poulantzas says the evasive reference to commodity-exchange expresses empiricist and transhistorical conceptions of territory, language, and historical tradition.

⁵¹ This is merely an analytical categorization. In reality, these moments are not separate. Even analytically, discussing time as separate from space, or language from spacetime, is nearly impossible. Therefore, although the substantive chapters of this work focus respectively on time, language, and space, a certain degree of overlap is inevitable.

⁵², have indirectly contributed to a nationalist outlook, thereby naturalizing linear conception of time and internal colonization. Then, I engage with a few critical efforts to critique and rethink Marxist and postcolonial theories and historiographies.

After discussing state time, I focus on the state language. I examine the works of Mostafa Vaziri and Mana Kia as two notable exceptions that, in distinct ways, have historicized ‘Iran’. I also draw on Elden’s work that has historicized the concept of territory. Ehsani’s contributions also resonate strongly with the concerns of this dissertation. As he argues, the term “Iranian” or “Persian” are themselves vague, especially in the early twentieth century “when a coherent and homogeneous national identity had not yet been more systematically institutionalized” (Ehsani, 2014: 232). Together, these scholars have contributed to the historicization of the nation, language, and/or Iran. Vaziri, Kia, and Elden do not directly engage with the spatiotemporal matrix of the nation state ⁵³, nor do they explore how language plays a fundamental role in its colonial production. Building upon their unprecedented contributions, my work extends their insights by incorporating a distinctly Marxist theory of the state. It further enriches the discussion through the lens of radical geography, with a particular emphasis on the spatiotemporal dimensions of the nation-state.

Last but not least, I will explore various key studies that focus on state space and nationalism to varying degrees. Matin argues that it is essential to address the totality of production relations, rather than focusing solely on the discursive aspect of social change. Goswami has crafted a dialectical analysis that like Matin critiques both Marxist and postcolonial approaches by focusing

⁵² This disregard for the land is tied to the insufficient theorization of the nation-state and its spatial dimensions. As Hadjimichalis says, “the nation-state constitutes itself on the basis of integration but also of disintegration/marginalization of social groups, minorities, regions, languages, religions, issues which are at stake in conflicts and struggles beyond the classical one between capital and labour” (Hadjimichalis, 2016: 139).

⁵³ Although they recognize to some degree the language-dependency of certain social forms like territory and place, they fail to address the language-dependency of the national state itself.

on the state and its infrastructural components, though her work does not address the cartographic practices of the state. This gap could be addressed by incorporating Winichakul's insights who has analyzed the cartographic processes by which 'Siam' as a national territory was formed.

1. State Time:

1.1. Dualist, Linear Iranian Historiographies

As my research shows, Iran, as a *nation*, a territorially bounded *space* with a national *history* and a national market/economy, has been an unprecedented phenomenon that was absent in the early 19th century. Nonetheless, there is still no explicit attention given to the historically contingent production of 'Iran'. Cyrus Schayegh (2009: 14) uses 'territory' in a highly general, undifferentiated manner and does not problematize the historical process of production of the territory itself. There is no pre-Iranian territory time in his narrative. Space is therefore excluded from the social relations of production. Schayegh says "under Reza Shah, the state wished to exercise full sovereignty over Iranian territory" (Schayegh, 2009: 70). This implies that the state and Iranian territory are conceived in terms of exteriority. It is as if either 'Iranian territory' exists as a ready-made entity to be invaded, or a preformed 'Iranian state' is going to exercise its sovereignty over a naturally defined land which is already called Iran.

This view that reflects the dominant conception of Iran and spacetime, considering them as a passive, static background, or container for social forces at best fails to account for the geohistorical specificities of the production of Iran. So, the racial and colonial dimensions of the Iranian state formation are either overlooked, or when addressed, are discussed as abstracted from the spatiotemporal matrix of the nation state. By disregarding the dialectical relationship between the state and spacetime, this view depoliticizes and fetishizes 'Iran' as a territory and nation. As a result, the violent abstraction involved in the formation of 'Iranian' history, language, and territory

is not problematized. To reveal the roots of this naturalization, we need an account of ‘the historical production’ of apparently natural categories such as the national territory (Goswami, 2002: 794).

There is a link between the externality of nature and the passivity/neutrality of spacetime in social theory in general, and Iranian studies in particular. Not only nature but spacetime is treated as external to social relations. This externality applies to space in its different forms and scales. This is therefore *a fortiori* true for the national territory. In other words, excluding national territory from the social analysis (known as methodological nationalism) and taking its existence for granted, has definitely something to do with a fundamental dualism of nature-society. As Jason Moore (2015: 14) argues, the view of ‘Nature’ as external is a fundamental condition of capital accumulation. The concept of totality provides us with a helpful tool to go beyond the conventional dualisms. Moore’s ‘web of life’, I assume, is another term for totality. It refers to the totality or unity of Nature/Society. In order to develop emancipatory politics, one cannot see through dualist or disciplinary lenses. The very disciplinary separation of specialized knowledge in its current form is the continuation of the dualist bourgeois thought. A standpoint of totality can help us to change the dominant Cartesian bias in our conceptual language “such that we speak of humanity’s relation to nature as if relations between humans were not, already, relations of nature.” (Moore, 2015: 34)-Human history is then primarily an environmental, natural, and spatial history: “nature is no static field but is itself renewing and evolving in a cyclical and cumulative fashion. Nature is, above all, historical.” (Ibid: 28) If we narrate history in a non-anthropocentric way, it is then not one-dimensionally limited to what human society/culture can do to nature/space. We instead have a dialectical relationship which made history spatial from the very outset. It is in this sense that Moore says history is already an environmental history. According to him, “this allows us to move from environmental histories *of* modernity to modernity’s projects and processes *as*

environmental history.” (Moore, 2015: 22) It is explained that ‘nature is not “just there.” It is historical’. In a similar fashion, we can argue that spacetime is not just there, it is historically produced. Spacetime, which includes nature, is a self-transforming entity. It is not that only external forces change nature. Nature itself changes. More precisely, human society/culture is an internal part of nature, which today is more than ever a social nature.

Lack of attention to the geohistorical specificities of social processes stems from the nationalist methodology of the historiographies of ‘ancient Iran’, which through a linear reading of history, takes the existence of ‘Iran’ for granted. Touraj Daryaee (2009) for example poses the question *where* is Iran/Iranshahr? Yet he never asks: *when* was Iran formed? His narrative is overshadowed by a mythological view of a shining lost past embodied by ancient empires that are supposed to rise from the ashes. Historians talk about Achaemenid Iran, Sassanid Iran, Safavid Iran etc., without dealing with the fact that ‘Iran’ is a *historical* product with a very recent history.

Despite a growing body of critical literature on Iranian historiography – including Vaziri (1993), Boroujerdi (1998), Asgharzadeh (2007), Marashi (2008, 2014, 2020), Zia-Ebrahimi (2016), and Matin-Asgari (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2014, 2024) – critical scholars continue to put Iran outside of history. Peyman Vahabzadeh, who aptly highlights the role of the Persian language in the formation of the national state, insists that ‘Iran’ has existed since ancient times, at least for thousands of years (Vahabzadeh, 2022). A similar approach is recognizable in Touraj Atabaki who speaks of the Persians versus Turks in a dualistic manner (Atabaki, 2007: 15). Atabaki does not use the term ‘Iran’ in a geohistorically differentiated manner. Thus, Iranianness is characterized as being a Farsi/Persian-speaker⁵⁴ (Atabaki, 2007: 43, 44). He differentiates between Russians,

⁵⁴ This is despite the fact that Atabaki himself has says “ignoring the multiethnic nature of *Iranian* society and demonstrating conviction to the ethnic and cultural superiority of the Persian against the Arab and the Turk became a strong ingredient of the new nationalism” (Atabaki, 2009: 72). He does not seem to be committed to his own statement.

Armenians, and Georgians, yet he does not extend the same distinction to non-Persian *Iranians*. Using a homogenizing strategy, he talks about *Iranian*⁵⁵ migrant workers (Ibid: 45)⁵⁶ in the Caucasus and argues that Iranian ‘Azeris’ were able to uphold their territorial-Iranian identity. He describes this as “an *inclusive* culture that took precedence over ... their ethnic, linguistic and class loyalties” (Atabaki, 2007: 52). He thus advocates territorial nationalism⁵⁷ and disregards the racist roots of national-territorial identity. This narrative contributes to the internal colonization.

While recent critical debates on Iranian nationalism have emphasized politics, race, and language, Kashani-Sabet’s pioneering work (1997: 37) shifts the focus to land, highlighting its central role in the formation of nationalism. Although she charts nationalism as a historically specific process, Kashani-Sabet still assumes a national territory as ‘transhistorically and objectively identifiable in terms of the empty space of empirical geography’ (Kia, 2020: 5) and, in this way, essentializes Iran (Ibid). Therefore, Kashani-Sabet’s theoretical framework appears to remain confined to a state-centric conception of time.

Zia-Ebrahimi⁵⁸ has critically examined Iranian nationalism and its racial and temporal dimensions. As he argues, the majority of Iranians identify themselves with the past – the era before the so-called invasion of Arabs – and specifically with the Aryan ‘race’. These common ideas about the superiority of Iranians over Arabs are part of a nationalist ideology which he calls

⁵⁵ Hereafter, all italicized text has been emphasized by me, unless indicated otherwise.

⁵⁶ Atabaki believes that even Mohammad Khyabani (1879-1920), who founded the state of *Azadestan* was “committed preserving the country’s *territorial integrity*” (Atabaki, 2005: 33). This is however anachronistic since around 1918, ‘territorial integrity’ had not yet been formed in Farsi. The concept was even hardly ever used in English (Marxsen, 2015: 8).

⁵⁷ Another name for ‘civic nationalism’.

⁵⁸ Zia-Ebrahimi provides a typology of critical theories of Iranian nationalism. Building on Mostafa Vaziri (who highlights the role of European Orientalism in forming Iranian nationalism), and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi (who sees through a local lens and seeks the origin of Iranian nationalism in texts written in Persian in the 17th century in Mughal India, and as a result abandons the use of European models in the development of Iran as a nation), Zia-Ebrahimi proposes a third approach, which simultaneously incorporates both local and global/European aspects of the formation of Iranian nationalism. He admits that the fundamental ideas of nationalism are derived from European studies and, in this sense appeared first in the writings of Europeans. Nevertheless, it was Iranian writers who produced a combined and hybrid mixture of these ideas in the form of dislocative nationalism (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 14).

“dislocative nationalism.” (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 2) This nationalism revolves around a series of principles which include the idea that Iran is an eternal nation that has existed uninterruptedly since at least 2,500 years ago. In addition, the essence and glory of Iran should be found in the pre-Islamic golden age. And finally, the fact that Iranians are of the Aryan race and therefore are utterly different from Arabs. Zia-Ebrahimi claims that the supporters of this dualist ideology are the producers of Iran’s dominant historiography (Ibid: 3).

While critiquing the Iranian-Arab racial dualism, Zia-Ebrahimi appears to reproduce another form of dualism. He defends a form of constitutionalism that has pre-emptively embraced the notion of the nation-state as a democratic phenomenon. He however does not address the fact that the very form of the nation-state is fundamentally built on the exclusion of others, and most specifically, of internal/national colonies. Kashani-Sabet’s and Zia-Ebrahimi’s national-state-centric approaches assume a linear history, ultimately aiming for a liberal democratic nation-state. I emphasize that it is the modern nation-state itself that has produced a linear time and history, propagated as the sole path of progress for the spatially peripheralized societies through nationalism. A critical analysis of nationalism cannot leave the nation state and its spatiotemporal matrices untouched⁵⁹.

As Poulantzas says (1980: 114), imperialism is consubstantial with the modern nation in the sense that it cannot be other than *internationalization* of the processes of labour and capital. Imperialism involves the homogenization of temporal sequences and, in Iranian context, the assimilation of non-Persian histories by the nation-state, contributing to the worldwide expansion

⁵⁹ Socialist and anarchist traditions have developed radical alternatives for the political organization of space. From Lefebvre’s ideas of autogestion (self-determination) and the right to the city (Bitter & Weber, 2009; Purcell, 2002; Magnusson, 2015) to libertarian municipalism – by Murray Bookchin (Bookchin & Taylor, 2015) – Abdullah Öcalan’s democratic confederalism, and the perspectives of Immanuel Wallerstein (Wallerstein & Balibar, 1991), all consider the scale and space of political organization as non-national. I argue that redefining the current organization of space cannot be accomplished by reproducing the national form.

of the nation state and nationalism. Claims for Iranian identity, like other nationalist representations of spacetime, evoke a continuous and singular history, an uninterrupted linear progress to the present. These claims are internalist⁶⁰. There is no constitutive outside in this conception of spacetime and “if the ‘outside world’ is recognised at all ... it is through negative counter position ... rather than through positive interrelation” (Massey, 1995: 189). A relational conception of the territory is based on a radical recognition of others as integral parts of the selves. This is pervasive in Iranian historiographies which try to conceptualize Iran by negating its Islamic, Turkish, Mongolian, Arabic, or more generally, its non-Persian pasts and ‘outsides’. Iran is therefore uprooted from its positively constitutive spacetimes. National states however recognize each other only negatively. Developing a strategy of writing a radical – multiscalar and multirhythmic – history of Iran is a crucial step in transforming the national state space and its genocidal spacetime (Poulantzas, 1980: 107).

1.2. From Iranian Studies to Marxist and Postcolonial Histories

This linear historiography has been spread across various disciplinary fields. Kamal Athari employs the same linear account of social change (Athari, 2016) and approvingly notes that the China represents a new *statism* (Athari, 2020b). Athari’s linear conception of time reveals a broader methodological problem. In contrast to Gramsci who goes beyond the binary idea that “political struggle is a choice between a war of movement and a war of position” (Fonseca, 2016: 76), Athari (2021)⁶¹ believes Gramsci has shown “the necessity of *replacing* the war of maneuver with the war of position.” Athari employs a linear logic of transition/replacement to declare class

⁶⁰ Matin has also developed a systematic critique of internalism. Here, I am referencing an earlier intervention by Doreen Massey which is focused on ‘space’ as a methodological concept.

⁶¹ In an interview with a notorious IRGC-affiliated news agency (*Tasnim*).

politics obsolete⁶². This approach, who is employed by others (Hoominfar and Zanganeh, 2021: 265-266) underscores how linear interpretations of history can serve to absent the existing pasts such as non-Persian temporal regimes. Stagism dismisses the simultaneous existence of different temporal regimes.

The stagist-linear conception of time is also prevalent among Marxists. Bijan Hekmat believes that “when we talk about classes and their positions, neither this nor that other has yet formed *in Iran*” (in Etemad, 2010: 225). Hekmat talks about lack of capitalism ‘in Iran’ as if ‘Iran’ is exterior to capitalist history. This dualistic discourse of ‘absence’ is constructed upon a bounded conception of space and a linear (Eurocentric, and internalist) understanding of time. In this perspective capitalism proper is assumed to be *internal* to a specific geography (‘Europe’) from which ‘Iran’ is spatially and temporally separated. Iran and Europe are seen as territorially bounded spaces with exclusive borders, positioned along a linear time arrow where Europe represents the endpoint and Iran lags. Reflecting the stagist presumption that capitalism has been fully realized Hekmat believes that capital removes the old forms of exploitation (in Etemad, 2010: 244). The same structural strategy of reducing history to a singular temporal regime has led to the removal of other – in my study, non-Persian – temporalities. That explains why Hekmat implicitly considers Iran as a unified nation (Ibid: 245, 247) with a shared singular history. Linear conception of history cannot see history as multirhythmic⁶³. Iran is therefore reified as a manifestation of linear time.

⁶² One of the worst implications of such non-dialectical interpretation at the level of strategy is that Athari represents a passive revolution as the subaltern counter-hegemony or a bottom-up war of position.

⁶³ Here, I refer to Lefebvre’s *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) as a complementary basis for my understanding of spacetime. Lefebvre’s the production of space focuses on space, while rhythmanalysis is mostly concerned with time. These notions dialectically complement each other. Bhaskar’s concept of rhythemics shares notable parallels with Lefebvre’s approach. It is argued that “the ontological category of rhythemics entails that things and processes have emergent spatio-temporalities” ... the rhythmic ‘may be a sui generis causal power of space-time itself’ because ‘space and time are far from causally inert’” (Hartwig, 2007: 436). Bhaskar indicates that spaces and times intersect, overlap, or coalesce in contradictory ways (Ibid: 437).

Seeing temporalities as bounded packages supposes that the present excludes the past⁶⁴. A significant consequence of this oversight is that various forms of domination, like internal colonization through expropriation of non-Persian lands and languages, often presumed to belong to the past, and therefore have been inadequately addressed, if not entirely neglected, in critical scholarship. This explains why despite the long history of Iranian internal colonization, a Marxist analysis of the problem is still lacking.⁶⁵ This linear reading of capitalism⁶⁶, and more broadly, geohistory, characterizes the Iranian Marxism and critical Iranian historiography, with notable exceptions such as Matin-Asgari (2009a, 2009b, 2018).

This statist logic of transition (and its associated dualisms) has even been reproduced in critical analyses that are attuned to the spatiotemporal specificities of social processes⁶⁷. While Ehsani criticizes the dualistic approach of modernization theories that ‘celebrate urbanization as inherently progressive’ (Ehsani, 2014: 16) he keeps another dualism intact. Ehsani says “state-centered historiography tends to produce an anti-colonial and nationalist narrative” (Ibid: 145). In this view, it is dualistically assumed that since nationalist projects are formed in opposition to one form of colonialism, they cannot themselves be colonial. So, colonialism is understood in a Eurocentric, racist manner, as if colonization is the exclusive capacity of Europeans, while others are perceived as incapable of enacting it. The dominant historiographic assumption in anti-colonial

⁶⁴ Furthermore, dualistic perspectives treat the ‘market’ as separate from and external to the ‘state’. Accordingly, as long as the latter remains dominant, they conclude we do not have a capitalist market.

⁶⁵ Two Iranian Marxist approaches are identifiable that view the question of ‘minorities’ as a distraction from anti-imperialist and class struggles. The first one is the anti-imperialist left that draws on the legacy of the Stalinist Tudeh party (formed in 1941). The second is the economist left which refers to the those who have a strategic focus on anti-capitalist struggle to the neglect of national and gender questions (Matin, 2020).

⁶⁶ In her discussion of the Paris Commune and the development of ‘anarchist communism’ Kristin Ross argues that the intricacies and drama of the Marx/Bakunin split have dominated our perception of the politics leading to a reductive opposition between an anarchist focus on political domination and a Marxist focus on economic exploitation (Ross, 2015: 165). The point however is the simultaneous dissolution of Capital, State, and Nation (Ibid: 171).

⁶⁷ Ehsani however uses spatial categories of land, place, territory, space, urban space, built environment, and scale in a highly undifferentiated manner and uses them interchangeably (Ehsani, 2014: 1-2, 35, 126, 151, 218, 382). Such an undifferentiated language cannot historicize space and Iran.

nationalism has been that of a colonial/anti-colonial binary (Goonewardena, 2004: 682). Not surprisingly, Ehsani reiterates a dualist, stagist reading of Marx's notions of formal and real subsumption (Ehsani, 2014: 146) and argues that the history of Khuzestan⁶⁸ in 1908-1911 reveals the process of *real* subsumption (Ibid: 149). It is in fact the perpetuation of the old in the new that presents the general condition of subsumption (Harootunian, 2015: 193).

I contend that the lack of engagement with dialectical theories of history and state space has contributed to the reviewed issues⁶⁹. Harootunian argues that postcolonial theories treat the mode of production as a static *timeless* space (Harootunian, 2015: 225). This commitment to 'postcolonial' capitalism was rooted in the cultural exceptionalism, caused by postcoloniality's misplacing of Marxism as another metanarrative coercively imposed on South Asia from the outside (Ibid: 212). The point is that with the move from class politics to cultural critique "comes the risk of sacrificing historical capitalism ... and overlooking the role played by precapitalist formations" (Harootunian, 2015: 231) including nomadic, tribal, and non-Persian modes of life, and therefore, disregarding the totality of relations of production.

1.3. Linear History and Intellectuals:

Marx developed the concept of 'formal subsumption' to emphasize "the coexistence of different economic practices in certain moments and the continuing persistence of historical temporal forms" (Harootunian, 2015: 9). For Marx, "formal subsumption was a *form*, not a *stage* taking its place in an inevitable transitional linear process, to be ultimately replaced by real subsumption" (Harootunian, 2020: 144). Following Harootunian, I employ an approach which is multitemporal⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Khuzestan province is one of the 31 provinces of Iran. Located in the southwest of the country, the province borders Iraq and the Persian Gulf.

⁶⁹ This neglect of the radical geography tradition is clearly observable even in the most critical analyses of Iran: Vaziri's *Iran as an Imagined Nation* (1993/2013) and Matin's *Recasting Iranian Modernity*.

⁷⁰ The traditional frameworks of historical writing are either single countries or closed periods. The dominant method revolves around a chronological monism or monotemporality (Anderson, 1974: 10).

and acknowledges the *coexistence* and *copresence* of archaic and modern social forms such as nomadic and sedentary modes of life. Harootunian shows how criticizing linear development and time is related to a critique of the national state form. I think he does this based on his implicit conception of space as the copresence of different social forms. Harootunian, who connects Uno's conceptualization of 'late development,' and Gramsci's political recoding of formal subsumption (Harootunian, 2015: 16), sees passive revolution as 'the political analog of formal subsumption' (Ibid: 212).

This brings us to the relationship between the histories of capitalism and other histories. According to Uno, Marxian political economy can be divided into three levels of analysis: the theory of a purely capitalist society, the theory of stages of capitalist development, and the analysis of capitalist history (Albritton, 1991: 1). The third level is an effort to understand how capitalism has impacted modern history (Ibid: 61-62). Albritton (Ibid: 64) posits that the relevance of studying modern history as the history of capitalism is contingent upon the degree to which capitalism plays a pivotal role in shaping the modern history. This significance, however, is not uniform and varies across different geo-histories. This perspective explains why I refrain from examining the history of 'Iran' *a priori* as a history of capitalism. Given that multiple layers of the production of Iran, including the expropriation of non-Persian lands and languages, and suppression of nomadic spatiotemporal regimes, it is not reasonable to analyze the history of the production of Iran solely through the lens of capitalism. Phenomena such as Islamic ideology (Shi'ism), Aryan racism, and internal colonization represent social forms that have their own relatively autonomous histories⁷¹. As I do not assume the dominance of capitalism across Iran's extensive geographies. It is the

⁷¹ For example, the expropriation of (Sunni) Turkmen lands and their linguistic repression by Iranian nation state is one of the most significant events in the production of Iran. This issue however cannot be comprehended solely from the perspective of capital accumulation.

totality of the relations of production, not capital accumulation, that characterizes the level of analysis in my research. Since dispossession is not exclusive to capitalism, the analysis must encompass production in its totality, while still acknowledging the significant force of capitalist hegemony. By examining the intellectual aspect of the production my research shows that class struggle is not confined to just the physical means of production and economy; it is also a struggle through and over the cultural-ideological means of production including language and knowledge. I view the expansion of the national state form from a geopolitical perspective as closely tied to the necessities of capitalist expansion. However, my focus is not on capitalism and capital accumulation per se; but rather on internal colonialism and linguistic repression as influential forces in the production of Iran. More precisely, my aim is to explore the relationship between non-capitalist and capitalist forms in the production of Iran. Since I do not presuppose the dominance of capitalism across Iran's extensive geographies, my attention is more directed towards how capitalist forms may or may not intersect with non-capitalist forms in the production of Iran.

This approach aligns with dialectical understanding of time and temporality in Gramsci⁷² and Lefebvre. Although Harootunian and Albritton have developed critical accounts of multiple temporalities, their accounts are not systematically *spatio*-temporal. Lefebvre and Gramsci provide a spatiotemporal alternative to the question. As Lefebvre argues, non- and pre-capitalist spatiotemporal regimes did not disappear with the rise of capitalism (Lefebvre, 1991: 324)⁷³.

⁷² Gramsci “recognized that the present is ... always an ensemble of fractured and heterogeneous combining of encounters between different times to create the figure of synchronous nonsynchronicities” (Thomas 2009, pp. 282–284, cited in Harootunian, 2020: 147–48).

⁷³ According to Lefebvre, Marx's initial intention in *Capital* was to analyze the capitalist mode of production in terms of a binary capital-labour model that presupposes the disappearance the land. This binary opposition “implies the subordination of the historical to the economic ... and ... the dissolving ... of a multiplicity of formations ... inherited from history.” In this abstract mental space, time is reduced to the measure of social labour. Although Marx became aware of this reductive schema, “many ‘Marxists’ – and all dogmatic Marxists without exception – have retained it, and indeed aggravated its problems”. Non-capitalist formations and landed property showed no signs of disappearing

Following the same logic, I argue that the production of Iran as a national space is dependent on its extension to *pre-existing* non-Persian *spaces*. This approach can be complemented with Gramsci's spatial historicism that provides a nuanced dialectical theorization of multiple temporalities. Kipfer defines Gramsci's historicism as spatial: "Gramsci's understanding of conjuncture wanted to grasp the imbrication, not the *a priori* separation of different rhythms" (Kipfer, 2013: 84)⁷⁴. Gramsci understands "bourgeois hegemony simultaneously as a confluence of multiple temporalities ... and a multiscalar and unevenly developed set of spatial relations" (Kipfer, in Ekers, et al, 2013: 85-86). He accordingly rejects *national* scale as a given entity and characterizes national space as an open-ended field of struggle. I accordingly argue that Iran as a national space is not an *a priori* formed structure. Iran as a fixed national territory has been produced through a linear, dualist temporal regime. Geography/space as a condition and product of history is 'an *active* force' that makes up historical time. In this sense, the separation of history and geography would lead to fetishized and dualist conceptions of history and geography.

Intellectuals of Iranian state have played a pivotal role in producing and fetishizing a linear conception of time by disregarding the spatiality of history. This directs us to the inscription of class struggle, and its dualist division of intellectual and manual labour, onto spacetime. The dualism is vital for the perpetuation of racial-colonial-class rule. The linear temporal regime, along with its associated Farsist dualisms, had to be materialized within the spatiotemporal matrices of Iranian nation to reproduce the colonial space of the nation state. Farsist historiographic and cartographic practices of the state therefore can be characterized as colonial mechanisms to

on a world scale. In contrast, the importance of space was continually growing in importance. Marx therefore proposed his 'trinity formula', emphasizing that there were three, not two, elements: the Earth, capital, and labour. The earth goes beyond agriculture or subterranean resources and encompasses the nation-state, its territory, and political strategies (Lefebvre, 1991: 323-25).

⁷⁴ Conjunctures in Gramsci refer to "historical moments that articulate the punctual temporality of the event with longer-term forms of historical duration" (Kipfer, in Hart, 2024: 146)

expropriate non-Persian spatiotemporal regimes. More specifically, dualisms are central to the racial-colonial structure of the nation state; not merely as abstract concepts but as material realities inscribed within the spatio-temporal matrices of the state.

Nationalism in this sense is the ideological embodiment of the dualist division of labour, and its linear temporal regime. Iranian nationalism is characterized by Farsist specialized knowledge – that promotes national linear history and abstract territory – and its inscription into the spatio-temporal matrix of the state. Iranian state, and its intellectuals, desperately seek to avoid ‘the everyday’. Immersing themselves in an abstract space – produced by Farsist historiographic and cartographic practices of the state – enables them not to get involved in ordinary things which are essential for the subaltern non-Persian classes. They prioritize the Farsist representation of space(time) over the heterogeneous materiality of Iranian spaces. Under the current relations of production not only specialized knowledge is marked by the ruling class but is also its property: ‘it is transmitted according to criteria that favor this class’ (Lefebvre, 1969: 147, 148). Knowledge production is a class problem⁷⁵ (Gramsci, in Alastair Davidson, 2106: 86).

A dialectical understanding of intellectuals considers the theoretical/conceptual as an essential aspect of the class struggle⁷⁶. Intellectuals are key articulators of the ideologies that define and reproduce the class relations of production. Their narratives attempt to “conceal the ideological standpoints from which they emerge and to which they contribute ... by means of symptomatic silences” (Goonewardena, 2004: 683). To criticize the Iranian state ideology – Farsist nationalism

⁷⁵ As Gramsci notes, “every class which has sought to take power has prepared itself for power by an autonomous education (Gramsci, cited in Alastair Davidson, 2106: 86).

⁷⁶ Class is predominantly viewed as an economic concept. A few non-Persian intellectuals have problematized Marxist class analysis. While Vali (2011) and Matin (2020) seem to understand class and national questions as separate, Baraheni (1979) sees national question as a class problem. Decades ago, he argued that the most critical issue of the Iranian revolution is the question of nationalities. Criticizing the communist parties in Iran, he rejects the idea that the struggles of the non-Persian peoples should be postponed to the post-revolution period. See: <https://eutopiainstitute.org/2020/01/the-iranian-left-radical-change-and-the-national-question/>

– as the main mechanism of the production of Iran, we need to recognize that the role of class struggle in the production of national space is cardinal (Lefebvre, 1991: 55). The class nature of the production of specialized knowledge⁷⁷ means that the producers of the dominant worldviews *practice* a particular philosophy without directly *thinking* about the nature of their class *position* (Lefebvre, 1991: 338).

To understand class dimensions of the intellectuals of the Iranian national state, it is essential to place them in their spacetime which entails exploring the state intellectuals’ conception of spacetime. I show that the ruling class and elites have deeply internalized a Farsist worldview which is associated with a *linear* conception of time. I will show how Iranian intellectuals have been instrumental in Farsization of the spatiotemporal matrix of Iranian nation state. Poulantzas says “the division between mental and manual labour constitutes the basic relationship of ideological domination/subordination” and “classes must be defined at the ideological as well as economic levels” (Wright, 1978: 7). A social class is “defined by its place in the ensemble of social practices” (Poulantzas, 1976: 14). This resonates with Gramsci’s integral theory of the state that understood intellectuals not mainly through their role within the capital circuit, but more so in terms of their capacity within the totality of social relations. This *expanded* concept of the intellectuals is related to the *integral* state that is crucial for grasping the logic of the passive revolution and its “structural capacity for incorporating subaltern *energies*, limiting them to merely ‘economic-corporative’ moments” (Thomas, 2007: 73).

⁷⁷ The incorporation of space into production, ‘frees an enormous quantity of social time’ which is consequently capitalized in the leisure space and other ‘parasitic forms’ like the production of specialized knowledge (Lefebvre, 1991: 347). I suggest seeing Iranian nationalism and more generally, the expansion of culturalism in this light.

Gramsci defines historical bloc⁷⁸ as “the necessary unity of several levels in which ‘class’ is the link between the structure and the superstructure” (Morera, 2011: 141).⁷⁹ Intellectuals can be positioned in the intermediary space between the structure and superstructure. Intellectuals play a crucial role in mediating the relation between structure and superstructure and naturalizing/legitimizing the national state space. Hegemony is thus defined as “a contingent fusion of macro- and micro-dimensions of reality, a condensation of base and superstructure” (Kipfer, 2002: 126-127). State intellectuals are not merely constructor of ideologies for governing others [non-Persians] but a realizer of the passive revolution, “actively preventing others from constructing ideologies in order to govern themselves” (Thomas, 2007: 76). I accordingly show that the intellectuals of the Iranian state prevent the non-Persian subaltern from developing ideologies for their self-determination, and in this way, they perpetuate Iranian passive revolution. Seeing passive revolution as a mechanism to conserve useful parts of the past, and produce a Farsist past, I argue that Iranian nationalism, and the production of Iran, can be characterized as the quintessential example of the passive revolution.

As my research shows, the production of Iran has been shaped through its formal subsumption or Iranian passive revolution. Formal subsumption of Iran into the emerging international order in early 19th century has been historically linked with the linear temporality of the Iranian nationalist historiographies. In this process, a linear temporality – produced primarily by the state intellectuals and then inscribed in spacetime through infrastructural practices – was imposed on the heterogeneous and predominantly non-Persian temporalities of the dispersed geographies of Iran. The portrayal of an eternally national history within the linear trajectory of

⁷⁸ (Gramsci, 1971: 366; Sotiris, 2018: 94).

⁷⁹ The full specification of a historical bloc demands that economic and extra-economic factors be taken into consideration and that their causal weight be assessed carefully” (Morera, 1990/2011: 173).

racial capitalism has been extremely influential in the central state's attempts at eliminating multitemporal histories of Iranian domains. Iranian national history has produced a crucial pillar of Iranian state temporal matrix. Historiographic practices of the state, including the role of state intellectuals in crafting a nationalist history, produced a linear temporal regime that was essential for the formal subsumption of Iran in the international economy. Consequently, the resulting passive revolution was founded on the erasure of non-Persian temporalities.

2. State Language:

2.1. Linguistic Construction of Iran

Published three decades ago, Mostafa Vaziri's pioneering work *Iran as an Imagined Nation* (1993/2013) has been largely disregarded⁸⁰. It severely challenged the prevailing views on Iranian national identity and history. Criticizing a conception of identity grounded in Iranians' ethnolinguistic heritage, Boroujerdi argues that "language does not constitute the entirety of any culture. Language, after all, is a product of social reality, and as such, the internal logic of cultural discourse must be situated within the field of social practices and relationships". (Boroujerdi, 1998: 51) However, even Boroujerdi does not engage with Vaziri's work. Vaziri is the first scholar who problematizes the taken-for-grantedness of Iran and elucidates the *imaginary* nature of Iranian nationhood. He contends that 'Iran' as a nation is an invention of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and shows that Orientalists and Iranian intellectuals have imagined the notion of Iran as a unified nation despite the fact that during the ancient and Islamic periods Iran as a homogenous entity did not exist⁸¹.

⁸⁰ While critical of aspects of Vaziri's work, Matin-Asgari (2009b: 130-134) shares a similarly strong critique of Iranian nationalism.

⁸¹ Matin-Asgari (2009b: 132) has criticized this ahistorical conception of geography in Orientalist historiography.

Vaziri argues that in the context of the geographical expansion of European colonialism, European scholarship employed ‘the same methodology of national and racial data-gathering as it did in studying its own territories’ (Vaziri, 2013: 3). He highlights the role of sciences like philology and archaeology in constructing ‘Iranians’ as Aryan, in explicit contradistinction to Arabs, Turks, and other non-Persians. One of Silvestre de Sacy’s works published in 1793 was in the forefront of philological research that emphasized a *national* framework for Iran (Ibid: 67). Only with the introduction of this empiricist conception of Iran to European intellectual circles was the perception created that Iran was the name of a *land* that had existed from ancient times. The turning point was reached with the Orientalist philologists who classified the family of ‘Iranian’ languages. A range of significant contributions by trained Orientalists such as Theodor Nöldeke, and the nationalist methodology developed by the racist Aryanist, George Rawlinson who believed an ‘Iranic nationality’ existed among the Sasanian⁸² elites and rulers were highly influential (Ibid: 106-107). Subsequent works like Edward G. Browne *A Literary History of Persia* (1902–1924) followed it in the emerging field of Iranian studies (Ibid: 103-104). Central to his work was the notion that language is the basis of national identity. He developed the idea that Farsi is the lineal offspring of the language which Cyrus⁸³ and Darius⁸⁴ spoke.

Iranian historiographies are mostly confined to the empirical level of reality⁸⁵ and therefore understand language as abstracted from structural level of reality such as spatiotemporal regime of the nation state. In line with Vaziri’s pioneering research, Kia (2020) goes further and attributes

⁸² The Sasanian Empire was the last ‘Iranian’ empire before the early Muslim conquests of the 7th-8th centuries AD.

⁸³ Cyrus II of Persia (c. 600-530 BC), commonly known as Cyrus the Great, was the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, the first ‘Persian’ empire.

⁸⁴ Darius I (550-486 BCE), commonly known as Darius the Great, is conventionally considered a ‘Persian’ ruler who served as the third King of Kings of the Achaemenid Empire, from 522 to 486 BCE.

⁸⁵ In critical realism, there is a distinction between three interrelated layers of reality that are irreducible to each other: domains of the real (mechanisms, events, and experiences), the actual (events, and experiences) and the empirical (only experiences) (Bhaskar, 2008a: 2).

the dominant methodological nationalism to an empiricist logic that conceived land, space, and territory as objective, self-evident things⁸⁶. Kia notes the disciplinary divisions that demarcate regional fields like ‘Iranian Studies’⁸⁷ worsen the problem by reifying geohistorical realities including language (Farsi). That partly explains why the nationally colonial *production* of the homogenized state space is overlooked. As I explored in section one, the dominant nationalist methodology has been shaped by a dualist conception of space(time). Kia (2020) characterizes this as a binary ‘nativist logic’ according to which, Hindu, for example, is something ‘Indic’ because it originated in the place we now call India (Kia, 2020: 98). She argues that Tavakoli-Targhi is at pains “to historicize Persianate culture and society, speak of Iranians and Indians and refer to an ‘Indian world’ or ‘Indian psyche’ as if the South Asian subcontinent already formed a cohesive whole distinct from other entities such as ‘Iranians,’ ‘Turko-Persians,’ and ‘Islamic peoples’” (Ibid: 6-7). The result is ‘mutually exclusionist regimes of origin, place, and selfhood,’ in which, ‘Muslims are foreign, having arrived from elsewhere ... and Persians are essentially and naturally Iranian’ (Ibid: 98). This ahistorical language is associated with a primordial Iran manifested in the nationalist historiographies.

The most difficult terminological task in my research is to talk about Iran when and where Iran did not exist. Although using terms other than Iranian might render the discussion awkward, these concepts need to be problematized, ‘so that modern meanings do not structure scholarship’ (Kia, 2020: 6-7). To do this task, we need to historicize language itself. I will do that by spatializing Farsi. More precisely, I will put Farsi in its spacetime. Kia highlights the necessity of putting aside “the assumption of a self-evident empirical territory as the ground upon which signification

⁸⁶ Despite clear overlaps between the studies of Kia and Vaziri, Kia fails to recognize Vaziri’s crucial contributions.

⁸⁷ Elling (2013) also acknowledges the ‘Persian-centrist’ perspectives within Iranian Studies.

accrued” (Ibid: 29). Historicizing Iran cannot leave our basic conceptions of space, time, history, and territory, and their interconnection, intact.

2.2. Beyond Empiricist Language: Conceptual History

To deepen Vaziri’s and Kia’s arguments that advocate for geohistoricizing nation, Iran, and language, Elden’s research is of crucial relevance. Partially drawing on Reinhart Koselleck’s idea of conceptual history Elden suggests that concepts must be both history-sensitive and geography-sensitive and demonstrates why it is necessary to historicize the concept of territory itself. His emphasis on the (geo)history of concepts highlights the role of language in the production of space. This is crucial since I will discuss Farsi and Farsization as inherent to the production of Iran. The concept of territory as *a bounded space* under the control of a state is a very recent historical product⁸⁸ (Elden, 2013: 322, 328). Elden’s methodology, which refines historical materialist approaches, offers a valuable framework that can be effectively utilized within Marxist scholarship. His exploration, primarily centered on European intellectual history, implicitly extends an invitation for the exploration and development of the etymology of ‘territory’ in various global contexts. My research can be considered as an academic endeavor contributing to the expansion of this field beyond its European focus.

Vaziri, Kia, and Elden highlight the necessity of rethinking our concepts in a more geohistorically specific (or space- and time- dependent) manner to distinguish Iran, Farsi, and Persia(n)⁸⁹. Despite their exceptional contributions, none of them is equipped with a dialectical

⁸⁸ I agree with Kipfer’s observation that one must admit that Elden’s conceptual genealogy of the term territory is methodologically state-dependent and, thus, does not provide a full material-social history of territorialization. Kevin Cox also believes that Elden’s definition of territory is ‘quite extraordinarily arbitrary’ (Cox, 2014: 352). Cox criticizes Elden for his focusing ‘on the discursive’ and believes that such a method “leaves us with the assumption that ideas carry an independent causal weight” (Ibid). In my view however Elden just highlights the ideational dimension of materiality and the material aspects of territory as well (Elden, 2013: 323).

⁸⁹ Vaziri says equating Persian/Fars and Ajam with Iran has been misleading. For instance, translating *Muluk al-Fars* (which exists in Arabic texts) as kingdoms of Iran is as wrong as translating *Muluk al-Roum* as the kingdoms of Italy.

theory of language. Enriching them with dialectical theories of the state-space, I aim to develop a spatiotemporal theory of Iranian state formation, a subject neither addressed nor intended by their studies. While these scholars acknowledge, to some extent, the language-dependency of territory and place, considering how language is fundamentally intertwined with the spatiotemporal matrix of the nation-state remains outside their scope. As a result, Vaziri, Kia, and Elden do not engage with the multiscalar dynamics of colonial relations. These gaps underscore the need for a more dialectical conception of language which situates it within its spacetime.

2.3. The Spatial Production of Language

As discussed, one of the mostly overlooked questions in Iranian historiographies and analyses of Iranian state is the production of national language (Farsi) and its role in the colonial (re)production of national state. The intertwined history of the nation state and language is often ignored. As a result, the geopolitically driven imposition of Farsi⁹⁰ on linguistically diverse populations is largely disregarded. In response, I explore how Lefebvre's theory of language, which is intricately linked to his theory of the production of space, can illuminate the dialectical relationship between language, state, and space. Lefebvre's theory of language positions language within the spatiotemporal matrix of the nation-state.⁹¹

The polyvalence of social space means that space “cannot be separated either from the productive forces, including technology and knowledge or from the social division of labour which shapes it, or from the state” (Lefebvre, 1991: 85). Lefebvre warns to be aware of the implications of the reduction of space to the state representation of space. He has illustrated this linguistic

⁹⁰ During the Pahlavis, 1925-1979, and the Islamic Republic, 1979- .

⁹¹ A comparable dialectical approach to language, which situates language within the spatial process of hegemony-building can be found in Gramsci who “explicitly relates the study of language to that of politics” (Ives, 2005). His discussion of ‘normative grammar’ shows how the formation of Italian language as the ‘common’ language of a nation it is a political act, which many try to cover up” (Gramsci, 1985, pp.181-2, Q29 2).

fetishism⁹² as an illusion to suppose that thought can say what is space based on propositions *about* space (Ibid: 162). The centrality of the state space is therefore functional in avoiding the linguistic fetishism and elitist idealism of the Farsist ruling class that dualistically prioritizes intellectual labour over manual labour. It is “the State which has systematized, if not invented, *grammar* and *orthography*” (Poulantzas, 1978: 59-60). Accordingly, “the popular masses are permanently kept at a distance from the centers of decision-making” (Ibid: 60). The State is not the mere result of the dualism between intellectual and manual labour but actively produces it through the production of spacetime (Ibid)⁹³.

Lefebvre’s language theory serves as a determining element for his theory of the production of space (Schmid, 2008: 28, 37). He develops a three-dimensional approach that offers a robust foundation to challenge the predominant dualistic conception of national state spacetime. Material practice as the starting point of life and of analysis constitutes the first moment. It stands in contradiction to the second moment: knowledge, language, and the written word. The third moment involves poesy and desire. In this way a three-dimensional dialectical figure emerges (Schmid, 2008: 33): spatial practice⁹⁴, *representations of space*, and spaces of representations⁹⁵ (Lefebvre, 1991: 33). *Representations of space*, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic sub-dividers, and social engineers, “are tied to the relations of production and to the

⁹² By fetishism I mean “the process whereby human beings and social relations are perceived to be natural, closed and immutable whereas they are really *geo-historical*, open and reflexive (Hartwig, 2007: 206).

⁹³ This is manifested in modern law: outside the law, individuals contain no knowledge or truth. Capitalist law indicates “the process whereby the agents of production are entirely dispossessed of their ‘intellectual powers’ to the benefit of the dominant classes” (Poulantzas, 1978: 89). Modern law embodies the state monopoly of knowledge production (Ibid: 90).

⁹⁴ *Spatial practices* refer to “the physical and material flows (of individuals, groups or commodities), circulations, transfers and interactions that occur in and across space, structured in such a way as to assure social life is produced and reproduced” (Zieleniec, 2007: 73).

⁹⁵ *Spaces of representations* refer to space “as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of inhabitants and users ... This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (Lefebvre, 1991: 39).

order which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge” (Ibid). This is the dominant space of any society (Ibid: 38–9).

Three moments of the production of space are derived from Lefebvre’s three-dimensional theory of language. *Spatial practice* designates the material dimension of social activity. The spatial refers to the simultaneity of activities. Spatial practice is an analogy to the syntagmatic dimension of language. *The representations of space*, which is analogous to the paradigmatic dimension of language emerge at – but are not limited to – the discursive level and therefore comprise definitions, scientific theories of space, and maps (Schmid, 2008: 36-37). The third moment of the production of space concerns the symbolic dimension that could refer to a divine power, the logos, the state, masculine or feminine principle. More importantly, this dimension refers to the process of signification that links itself to a *material* symbol (Ibid).

The theory of the production of space goes one decisive step further than the three-dimensional language theory and seeks to encompass the entirety of social practice and not merely a partial aspect of it. It is thus directed towards the *materiality* of social practice and the central role of the human body (Schmid, 2008: 40). Language thus inherently constitutes an element of the production of space. Naming, theorizing, renaming, historiography, translation, mapping, etc., all are key mechanisms of the production of space. Language is not merely a means of transferring information from an abstract ‘sender’ to an abstract ‘receiver’ ... it is a means of social production (Sućska, 2020: 89). The class which controls the dominant language controls one of the primary means of production (Ibid).

Building on these dialectical insights, I problematize the historical formation of ‘Iran’ through the state-driven production of Farsi as the national language. The Farsist practices of the state, which presuppose the existence of Iran, have played a pivotal role in this process. In chapter

two I show that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a linear temporal regime and Iran as a nation enclosed by a national history were absent. In chapter three, I indicate how the production of Farsi as the national language served to form the Iranian nation as a unified Fars nation.

I characterize the invention of the ‘Iranian’ language family and its tripartite periodization (Old, Middle, and New Persian) as a racist-colonial-class strategy of Farsization of history. This Farsist periodization is colonial since it systematically ignores non-Persian temporalities. Farsization of history has resulted in the production of a Farsist temporal regime. I see this in the context of the capitalist temporal matrix that entails ‘*cumulative and irreversible time*’ – measurable and controllable by means of clocks and calendars – as standardizing and abstractly unifying technologies (Poulantzas, 1978). The Farsist state establishes the modern nation by systematic attempts at eliminating non-Persian pasts and temporal regimes and turning these spacetimes into mere variations of its own Farsist history. The Farsization however has not been confined to history. Space has also been Farsicized. The state has systematically Farsicized space and territory. The erasure of non-Persian pasts has been intertwined with the violent removal of the non-Persian spaces.

3. State Space:

3.1. The Space of Nationalism

“Is not the secret of the State, hidden because it is so obvious, to be found in space?”

Henri Lefebvre (2003: 87)

Over the past three decades critical contributions have problematized Iranian nationalism by focusing on its spatial dimensions. Both Juan R. I. Cole (1996) and Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet (1999) have focused on the territorial and cartographic dimensions of Iranian nationalism and critically

analyzed the growth of territorial consciousness and the formation of Iran's borders⁹⁶. Kashani-Sabet's work has been considered as "the most sophisticated and systematic study of the frontier in Iranian history." (Khazeni, 2007: 1409) As Kashani-Sabet demonstrates, while numerous significant works on Iranian nationalism have been published over the years, the cultural and political significance of *frontiers*, *geography*, and *land* has remained largely overlooked in these studies (Kashani-Sabet, 1997: 22).

Bert Fragner has also traced back what he calls "the stages of collective consciousness "of space/territory as a means of mental self-location in Iran" in the centuries prior to the Qajar period (Fragner, 2019: 60). Marashi (2008, 2014, 2020) critically examines other spatial dimensions of Iranian nationalism. He portrays the important role of urban space in the frequent staging of public ceremonial events in the formation of the Iranian nation (Marashi, 2008). Ehsani's (2014, 2017) focus on the material dimensions of state – such as pipelines and oil company towns – also examines a crucial spatial – urban-infrastructure – aspect of Iranian state formation, thereby addressing a significant gap in critical studies of Iranian nationalism.

In his more recent book, Marashi explores the transnational ties between Iranian nationalist intellectuals and the Parsi community in India (Marashi, 2020). Based on a reading of a number of neglected safarnama in Baluchistan, Khazeni (2007) explores conceptions of Qajar imperial perceptions of Iran's 'nature' and 'frontier'. Cronin's (2007) focus on 'tribal politics' and the forced sedentarization of nomadic populations, sheds light on another spatial dimension of Iranian nationalism and state formation by shifting our attention from urban politics to the rural areas and nomadic modes of life. Although Grigor (2009, 2021, 2025) may not explicitly frame her work in

⁹⁶ Spatiality, however, is not confined to the national borders. For example, studies on the spatial aspect of *administrative divisions* are scarce. Amid all the attention that Iranian politics has received since 1979, 'local politics has been almost totally neglected' (Chehabi, 1997: 2).

these terms, her scholarship offers a valuable architectural history of Iranian state formation. Their works have undoubtedly laid important groundwork for writing a spatial history of Iran. However, the concept of the production of space has not been within their theoretical purview.

The disregard for space is not confined to the field of Iranian studies⁹⁷; rather, it represents a widespread issue within social theory in general. Consequently, it is not surprising to see that a pervasive ‘spatial blindness’ is evident in theories of nationalism (Yiftachel, 2002: 215). Yiftachel highlights the bypassing of geographic scholarship, and subsequently, the privileging of the dynamics of time over space in theories of nationalism (Ibid: 219). Benedict Anderson, for instance, understands the emergence of nationalism in relation to the decline of religiosity, arguing that this shift necessitated new collective perceptions of time. Yet, national time can never be divorced from the on-going construction of national territory (Ibid: 216, 221-222). According to Anderson himself, his work focuses on the nation, print-languages, and time (Anderson, 2006: 3). Once the elite Latin market was saturated, attention shifted to the much larger potential markets of monoglot masses (Ibid: 38). Nothing served to ‘assemble’ related vernaculars more than capitalism which created mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through the market (Ibid: 43-44).

Bourgeoisie was the first class to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis (Anderson, 2006: 77). As literacy increased, it became easier to arouse popular support. As Nairn formulates, the new middle-class intelligentsia invited the masses into history (Ibid: 80).

⁹⁷ Although Kashani-Sabet does not engage with space in a Lefebvorean sense, she acknowledges that theorists of nationalism have often minimized the significance of land and frontiers in the national debate. As she explains, a key aspect of nation formation involved making the nation *physically* visible. Since members of a nation could not all know or see one another, tangible elements like land, maps, flags, and archaeological sites gave the nation a certain materiality, reinforcing nationalist narratives and shaping imagined frontiers. Therefore, “Maps, flags, and the homeland’s soil, for instance, became concrete embodiments of the nation” (Kashani-Sabet, 1997: 21). Kashani-Sabet (1997, 1999) has developed a new paradigm for nationalism that she calls ‘frontier fictions’; a framework that argues for the centrality of land in nationalism.

Elites/intellectuals not only claimed to speak on behalf of large numbers of anonymous dead people but insisted that they could say what they really meant and wanted, since they themselves did not understand (Ibid: 198). Anderson thus emphasizes the role of print-language in producing a new *temporality*: empty homogeneous time⁹⁸. Decades earlier, by emphasizing the centrality of space, Lefebvre had cautioned against this spatial blindness. As he says, nationalism is usually understood as a way of masking class contradictions and seducing the working class into an illusory national solidarity. This definition, however, reduces national question to linguistic and cultural one, “that is to say, to matters of secondary importance” (Lefebvre, 1991: 111-112).

My dialectical treatment of Iran critiques claims to Iran as historically false and arbitrary. This Iran has been an inorganic construction of elites in the process of state-formation. Inspired by those who see nations as imaginaries (Anderson) or invented traditions (Hobsbawm), and drawing on Marxist dialectical theories of state space, I argue that nations are inventions in a very particular sense; they are arbitrary unities of different real-existing spatio-temporalities and geo-histories (histories of language, organized religion, non-capitalist formations, etc.). While these components are often falsely claimed as national (Iranian), they are not arbitrary themselves. My work tries to give insight into these very real historical strands that are falsely homogenized in the search for national coherence, as ‘Iran’. I aim to do this by highlighting the space and territorial dimensions of nation and nationalism, and more specifically, by focusing on the spatiotemporal matrices of nation state. Nationalist claim is an integral part of hegemonic struggles. Hegemonic struggle is a spatiotemporal process (Kipfer 2008; 2002).

⁹⁸ Take national anthems, for example. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity across homogeneous, empty time (Anderson, 2006: 144-145) which has resulted in modulation of nationalism (Ibid: 157).

3.2. Mapping the Nation: Urbanization and Cartography

Compared to Anderson's, my approach extends beyond the role of abstract time and language in constructing a nationalist discourse and examines the imprint of language on space. This approach enables me to highlight how language shapes not just an imagined nation but does so by its inscription in the spatiotemporal matrix of the nation state. Thus, in addition to abstract time and language, other political practices and technologies have been essential in the production of the nation. Cartography, as an essential component of the infrastructural projects and urbanization, has played a crucial role in mapping the nation and its linear history and thereby in the production of national space. Anderson, in the second edition of *Imagined Communities*, devoted a separate chapter to cartography. He argues that a map was a model *for*, rather than a model *of*, what it purported to represent (Anderson, 2006: 173-174).

Anderson's revision was in fact informed by Winichakul's work on Siam who has traced the cartographic processes by which a bordered 'Siam' came into being between 1850 and 1910 (Anderson, 2006: 171). On all the maps before the second half of the nineteenth century, the interior had been terra incognita (Winichakul, 1994: 113, 114). Not even one map of the boundary was completed before the crisis⁹⁹ in 1893. The growth of urbanization and infrastructural project in Bangkok required the increasing role of mapping (Ibid). Mapping created a new entity whose geo-body had never existed before; it did not passively reflect Siam, rather, it has actively structured it. Nation thus becomes a *natural* feature of the earth's surface (Ibid: 129, 130, 132).

All the accounts about the loss of territories must establish that the geo-body of Siam was always there (Winichakul, 1994: 147). The prior existence of the geo-body prevents any

⁹⁹ The Paknam Incident was a military engagement during the Franco-Siamese War in July 1893. While sailing off Paknam on Siam's Chao Phraya River, three French ships violated Siamese territory and a Siamese fort, and a force of gunboats fired warning shots. In the ensuing battle, France won and blockaded Bangkok.

recollection that it was in the process of being created. The role of mapping as a key mechanism of the production of space is thereby concealed (Ibid). This process conceals the expansionist desire but magnifies the anticolonial pretension. So, what should be a history of regional hegemony turns out to be a glorious anticolonial history performed by the national elite (Ibid: 148). Following the global current of fascism, the Phibun government (1939-1944) changed the name of the country to Thailand in 1939¹⁰⁰ (Ibid: 150). Bharat and Aryavarta in India¹⁰¹, Arya and Iranshahr in Iran, and Thai in Siam; all are invented myths to legitimize the implementation of internal colonization.

Language and cartography are interconnected. The birth of ‘Siam’ locates in the composition of the characters S, I, A, and M. Likewise, its geo-body is born in a map (Winichakul, 1994: 174). This observation lends further support to the argument that the means of production are not confined to the physical means alone. *Representations* of spacetime are also part of the means of production. These representations, as specialized forms of knowledge, are produced through historiographic, Farsist, and cartographic practices of Iranian nation state. A revolutionary strategy relies on the autonomous production of knowledge, including representations of spacetime.

3.3. Nationalism, Totality, and the International

A fundamental characteristic of nationalism’s spacetime is its international dimension. Goonewardena (2004: 667) argues that we need to engage with ‘totality’ so that we can “take stock of the geopolitics of imperialism and colonialism which are ... glossed over by the euphemism of globalization” (Ibid). The overstatement of ‘globalization’ and ‘networks’ is part of a theoretical trend that questions such things as structures, collective action (Joseph, 2010: 141), and their

¹⁰⁰ It is noteworthy that the name Iran was chosen for the country in place of Persia in the year 1935, coinciding with the international rise of fascism.

¹⁰¹ The conception of Bharat as a national-territorial entity only emerged during the 1860s and 1870s (Goswami, 2004: 156). Nineteenth century geohistorical works attributed an exceptional significance to the northern region where, the Gangetic basin, commonly designated as Aryavarta (land of the Aryans), was hierarchically privileged as the paradigmatic space of the imagined nation (Ibid: 159). By the turn of the century, the conception of Bharat as a territorially bounded national entity had acquired a self-evident givenness (Ibid: 165-166).

spatiotemporal aspects. The misplaced hostility of postcolonialism towards totality prevents us from seeing these structures. Nonetheless, critiquing the *structure* of the nation-state, and its underlying ideology is indispensable. Ideology is present in the form of its silences, absences, or ‘representations omitted’ – imperialism and colonialism. These absences in postcolonial theories are the conditions of possibility of the very nationalist conflict that uprooted diasporas from their homeland and landed them somewhere else (Goonewardena, 2004: 684). The abstract preoccupation with the distant past¹⁰² is a fundamental factor in absencing present structures such as internal colonization.

Echoing Goonewardena’s emphasis on totality, Matin (2019) has discussed one of the ‘representations omitted’ i.e., the international aspect of nationalism in greater detail. His theory tackles key methodological issues that my research also grapples with. Matin highlights an intellectual impasse in nationalism studies: how to theoretically digest the nation’s Janus-like character, i.e., its simultaneous modernity and antiquity. The existing perspectives, according to Matin, are unable to address the fact that in the majority of cases the rise of nationalism has preceded capitalist development¹⁰³. Matin seeks the root cause in social theory’s internalism (Matin, 2013: 2). This internalism has penetrated nationalism studies to the extent that they have ended up in unilinear conception of socio-historical change. Matin explains that methodological nationalism is produced by theoretical internalism¹⁰⁴: an intellectual mode in which concept

¹⁰² If scholars do not care about the life around them, they are at most an antique fan, not a historian (Zou, 2022: 405). As Bloch says, “a man may wear himself out ... in seeking to understand the past, if he is totally ignorant of the present” (Ibid).

¹⁰³ I do not regard nations as pre-capitalist entities. I specifically aim to demonstrate how Iran has been practically produced as a nation during the rise of imperialist capitalism. My focus is on those practices that have enabled the production of Iran as a nation. I argue that historiographic, linguistic, and cartographic practices of the state have played a key role in producing the Iranian nation. As opposed to the internalist approaches, my research shows that the Iranian nation did not exist prior and external to capitalism.

¹⁰⁴ A similar critique has been developed around two decades earlier in radical human geography. Criticizing the internalist way of thinking about place, Doreen Massey (1995: 182-84) says internalism is recognizable in the conventional conceptions of both space and time. When it comes to time, internalism denotes a disruption between

formation are conducted by reference to relations and dynamics internal to a particular ‘society’ or human collectivity (Ibid: 4). This procedure removes mutually constitutive relations between societies from the theoretical purview of social theory.

Matin contends that over the past decade or so, the Marxian branch of historical sociology within International Relations has undertaken this challenge, reflecting on the critical importance of ‘the international’ in the emergence of specific social orders. Here ‘the international’ refers to ‘societal multiplicity’. Uneven and combined development (UCD) incorporates the condition of ‘the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous¹⁰⁵’ (Matin, 2013: 4-5). Thus, UCD is concerned with the *totality* of social reality across historical epochs (Matin, 2019: 5). Matin shows how the nation’s Janus-like character can be explained through the UCD, which operationalizes the consequences of societal multiplicity, i.e., difference, coexistence, interaction, combination, and dialectical change. According to him, the internalism of nationalism studies has led to a search for capitalist causes of nation-formation processes *inside* given societies (Ibid: 3). However, the uneven and combined nature of all developmental processes means that nation-formation does not necessarily require the empirical presence of capitalism at the level of individual social formations (Matin, 2019: 3).

Through his critique of Eurocentrism as an internalist conception of modernity, Matin has developed his international social theory through a critical engagement with the internalism of Anderson’s implicit theoretical framework (Matin, 2019). Eurocentrism, Matin says, is a specifically ‘internalist’ mode of comprehending modernity rooted in its abstraction from the

the past and the present (or potential future) of a place. The portions of time, the periods, are then considered to be external to each other. It is then as if the past is frozen and completed, at a particular moment in time and has transferred to the present intact. As Lefebvre argues, “when space is split, time is distanced” (Lefebvre, 1991: 339). In a fallacious manner, then, this past is considered to be materialized in a particular place which is present. In other words, a particular history turns to be a particular geography. The internalism is thus multiplied in terms of space and geography as well. Space is then purged from any ‘external’ influence.

¹⁰⁵ Marx’s formal subsumption, as Harootunian (2015) says, can be of the same function.

spatial dimension of social development. Eurocentrism “individuates societies and encloses them within an abstract ‘universal’ history’ that is derived from the particular internal history of Europe”¹⁰⁶ (Matin, 2013: 2). Matin argues that “print-capitalism in Anderson’s account occupies such a central explanatory place as to theoretically eclipse the systematic ... significance of the wider impact of capitalism in the rise and expansion of nationalism and nation-state form” (Matin, 2013: 77). Accordingly, Matin says Anderson’s account of the nation ignores capitalism as a ‘social-relational *totality*’ (Matin, 2019: 9). In contrast, Matin emphasizes Trotsky’s UCD as a “theoretical framework concerned with the *totality* of social reality across historical epochs” (Ibid: 5).

Criticizing contemporary Marxist approaches to the international which leaves the general abstractions of Marxist theory, and therefore its internalist mode, intact (Matin, 2013: 14) Matin states Trotsky’s UCD is a remarkable exception. Drawing on Poulantzas’s, Lefebvre’s, and Gramsci’s spatial insights, I think that it is *the spatial* and not merely *the international* that better serves Matin’s purpose. The international is a genus of the spatial¹⁰⁷. We need a social theory which has the spacetime in its totality at its core. The international is integrally part of the spatial

¹⁰⁶ Matin argues that the Weberian framework of the ‘multiple modernities’ approach leaves Eurocentrism’s internalist method intact. Postcolonialism, on the other hand, although sensitive to the international, is unable to develop a general social theory due to its hostility towards universal categories (Matin, 2013: 3). Matin argues that homogeneity is not an intrinsic quality of the concept of the universal, but a result of its specifically internalist mode of construction (Matin, 2012: 1). This shows that overcoming Eurocentrism requires an explicit theoretical incorporation of the universal as ‘interactive heterogeneity’ (Ibid: 13). As Matin explains, “the incorporation of international relations into social theory involves the adoption of a plural ontology that posits relationships and processes between and within societies as mutually constitutive, and development as intrinsically interactive and multilinear (Matin, 2013: 3).

¹⁰⁷ Matin argues that thanks to the ‘inter-’ ‘the International’ (in the specific sense of ‘societal multiplicity’) immediately signals multiplicity, and by contrast ‘the spatial’ or ‘space’ connotes singularity. This argument is however contingent upon how these concepts are defined. If we adopt Lefebvre’s conception of space – as an open-ended multi-scalar and multi-rhythmic social form – then the spatial implies a more differentiated multiplicity than the international. The issue is not about the presence or absence of the prefix ‘inter-’ but rather about the underlying conceptual framework. The concept of the international indeed represents a specific form of multiplicity: that of multiple societies or nations. But it does not adequately address other forms of multiplicity such as different scales. The international does not capture space as the positive heterogeneity (Massey, 2005: 149-50) or what Gillian Rose (1993) calls radical heterogeneity. Space in this sense is defined by radical difference and heterogeneity, not territoriality. Territoriality, which characterizes the space of the international, is a negative form of difference (Rose, 1993: 272).

and the cross-cutting, inter-scalar relations through which national state space is produced. Such a spatial social theory allows me to develop a more critical conception of internal colonialism.

Matin's contributions, along with a dialectical conception of state space, and the empirical findings of my research, enable me to get a more differentiated conception of internal colonialism. In this dissertation, the adjective 'internal' in 'internal colonialism' does not have anything to do with theoretical internalism. Internal, here, instead differentiates this form of colonialism from the conventional conception of colonialism which treats it as a relation of domination only at the international scale. While the term 'internal' colonialism is well-established, we need to be aware of the pitfalls of internalism (Matin, 2012; 2013; 2019). One might ask internal or external to what? Based on a dialectical conception of spacetime, we recognize that social relations are not confined within a bounded spacetime; they inherently extend beyond set borders. The structural causes of the formation of national states are neither internal nor external. Spacetime is not a container where things and relations occur. Rather, space and social relations are intertwined from the very outset. As a result, when spacetime is viewed in a dialectically relational manner, the notion of 'internal' colonialism becomes problematic. Colonialism operates across multiple scales and is not internal to or contained within any single geographical area, as these areas are not external to each other in the first place. So, colonialism is not 'external' to any specific geography or nation. It is the very dualism of internal-external that needs to be transcended.

However, this is only part of the story. Over the past century, the state production of space, has led to the production and fetishization of national territories. Consequently, the internal-external dualism has gained materiality and has been inscribed in space. That is why we need to dismantle this entrenched dualism. Hence, 'internal' colonialism does exist as it reflects how colonial mechanisms are implemented *inside* a national territory in a relative autonomy from the

broader colonial structures/forces at other scales. Yet, these ‘internal’ mechanisms are not isolated from ‘external’ forces which underscores why the internal-external terminology is both insufficient and problematic. To address these contradictions, we must develop a new concept. I accordingly propose ‘national colonization’ instead of ‘internal colonialism’.

Some may argue that this introduces another dualism, that of national versus international, potentially shifting rather than solving the issue. However, the national-international dualism is less constrained with internalism than internal-external. National does not necessarily imply internal, nor does international inherently correspond to external – unless, in an internalist manner, one presumes *a priori* that they are distinct and exterior to each other. Additionally, national and international refer to historically specific scales, unlike more abstract nature of ‘internal’ and ‘external’. Therefore, in historical analysis, the internal-external dualism is of a limited use if at all. Being situated at the historical level also warrants the relevance of the concept of national colonization in my research. Thus, I think national colonization offers a more advanced and effective framework, as it emphasizes the pivotal role of the *nation*-state in the colonial production of *national* territories. The concept of national colonization offers greater explanatory power, particularly in understanding the production of Iran.

The concept of national, or even more precisely, Farsist, colonization provides an additional advantage. In the context of anti-colonial struggles, it is often assumed that national movements are anti-colonial because they resist a particular form of colonialism. This can lead to the mistaken belief that the national, by nature, is anti-colonial. Thus, everything national, like nationalization of natural resources is often considered as positive and progressive. However, this perspective overlooks the potential for national movements and nationalization practices to replicate colonial dynamics at various scales and cannot problematize nationalism as the ideology that legitimizes

and reproduces national colonization. As Mamdani says, the relation between the modern state and modern colonialism is neither sequential nor contingent. Rather, it is one of mutual constitution (cited in Matin, 2022: 1). This co-constitution, Matin says, is mediated through political centralization and cultural homogenisation that were pivotal to European colonialism's 'civilising mission' and replicated in postcolonial states' building of unitary nation-states (Ibid). He sees this process as 'inter-subaltern colonialism' in which 'colonialism' is synonymous with 'foreign domination'.

Matin uses 'inter-subaltern' to avoid the *internalist* connotations of 'internal' colonialism.¹⁰⁸ He clarifies that the prefix 'Inter' in the 'inter-subaltern' refers to "the dualistic position of ruling elites of the Iranian nation-state, who are internationally subaltern, but nationally colonial". This concept allows us to explain why Iran as a lately developed nation state is structurally bounded and forced to colonize its spaces-peoples. The international system is spatiotemporally founded upon this hierarchy of colonizations. While the concept provides valuable insights, it also presents a few complications. The term 'inter-subaltern colonialism' suggests relationships among subaltern groups. According to this perspective, both the Iranian ruling elites and non-Persian groups are depicted as subaltern. It is, to some extent, true to say that both the Iranian ruling class and non-Persian Iranians occupy subaltern positions relative to the dominant nation-states. Nevertheless, my focus lies primarily on the way the Farsist *ruling* class colonizes non-Persian

¹⁰⁸ However, there is a territorial internality to this process that Matin acknowledges when he says, 'foreignness' refers to the 'relations of cultural *exteriority*' or that inter-subaltern colonialism refers to "'postcolonial states' ideological reconstruction of stateless peoples *within* their territory as 'ethnic minorities'" (Matin, 2022: 1) Matin believes that postcolonial states "*internally* perform sovereignty through colonial domination of their 'ethnic minorities', which is central to their self-reproduction as (unitary) nation-states. Yet simultaneously, they also occupy a subaltern position vis-à-vis globally hegemonic states within capitalist world order" (Ibid: 1-2). Matin then argues that inter-subaltern colonialism is international in origins, and "it is therefore in theoretical excess of internalist concepts such as 'internal colonialism'" (Ibid: 2).

subalterns. In this relationship, the ruling class assumes the role of the colonizer rather than the subaltern.

Moreover, ‘inter-subaltern colonialism’ does not account for the Iranian state’s role as an international colonial force. Given Iran’s active presence within the nation-states of the region, such as Iraq and Syria, it cannot be deemed internationally subaltern – unless we disregard Iraq and Syria as nation-states and interpret the term ‘international’ to specifically denote Iran’s interactions with Western nation states. I argue that in the Iranian context, a ‘nation-state’ in formation has colonially produced a *national* history, language, and territory. So, in contrast to what ‘inter-subaltern colonialism’ might suggest, the Iranian ruling class does not constitute a subaltern class in relation to the non-Persian peoples of Iran. Therefore, the applicability of inter-subaltern colonialism in explaining the colonial dynamics of the Iranian nation-state remains debatable.

Goswami (2004) has developed a Lefebvrian framework that addresses the same problems Matin criticizes: methodological nationalism and postcolonial theory. She simultaneously addresses the limitations within subaltern studies and challenges Benedict Anderson. Additionally, she highlights the importance of infrastructural practices in the production of India as a national space. Complementing on Matin’s *temporal* theorization of nation as being simultaneously modern and ancient, Goswami develops a *spatiotemporal* approach: the doubled form of nationalism as simultaneously *universal* and *particular* that allows both for objectivist and subjectivist theories of nationalism (Goswami, 2002: 775). Goswami believes that Anderson’s account of the migration of nationalist models proceeds without reference to on-going sociocultural and local-regional shifts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. So, the circulation of nationalist models is delinked causally from their on-going contexts of production. Implicitly drawing on the concept

of totality, Goswami says Anderson's focus on print-media, rather than the new form of social relations, overlooks the *multiple* causal forces that shape nationalism (Ibid: 780). His narrative thus represents social causality as temporally homogenous rather than heterogeneous (Ibid: 782).

The newly formed national space can be characterized as a differentiated variation of the logic of colonial abstract space produced on/as a new scale. The same promise however is reproduced: peripheries, gradually will reach the same level of development; through the production of national scale (Goswami, 2002: 796). The interpretation of modernity as an autochthonous formation that developed within particular self-enclosed regions, and subsequently extended outward to so-called late developers forever doomed to play a game of catch-up, pervades both modernization and Marxian accounts of *transition* to capitalism in non-Western societies (Goswami, 2004: 28). An emphasis on what Lefebvre calls the 'superimposition and interpenetration' of social spaces within a single, yet uneven, global spacetime unsettles narratives that delimit the modern within a particular geography and posit global capitalism as a process external to peripheral states (Ibid). Accordingly, as discussed in Chapter Four, the production of Iran as a late developer cannot be separated from the imperialist formation of a single, uneven global spacetime.

The making of a global space-time is not reducible to the expansion of capitalism alone. Rather it signifies the formation of relations of interdependence between multiple spatial scales and temporalities. The non-capitalist modes of life, and more specifically, the presence of internal colonization that characterize the production of Iran should be considered as one of these multiple spatiotemporalities. In contrast to the analyses of 'globalization' as a process of homogenization, Lefebvre suggests that global space is hierarchically organized and differentiated. This formulation counters approaches that conflate the structural tendency of capital toward homogenization with

its actual historical realization¹⁰⁹ (Goswami, 2004: 36-37). This allows for an understanding of Iran which does not *a priori* confine its production to the actualized structural tendency of capital toward homogenization. A conception of global space-time as differentiated “foregrounds the ongoing creation of unevenness as the *internal* supplement of the universalizing orientation of capital¹¹⁰” (Ibid: 40).

By the 1870s, national-economy making mandated the reorganization of economic space into mutually exclusive national blocs through the massive state-directed investments in infrastructural projects (Goswami, 2002: 788). While these movements were fashioned by local [national] social relations and power struggles, their temporal simultaneity and structural similarities was conditioned by their location within ‘a single, hierarchical global space-time’ (Ibid). A range of imperialist practices and institutions helped forge the national as the privileged scale for social relations. These included the demarcation and mapping of national-territorial boundaries which necessitates the production of nation states like Iran. These imperialist practices include the formation of a vast, territorially integrated networks of communication infrastructures such as roads, railways, bridges, canals, and post-offices, which I study as the infrastructural production of national territory, and the appropriation of natural resources, which I discuss under the production of nature. Thus, imperialist practices created practices of spatial and economic planning that took a demarcated national territory as their unit of development. The creation of a national built environment in the form of capital cities, monuments, official cemeteries, museums,

¹⁰⁹ This account bears resemblances to Albritton’s levels of analysis approach but is more dialectical by explicitly incorporating space.

¹¹⁰ Goswami says, “the universalizing dynamic of capital develops unevenly across space and time” and “the contradictions internal to historical capitalism produce a global, differentiated, and hierarchical space-time” (Goswami, 2004: 40). She however does not differentiate ‘the universalizing tendency of capital’ and ‘historical capitalism’. The levels of analysis approach provides a complementary explanation for Goswami’s Lefebvrian view.

and parks as places of state-mediated collective memory helped forge the spatio-temporal matrices of the modular nation form (Goswami, 2002: 790).

As Goswami shows, analyzing the production of national space raises the question of the space of production and therefore imperialism. Discussing Marx's conception of average rate of profit Lefebvre highlights the spatial aspect of the production: "when it takes the *average* organic composition of capital into account, theory rejoins social *space* – i.e., it ceases to operate in an abstract space. This average is only meaningful in connection with a specific space; the territorially bounded space of a *country* or a continent". So, Marx's concepts of average social labour and average rate of profit have no utility at the level of a single factory and are meaningful only "when applied *worldwide*, for there is a global organic composition of capital which subsumes the averages obtaining in specific countries or *nations*" (Lefebvre, 1991: 346). This helps us understand the spatial aspect of the production of Iran and Iranian nationalism by putting it within the worldwide chain of imperialist expansion.

Drawing on Lefebvre's theorization of the production of space(time)¹¹¹, I analyze the production of Iran by examining its entanglement with the production of hierarchical spaces of the nation-state, nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, and racial colonialism. The advent of the so-called *world* market has been associated with the planetary proliferation and naturalization of the nation state form (Lefebvre, 1991: 375) during the second half of the twentieth century (Ibid: 23). The State thereafter controls space and time.¹¹² Taking charge of growth is impossible without controlling the hierarchical production of space on different scales. Internal colonization and the

¹¹¹ The production of space can be complemented with a theory of the production of time. An initial version of the later has been developed by Lefebvre in *Rhythmanalysis* (2004). Drawing on that, one can argue that historiographic practices produce the *dominant statist rhythm*, creating a unilinear national rhythm that facilitates the formation of an imagined community. The enforcement of Farsi indicates an attempt to colonially flatten/homogenize the rhythms of non-Persian spaces and thereby contributing to the production of a national *spatiotemporal matrix*.

¹¹² The state crushes time by reducing differences to repetitions. The state, as both the end and the meaning of history, flattens the social and cultural spheres (Lefebvre, 1991: 23).

production of Iran should therefore be understood as an extension of the state space and its role in growth-oriented development. As a result, today more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space, and forms of the class struggle are more varied than formerly and include the political actions of national minorities (Lefebvre, 1991: 55). Nationalism thus acts as a class strategy to create a buffer zone that keeps the exploited and the colonized (non-Persians) at a safe distance from class politics¹¹³.

Utilizing this theoretical framework, I approach the research question of how Iran has been produced as a nation-state by analyzing three interrelated mechanisms: historiographic, Farsist, and cartographic practices of the state. I argue that these practices constitute the primary mechanisms through which Iran has been represented and produced. It seems that the state has produced national time, language, and space within a Farsist spatio-temporal matrix. More specifically, I argue that the triadic practices of the state have played a crucial role in the production of Iran through internal colonization. Historiographic practices have contributed to the production of racist ideologies/knowledge and linear history. Farsist practices have led to the production and naturalization of a dualistic, statist worldview, and Farsization of spacetime. And cartographic practices have produced an abstract, bounded territory that has served as the condition of the possibility of Iran as an imagined nation.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I concentrated on those works that in one way, or another have attempted to historicize the central methodological concepts of nation, territory, spacetime, state, and Iran. I reviewed a range of sources addressing state *time*, *language*, and *space*, beginning with the state

¹¹³ Nationalism has also been employed as a tool of anti-colonial resistance or as part of working-class movements. However, viewed over the long term, even these revolutionary struggles have often resulted in the reproduction of the racial-colonial-class relations they sought to dismantle. This occurs through the reproduction of the nation-state's racial-colonial spatiotemporal matrix.

time. I critically analyzed the dualistic assumptions of historiographic works on Iran. By situating Iran within the hierarchical production of global space I showed how both Marxist and postcolonial theories have contributed to a dualistic conception of history. I discussed how dominant readings of Marx and capitalism have fostered a nationalist outlook that by overlooking the land, naturalizes linear conception of time and internal colonization. Then, I engaged with critical notions of ‘formal subsumption’, ‘levels of analysis’, and ‘spatial historicism’ to show the coexistence of capitalist and other histories.

Building on the discussion on state time, I then turned to the state language. After reviewing the works of Mostafa Vaziri and Mana Kia – alongside other scholars such as Asgharzadeh (2007), Marashi (2008, 2014, 2020), Cole (1996), Kashani-Sabet (1997, 1999, 2011, 2013), Fragner (1993, 1999, 2019), Cronin (2007), Matin-Asgari (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2014, 2024), and Mohammadpour and Soleimani (2020, 2022) – who have critically historicized ‘Iran’, I expanded on their discussions by incorporating Elden’s conceptual history of territory. Recognizing that Vaziri, Kia, and Elden do not explicitly address the nation state and the historical connection between language and the colonial production of the nation-state, I highlighted the necessity of examining the spatiotemporal matrix of the nation state. Building upon their contributions, I further developed their insights by incorporating a Marxist theory of state-space.

Subsequently, I explored critical studies on state space and nationalism. While Matin raises the international dimension of the state, his view does not account for the *production* of space. In contrast, Goswami offers a Lefebvrian analysis that emphasizes the state and its infrastructural components. Her work however does not address the cartographic practices of the state. To address this gap, I incorporated Winichakul’s insights which shed light on the role of cartographic processes in shaping national territory.

Different ideologies in the form of specialized, nationalist knowledge can hinder critical discourse on the interconnected forms of oppression and domination, thereby reproducing the nation-state form. Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that viable alternatives exist beyond this constrained framework. My theoretical framework reveals why dialectical theories of state space are crucial for challenging the diverse forms of nationalism and forging alternatives to national space.

Chapter Two

Iran's Time: Historiographic Practices of the State and Production of Iran as a National History

Introduction:

The majority of 'Iranians' have *passively* adopted a set of ideas that are the product of a century of exclusive state-centric knowledge. Such a long-standing process has shaped the 'Iranian' intellectual sphere in a specific way to serve the ruling class's interests. As a result, even today, the question of the colonization of peripheralized non-Persian regions-peoples of Iran is absent from the prevailing mindset of both Persian Iranians living in the urban centers, and non-Persians assimilated into Farsi/Persian culture. Even mentioning Iranian 'nations' rather than a single 'nation' immediately exposes one to the heavy accusation of 'separatism' (*Tajzie Talabi*). Focusing on the role of the state intellectuals and their conceptions of 'Iran', time/history, language, and space/territory through historiography in the late 19th and early 20th century, this chapter examines the production of Iranian history. I argue that this statist historiography of Iran initiated and led to the production of a Farsist ideology which became dominant. Accordingly, I ask how has Iran been produced through the historiographic practices of the state? What has been the role of the state's intellectuals in the process? To address these questions, I focus on the historiographic practices of the state. It seems that it is largely through historiographic practices (like history and geography textbooks, 'scientific', racist production of institutionalized knowledge, and architectural projects) since the late 19th century that nationalist conceptions of

time (and space) in and through Farsi are produced, naturalized, and penetrated into the peoples' everyday lives.

This chapter begins with a quick review of a key state intellectuals in late Qajar period and their influence on the historiographic scholarships. I provide a critical analysis of the intellectuals of Iranian state by highlighting class dimensions of the historiographic production of knowledge. By highlighting the implicit conceptions of space, time¹¹⁴, history and territory in the existing historiographic works, this chapter attempts to challenge the dominant taken-for-grantedness of 'Iran' and geohistoricize it. I argue that this state-centric production of knowledge that led to a national history has crucially contributed to the production of Iran as a unified *nation* with legal rights (which was coincident with the Constitutional Revolution, not surprisingly). Considering every relationship of hegemony as an educational relationship (Gramsci, in Ives, 2015: 8) I study educational textbooks on history, geography, and law produced during the late Qajar period by the prominent intellectuals of the state to show how nationalist representations of geohistory started to produce in and through Farsi.

To set the stage for the next chapter, I then examine whether and how historiographic practices of the state have been racist from the very outset. Here, I study the birth of Persian 'scientific' racism (Persian supremacy) that was achieved by the state intellectual's emphasis on language purity and the Aryan hypothesis. I indicate that the production of historiographic knowledge, as a form of specialized knowledge, has been fundamentally shaped by dualistic

¹¹⁴ Irancentric historiography has been rooted in the Aryan or other associated myths. All these myths are defined with a particular linear conception of time. According to the Twelver Shi'ist (messianic) myth for example the Major Occultation (329 AH-present, or 941 CE-present) is the second occultation of Imam Mahdi; the Hidden Imam which is expected to continue until his rise at the *end* of time to establish peace and justice on earth. Messianism originated in Zoroastrianism. In Zoroastrianism, the Saoshyant, is an eschatological savior figure who brings about *Frashokereti*, the *final* renovation of the world in which evil is finally destroyed. All these mythical narratives represent a linear conception of *time*. The Aryan myth and the very idea of Iran have a direct connection to Zoroastrianism and *Avesta*.

structure of Aryan racism. More specifically, I will discuss how linear, stagist historiography is intertwined with the Aryan racism. Then, I examine the absence/presence of a hegemonic national temporal regime which reflects the absence/presence of Iran as a nation during the late Qajar period.

The dualistic framework of Aryan racism gradually gave rise to the production of a linear, stagist conception of history, in which tribal and nomadic temporalities were being peripheralized by urbanist, sedentary temporal regimes of the state. I accordingly explore how Aryan racism – initially produced through the historiographic practices – facilitated the production of a Farsist temporal regime as a material foundation of Iran as a linear history. Aryan racism aligns with the racist dualistic framework that separates ‘modern’ from ‘pre-modern’ or ‘civilized’ from ‘uncivilized,’ reinforcing the narrative of linear progress that serves the interests of the Iranian ruling class. I argue that the state produces a forcefully national temporality to repress non-Persian temporal regimes and prevent the emergence of alternative subaltern (spatio)temporalities. The formation of Iranian national history has been made possible through this colonial process.

In light of the theoretical framework, the *production* of ‘specialized knowledge’ through historiography should be seen in its *totality*. This approach is necessary to avoid reductionist interpretations, as discussed in previous chapter. Historiographies were not merely a form of knowledge; rather, they became embedded in the spatiotemporal structure of the emerging nation-state. For a national history to be produced, it had to be inscribed into the temporal matrix of the state as well. I examine how the nationally colonial production of Iran has been intrinsically linked to the production of a linear Farsist history and temporality. Thus, the international backdrop of Aryan racist nationalism along with both discursive and physical moments of Aryan racism will be discussed respectively. This must be understood within the context of imperialism and the

concurrent rise of nationalisms, particularly German nationalism. We should not forget that intellectuals of the emerging ‘German’ state, such as Friedrich Schlegel, first connected language and race. As a result, the next chapter will examine the role of language (Farsi).

In the theoretical framework I discussed why *representations* of spacetime are part of the means of production. Accordingly, in this chapter I argue that dualist representations of spacetime (linear time, racist space) as means of production are essential for the formation of Iranian nation state. Given the dialectical relationship between time and space, the production of abstract (fragmented, quantified, measurable) time is inextricably connected to the production of abstract space. In this context, I discuss how the production of Tehran as the nation’s capital was pivotal in the spatialization of the abstract temporal regime of the nation state. Time and temporality are not external to the state. More precisely, the state is not external to the production of spacetime. It is the state that produces the national history. This connection between the state and time becomes evident through practices such as calendar reforms and the imposition of homogenizing clock time. I show how through these practices, the state actively produces its own unified temporal regime. These efforts to standardize and control the perception and measurement of time are fundamental to the production of national history, the establishment of a national temporal regime, and, by extension, the production of the Iranian nation.

1. The Embryonic Stage of National(ist) Historiographies

‘Iranian’ historiographies have arbitrarily¹¹⁵ produced and prioritized a particular *spatiotemporal* regime over the others. As Matthee says, Iranians look at their country as a natural, autochthonous entity ... endowed with a glorious history that stretches from the Achaemenids to the Islamic Republic (Matthee, 2021: 83). However, there *never* was a culturally or linguistically homogenous

¹¹⁵ The production of a national history is mechanistic and inorganic since it has been imposed from above.

state within a singular territory that we associate with Iran (Ibid). The guarded domains of Qajar *empire* do not correspond to the ‘Iranian’ nation state. Farsi had not yet been established as a defining feature of a unified nation. A variety of other languages were also common. During the Qajar period, literacy was extremely low, something around two or three percent of the whole populations. In addition, “a substantial portion of the population was pastoral nomads with no sense of territorial patriotism” (Cole, 1996: 37). It is estimated that nomads constituted approximately fifty percent of the ‘Iranian’ population in 1800, decreasing to twenty-five percent by 1900. ‘Iranian’ identity did not exist in that period (Ibid). Up until 150 years ago, the inhabitants of the dispersed regions that we now identify as Iran did not refer to themselves as Iranians. This is reflected in historical records, which reveal how both Persians and non-Persians perceived their connection to ‘Iran’:

The people in Baluchestan, the British telegraph employee Ernest Floyer observed in the 1870s, talked about Kerman¹¹⁶ ... as a faraway, inaccessible, largely imaginary place. The French explorer Gabriel Bonvalot ... a decade later met someone in Kordestan who was carrying Russian paper money. Asked why he did not carry Iranian coinage, the man responded by saying that the Iranians were too stupid. When Bonvalot inquired if the man himself was not Iranian, he replied by saying, ‘No, I am from Hamadan¹¹⁷’ (Matthee, 2021: 91).

This attitude remains evident at least until the 1970s, as demonstrated by Salzman (2020: 137-138). Contrary to the dominant belief, Iran has not always existed. If we analyze historiographic and cartographic practices of the state, it becomes clear that Iran as a historical product emerged very late primarily through the historiographic practices of the state in which intellectuals play a

¹¹⁶ Kerman, known in ancient times as the satrapy of Carmania, is the capital city of Kerman Province, Iran.

¹¹⁷ Hamadan or Hamedan is the capital city of Hamadan Province in the western part of Iran. According to Herodotus, Hamadan was established by the Medes (678-549 BC) and is believed to be among the oldest ‘Iranian’ cities.

crucial role. Iran has been produced in an elitist manner based on the perceptions and interests of the Farsist ruling classes. Eurocentric colonial scholarship and specifically orientalist have played a fundamental role in producing 'Iran'. This 'Iran' has been to a great extent, if not entirely, irrelevant to the lived experiences of the subaltern classes. The statist production of historical knowledge was initiated during the late Qajar period, and more specifically, the Nâseri era¹¹⁸ (1848-1896) (Amanat, 2012: 365). This was made possible through Orientalist scholarship and the subsequent awareness of archeological findings about the so-called 'Iran's pre-Islamic past'.

It was through a range of written historiographic works in Farsi (largely through translation) that an unprecedented memory or historical awareness was 'scientifically' produced in and through Farsi. My emphasis on Farsi gains more relevance when we consider that, during the late Qajar era, majority of 'Iranians' were not Fars/Persian. Over the past one hundred years, the statist production of historiographic knowledge in and through Farsi has been an essential mechanism of the production of Iran. This 'normative' prioritization of Farsi over other 'spontaneous' languages like Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Baluchi, etc. has been fundamental in the production of Iran. As this chapter shows the nationally colonial production of Iran is intrinsically related to the production of Farsist 'specialized knowledge' that has been crucial in what I call Farsization of history. Farsization has had an explicit racial aspect:

Throughout the second decade of the 19th century, a clearer narrative of Iranian historical identity began to emerge, emphasizing Iran's political continuity from ancient to modern times ... An

¹¹⁸ Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1831-1896) was the fourth Shah of Qajar Iran from 1848 to 1896 when he was assassinated. He was the first modern Iranian monarch who formally visited Europe and wrote of his travels in his memoirs.

unpublished work of Hedâyat¹¹⁹, *Nezhâd-nâme-ye pâdshâhân-e Irâni-nezhâd* ('A Genealogical¹²⁰ Account of the Kings of Iranian descent'), written in 1860, is perhaps the earliest example ... What distinguished this work, moreover, was Hedâyat's use of a 'pure' Persian style devoid of words of Arabic origin (Amanat, in Melville, 2012: 327, 328).

Hedayat's initiation was followed by Jalâl-al-Din Mirzâ. His work, *Nâme-ye khosrovân* (Book of the Khosrows, i.e., Sasanid kings) was the first history textbook published in Persian for elementary level students of the *Dâr-al-fonun*¹²¹. Like Hedayat's text, *Nâme-ye khosrovân* (written between 1868 and 1870) was also in a Persian purged of Arabic words. These works that were essential in Farsization of history, or the production of a Farsist history, were directly related to the mythical narrations of a Zoroastrian past (Ibid: 328-329). According to Zia-Ebrahimi (2016), Jalâl-al-Din Mirzâ¹²², is the first Iranian writer who introduced the 'idea of Iran' as a 'continuous' historical entity into the Persian-speaking intellectual circles. He employed a textual strategy that avoided borrowed and specifically Arabic words, thereby establishing a form of linguistic puritanism, which is a principal feature of nationalist writings. Drawing on my theoretical framework, I argue that claims to hegemony entail claims to spacetime and geohistory. The historiographic practices of the state serve as key mechanisms of articulating and proliferating these claims. In the following, I examine the representations of history and territory in historiographic works, utilizing space and time as methodological concepts.

¹¹⁹ Rezâ-Qoli Khan (1800-1871) was the great-grandfather of Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951). Sadegh Hedayat was an Iranian writer who had also translated a few books focused on 'Iran' including *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, a surviving 'Middle Persian' text on geography, which was completed in the late eighth or early ninth centuries AD.

¹²⁰ Amanat here has translated '*nezhadname*' to 'a genealogical account' and *nezhad* to 'descent' which is not precise. *Nezhad* in Farsi explicitly refers to what race means in English. A better translation would be *A Racial Account of the Kings of Iranian Race*.

¹²¹ *Dâr ul-Funun* (meaning 'polytechnic college'), established in 1851, is the oldest Western-style institute of higher learning in Iran. *Dâr al-Funun* originally was conceived as a polytechnic to train upper-class Persian youth.

¹²² The 55th son of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar (1769-1834), the second Shah (king) of Qajar.

2. Intellectuals and the Farsist¹²³ Production of Iranian History

This chapter does not offer a class analysis of the production of Iran¹²⁴. Instead, it focuses on class dimensions of the production of knowledge by the intellectuals who substantially contributed to the production of Iran. Drawing on the theoretical framework, particularly the critique of linear conception of history, and the role of state intellectuals in its construction, this section explores some of the most significant educational texts authored by the first generation of intellectuals of the ‘Iranian’ state. These intellectuals epitomize the societal stratum that Lefebvre identifies as the middle classes, who, whether inadvertently or intentionally, perpetuate the existing class structure, including the national state. The power structure rests on the middle classes who “shore up the essential relations by believing that they are free of them. The individuals as such lead or try to lead an elitist life” (Lefebvre, 1976: 25). They do so under the illusion of autonomy from these very structures: “their escape route is ‘culture’, although ... as a class, they convey the relations of production” (Ibid). The middle classes in this sense are fundamental in the *colonial* production of center-periphery relations¹²⁵. I show that through the works of state’s intellectuals, an ontological Irancentrism¹²⁶ has been initially devised and naturalized over the past century, which is a fundamental obstacle in developing a radical multiscalar and multirhythmic historiography.

¹²³ I distinguish two interconnected moments here: the production of historiographic knowledge *in* Farsi and the production *of* Farsi itself (two moments condensed in the Farsist production of knowledge).

¹²⁴ I argue that Farsist ideology is the embodiment of a range of dualisms (such as sedentary-nomadic) in the national spacetime. These dualisms in fact reflect the racial-colonial-class relations of production. Landed class interests are associated with a dualistic conception of world that prioritizes statist-sedentary modes of life and rendered them as natural. Such dualisms legitimize the colonial expropriation of nature-land, which are often collectively held by nomadic, non-statist communities. In this study I focus on the ideological layer of these relations of production, and therefore the associated modes of surplus appropriation must be studied in another research.

¹²⁵ Lefebvre argues “strategic space makes it possible simultaneously to force worrisome groups ... out towards the periphery; to make available spaces near the centres scarcer, so increasing their value; to organize the centre as locus of decision, wealth, power and information ... to find allies for the hegemonic class within the middle strata” (Lefebvre, 1991: 375).

¹²⁶ I define Irancentrism as the dualistic idea that there is no past prior to Iran, and therefore Iran has existed uninterruptedly. Irancentrism, as an internalist conception of spacetime, presupposes a dichotomy between Iran and non-Iran, and removes the geohistorical, contradictory relations that shapes Iran.

The textbooks published by the Qajar state's intellectuals have played a fundamental role in the generation and dissemination of the idea of Iran. I accordingly explore the portrayal of 'Iran' and 'Iranians' in these textbooks. In these texts, Iranianness is understood as external to Iran's multiscalar and multirhythmic spacetime. Examining the Iranian state intellectuals' assumptions about time (and space) I depict how a linear conception of Iranian history has been made possible and paved the way to produce the national temporal regime. In this way, I show the absence of a unified temporal regime and the corresponding absence of Iran as a nation in late Qajar period.

2.1. State Intellectuals: A Short Introduction

Before delving into the analysis of the primary sources, I briefly introduce each intellectual and their works, offering a general context for the ensuing debate. We can consider the two books, *Principles of Geographical Science* (1881) and *Branches of Geographical Science* (1884), written by Mirza 'Abd al-Ghaffar (1840-1908), as the most systematic and important educational works in the late Qajar era with a focus on geography and history. Mirza Abd al-Ghaffar, also known as Najm al-Mulk and Najm al-Dawla (ND, hereafter), was a renowned astrologer and mathematics teacher at Dār ul-Funun. His work stands out as the inaugural geographic work with a modern scientific approach¹²⁷. He was the first to calculate the solar Hijri calendar¹²⁸ based on the Jalali calendar¹²⁹. The first population census was also conducted by ND, with the aim of determining the population of the capital, *Dar al-Khelafah* (Tehran). Another important figure who played a significant role in historiography and the production of educational books on geography is Mohammad Hassan Khan Etemad al-Saltaneh (1843-1896) (hereafter, ES). He, as a graduate of Dar al-Funun, studied history, geography, and French literature at the University of Paris. The first

¹²⁷ For a detailed history of geographical textbooks in Qajar era see: Karamzadeh, F. (2017).

¹²⁸ The Solar Hijri calendar is the official calendar of Iran.

¹²⁹ The Jalali calendar, also referred to as Malikshahi, is a solar calendar compiled during the reign of Jalaluddin Malik-Shah I, the Sultan of the Seljuk Empire (1072–1092 CE), by the order of Grand Vizier Nizam al-Mulk.

geographical encyclopedia written in Farsi is ES's *Mar'at al-Boldan Naseri*¹³⁰ that as the first work of its kind reflects the central state's attention to the scattered geographies of *mamalek-e mahruse*.

Mohammad Hassan Khan Qajar, author of *Jahannama-ye Mozaffari* (Mozaffari Atlas), was a contemporary of Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar. Mirzā Ḥasan Monši Bāši, known as Kamāl Al-Dowla, special secretary to Mirzā Yusof Mostowfi-al-mamālek (1848-9 to 1924-5). During the tenure of Mirza Yousef Khan Mostofi al-Mamalek as Prime Minister, he held the position of Chief Secretary, and in 1896, he was given the title of Kamal al-Dawla (KD hereafter). Hassan Pirnia (1871-1935) was a prominent Iranian politician who held a total of twenty-four posts during his political career, serving four times as Prime Minister of Iran. He was a historian, co-founding the Society for the National Heritage of Iran (SNH). Hassan's brother, Hossein Pirnia (1875-1948), was also a statesman during the late Qajar period, serving as the Speaker of the National Parliament in the second and fourth terms, as well as a representative for six terms in the National Parliament. His father also served as Prime Minister of Iran.¹³¹

Mirza Mostafa Khan Mansur al-Saltaneh or Mostafa Adl (1882-1950) was an Iranian politician, diplomat, jurist, former Ambassador of Iran to Switzerland (1935–39) and president of University of Tehran (1941–42). The book *Constitutional Rights or Principles of*

¹³⁰ The process of collecting geographical information began during the time of Mohammad Shah and intensified during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah (Ganji, 1988: 271).

¹³¹ Speaking of the familial and class connections of the intellectuals of the national state with the court and the Shah himself, it is important to mention that Hossein Pirnia married Eshrat al-Saltaneh Davallou, whose father was Mohammad Vali Khan Asef al-Saltaneh and her mother was the daughter of Mozaffar al-Din Shah. Hossein Pirnia is the father-in-law of General Fazlollah Zahedi, the Prime Minister of Iran (1953-55). Fazlollah Zahedi is well-known for two major events: the suppression of Sheikh Khazal (the ruler of Arabistan and the Sheikh of Mohammedah), and the 1953 Iranian coup d'état, after which he replaced Mohammad Mossadegh. Ardeshir Zahedi, the son of Fazlollah, also served as the Foreign Minister of Iran during the Mohammad Reza Pahlavi era. He was the son-in-law of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. A systematic study of the intergenerational and interclass links between intellectuals, political elites, and military officials of the state has yet to be conducted. However, it can be inferred that the production of Iran has been partially dependent on these intergenerational class relationships.

Constitutionalism, written and published in 1909 by Mansur al-Saltaneh (hereafter, MS) is an important legal work that reveals some of the key mechanisms of the production of Iran. Last, but not least, is Mohammad Ali Foroughi (1877-1942), also known as Zoka-ol-Molk, was born in Tehran to a merchant family from Isfahan. He wrote numerous books on ancient Iranian history and served three terms as Prime Minister of Iran. His father Mohammad-Hossein Adib Esfahani, one of the prominent literary figures during the Qajar era, was the founder of *Tarbiyat* newspaper, the first non-governmental newspaper published in Iran. His grandfather, Mohammad Mehdi Arbab Isfahani, was amongst the most influential merchants of Isfahan and was skilled in history and geography. His ancestor, Mirza Abutorab was the representative of Isfahan in Mugan plain during Nader Shah Afshar's coronation.

2.2. Iranian Racism and Dualist Conception of Timespace¹³²

The production of Iran was dependent upon a systemic racism that was institutionalized by the state. This racism was made possible by inventing an ahistorical conception of Iran. Dualist understandings of social forms were promoted and established based on Aryan racism that resulted in putting Iran outside history. This dualistic framework was instrumental in producing a linear temporal regime. Examining what she calls “the nationalist invention of the tribal problem,” which emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Cronin argues that Iranian reformers came to view the ‘tribal problem’ as a central obstacle to national development and a lingering ‘legacy of the Turco-Mongol hordes’. (Cronin, 2007: 17) An important theme that stands out in the *Principles* is naturalizing and promoting the dualism of tribal/nomadic versus statist sedentary temporal regimes. As ND states, “whenever a nation consists of a few individuals and human artifacts, education, and industries are not prevalent among them, they do not have any privilege over

¹³² All translations from Farsi to English in the following subsections are mine.

animals, and they are referred to as clans and nomads. Whenever their number is considerable, and especially if they possess industries to the extent of their necessity, they are called a tribe” (Najm al-Dawla, 1881: 115). ND continues by saying that if a moderate community that has progressed beyond the tribal life resides in a defined area under a joint government, it is called *eyalat*. And if a reputable community inhabits a territory demarcated by certain *natural* features and all its inhabitants share a common language and lineage (*tireh*), or at least have some shared livelihood and practices, it is called a *nation*, governed by the state (Ibid: 115-116). ND explicitly associates civilization with urbanization, saying that “the dwellings of communities that have progressed and been educated are solid structures built with stone, brick, wood, and iron. So, if their number is significant and they have expanded extensively, they are called great cities” (Ibid: 116). Civilization, from this perspective, is closely, if not entirely, tied to the urban mode of life, in contrast to nomadic modes.

A similar dualism between sedentary and nomadic temporal regimes is also assumed in *Jahannama-ye Mozaffari* (Mozaffari Atlas) written by KD. In some villages, there are communities whose temperament differs greatly from the rest of the population and are referred to as *badīyeh-neshīn* or *īlāt* (nomadic groups) (Kamal al-Dowlah, 1898: 131). It is added that these communities lack morals and engage in theft, banditry, and murder, when necessary, as they are not bound by religion (Ibid: 133). The primary reason for the opposition to nomadic and tribal life has always been the mobility of these populations, making it difficult for the central state to rule. According to KD, the Jews “have not accustomed themselves to farming, but their whole existence revolves around cunning and exploiting the people” (Ibid: 140). The central state and its intellectuals tend to engage everything in sedentary farming so that the state can collect the taxes. Taxation of constantly moving groups is a very challenging task that the state with its tendency

towards stasis cannot tolerate. Therefore, sedentarization is a constitutive aspect of the state formation.

Discussing one of the spoken languages of the people Kamal al-Dowlah says “Dari¹³³ was an informal and undesirable language commonly used among the nomads and rural inhabitants. Its designation stems from the meaning of *dar*, which signifies valley, and mountainous regions. Specifically, it refers to the language of the coastal inhabitants of the Caspian Sea” (Ibid: 144-145). The languages of the nomads and mountaineers are considered inferior to the urban language, namely Farsi. It is stated that Turkish is prevalent among the tribes (p. 149). Turkish is regarded as the language exclusive to nomads or non-urban dwellers. Furthermore, it is mentioned that Arabic language is spoken by Arab *tribes*, while other Arabs who have settled in the central plateau no longer speak Arabic (p. 149). Here, Farsi is intertwined with a specific geography, namely the central plateau (of ‘Iran’). Farsi is dualistically perceived as the language exclusive to settled urban dwellers.

Nomads are considered a mixed race of Arabs and Turks, revealing the evident racist narrative of the state production of space. It is stated that although the land of Iran has been invaded by Assyrians, Greeks, Armenians, Turks, Tatars, Mughals, Arabs, and Afghans, the *original* ‘Iranian race’ has undergone less change. ‘Iranians’ have preserved the essence of their racial identity from these great perilous encounters, which is evident today in the clear differences

¹³³ In *Reading Persian and the History of Literature (gheraat-e Farsi va tarikh-e adabiyat)* for the fourth year of high school, published in 1959, it is mentioned that after the Arab conquest of Iran, people in Rey, Isfahan, Hamadan, and Nahavand spoke Pahlavi, while Dari was prevalent in Khorasan and Balkh. The people of Tabaristan spoke Tabari, and those in Khwarazm spoke Khwarazmi. In each city and province, the people also had songs and poems in their local dialect (p. 5). Dari is attributed to the people of Dar, meaning the court, and it was the language of the people of Balkh and Khorasan (p. 6). Nowadays, Dari, Dari Persian or Fārsī-ye Darī, or Eastern Persian is the variety of the Persian language spoken in Afghanistan.

between their race and the races of Arabs, Turks, and other tribes. So, both ‘land of Iran’ and ‘Iranians’ here are understood to exist independently of spacetime and outside the geohistory.

The appendix titled *Comparing Ancient and Modern Geographical Terminology of Iran*, in the book *Dorrar al-tījān fī ta’rīk banī Aškān* (1889), delves into ethnography, understood as the dissemination of tribes (*Enteshar-al-ghabayel*) (Etemad al-Saltanah, 1992: 759). ES defines geography as “the science of the conditions and circumstances of the Earth, encompassing the *nature* of countries, regions, mountains, lands, seas, rivers, and so forth” (Ibid: 755). ES’s conception of geography is not concept-dependent. Social structures do not exist independently of our conceptions we use to define/understand them. More specifically, Iran does not exist independently of a Farsist conception of timespace. The historical narrative of Iran in the appendix follows the Aryan hypothesis, according to which “from the birth of Christ until the 6th century AH, Germanic and Slavic tribes migrated from Asia to Europe, while Arab and Turkic tribes migrated to the western part of Asia and North Africa, and these nomadic tribes settled in places where the civilizations of the Romans, Greeks, and Iranians were flourishing” (Etemad al-Saltanah, 1992: 757). Revealing an early version of Eurocentrism, ES states that since there are no reliable sources on the eastern lands, one must rely on Greek and Roman texts and consider deviating from them unacceptable (Ibid: 758).

In terms of racial classification, it is also mentioned that Semitic tribes are composed of the descendants of both the Semitic and Aryan lineages. The Arabs are considered as another tribe of the Semitic group (Ibid: 769). Consequently, the Aryan hypothesis, in the dualist sense that Iranian nationalism utilized later¹³⁴, had not yet penetrated the Persian language. At that time, the Arabs and Aryans were perceived as part of the same Semitic group. In contrast, in Iranian nationalism,

¹³⁴ In this later interpretation, Semitic and Aryan are considered as mutually exclusive.

the Semites and specifically the Arabs are considered inferior to the Aryans. ES divides the Aryan tribe, which had more interactions with the ancient Greeks and Romans than other tribes, into three branches: the Aryans residing in India, the people of Iran (Ibid: 769), and the inhabitants of Greece (Ibid: 770). It is said that both the Aryans of India and Iran were known as Arya in ancient times, but when they separated, those who went to India kept the name Arya for themselves, while those who came to 'Iran' became known as Iranians (Ibid: 769). So, for ES, Iran existed under the same name before the arrival of the Aryans. This narrative contradicts many subsequent interpretations of the Aryan hypothesis. According to ES, the term Arya in the Greek language means master or owner (Ibid: 770), which differs from later interpretations of the meaning of Arya. Furthermore, it is stated that the Aryans went towards India or Iran, as if 'India' and 'Iran' had existed independently from the beginning, separate from the Indians and Aryans. This ahistorical conception indicates that Iran was understood as something that exists beyond history. However, the changing perspectives on the Aryans itself partly reflects the *historical* production of Iran as the dwelling place of the Aryans.

The categorizations provided by ES indicate that Iran had a dualistically exclusive and very limited meaning at that time¹³⁵. For example, distinctions are made between the *Khuzis* (the people of Khuzestan) and Iranians (Ibid: 765). It is also stated that before the invasion and domination of the Aryan tribe over Iran, there were tribes residing in 'Iran' who were black-skinned, and their descendants are now the Baloch people and some Indian tribes, as well as the inhabitants of southern Arabia (Ibid: 771). Here, the Baloch and Khuzestani people are referred to as the natives of 'Iran' before the invasion of the Aryans. So, historically, Iran has always existed from the

¹³⁵ This meaning is observable in modern times as well. While Iranian nationalists rhetorically emphasize the country's unity, in reality, they maintain a hierarchical conception of Iranianness, placing Farses above non-Farses or non-Persians.

perspective of ES and only its inhabitants have changed in different periods. This is a key mechanism in establishing a linear temporal regime that abstracts ‘Iran’ from history. ES defines the Mongol race as having general physical differences from all other humans, stating, “the Mongols stand out with their swelled foreheads, convex cheek and chin, yellowish-white skin color, thick and black hair, and sparse beards or bristles” (Ibid: 770). This underscores that Mongols were considered barbarians by the “Iranians”, despite the fact that being Mongol was a constitutive part of being Iranian (Kia, 2020).

In a similar fashion, Hassan Pirnia’s narrative of ‘Iran’ reflects an Aryan racial supremacy, and the associated linear temporality, rationalizing the forcible acquisition of non-Aryan lands and the killing, enslavement and ‘ethnic cleansing’ of their native population: “coming to the Iranian Plateau, the Aryans found there people who were ugly and inferior in race, habits, morals and religion . . . The Aryans called these *native* people *tur* or *div* [demon] ... at first [the Aryans] accorded them no rights whatsoever, fighting and killing them wherever they were found ... The Aryans came to Iran not to conquer and plunder, but to settle¹³⁶ in this country; therefore, they had to take the natives’ lands” (in Matin-Asgari, 2012: 178-179).

Comparably, in *Jahannama-ye Mozaffari* (Mozaffari Atlas) ‘Iranians’ are considered superior to all other tribes in terms of temperament, self-esteem, disposition, and so on (Kamal al-Dowlah, 1898: p. 129). This implies that many non-Iranians residing in ‘Iran’ are deemed less honorable than the authentic ‘Iranians’. It is mentioned that Turkmen people are not Iranian but merely inhabitants of Iran (p. 135). Iran is thus considered in an internalist manner to be an eternal ahistorical container for a group of people defined in racialized terms. This narrative, which

¹³⁶ In this conventional narrative of Aryan migration, one can argue that Aryan invasion of this geography can be characterized as the pre-history of settler colonialism.

reflects a linear temporality and a territorially bounded conception of space, extends to other tribes as well, including Baharlou and Hazaras. This racist dualism is intertwined with urban-rural and settled-nomadic dualisms. They reinforce and complement each other in and through Farsism. Iranians who are considered to be Farses are predominantly depicted as sedentary, urban, and civilized, while non-Iranians, or more precisely, non-Persians (including Turks, Arabs, etc.) are predominantly portrayed as nomadic, rural, and wild¹³⁷. It is articulated that the bulk of Iran's population lives in central plateau areas like Fars, Kerman, Isfahan, Yazd, Iraq, and Tehran (p. 130). This indicates these areas are predominantly inhabited by the Farses/Persians, defining Iranian as synonymous with being Fars. This narrative bears a striking resemblance to Haj Ali Razmara's view of Iranianness (1944: 202) approximately 50 years later. Razmara regarded the authentic Iranian as synonymous with Fars. In fact, this Farsist definition of Iran did not originate with the Pahlavi regime; it had already taken hold during the late Qajar period.

The racist narrative of Iran and Iranians in *Jahannama-ye Mozaffari* is utterly evident in the author's description of the Hazaras. In his view, "Hazaras are of Turkic origin, and some of them are known as crooked-eyed, hunchbacked, having sparse beard, and their morals resemble the Mongols, and their religion is Sunni Islam (Kamal al-Dowlah, 1898: p. 136). The Hazaras are a tribe merely *residing* in Iran and therefore are not considered *originally* Iranians. The same perspective is repeated in reference to the Kurds. It is stated that 'savagery' predominates in the Kurds, and they "continue to have an excessive inclination towards the depths of mountains"¹³⁸,

¹³⁷ While I argue that the sedentary/urban versus nomadic/rural dualism is inherently hierarchical, one important clarification is necessary. From the perspective of the state, the nomadic and rural pole was regarded as inferior. However, from the standpoint of nomadic and rural communities – such as the Baluch – the hierarchy was often viewed in reverse (see, for example, Salzman, 2000: 241). Certainly, neither of these perspectives was inclusive or dialectical; both reproduced binary oppositions rather than engaging with the complexity and interdependence of these modes of life.

¹³⁸ Even today, Aryan/Farsist racists derogatorily refer to Kurds as 'mountain goats' to demean them.

valleys, and caves, lacking civil and urban traits, and their animalistic, wild nature prevails in them” (p. 139). A similar depiction is provided for Baluchestan¹³⁹ elsewhere, stating that “this *velayat* possesses both rough terrain and wild positions, and its people are inherently wild” (p. 264).

It is mentioned that “Iran is an ancient name and the name of individuals who were raised in the central plateau, and their dwelling was permanent, and their occupation was agriculture and industry” (p. 6). This dualist notion of a fixed dwelling or sedentarism is regarded as a defining feature of Iranian history. It is added that “Turān is the name of tribes, with wild nature, nomadic, bandits, and without settlement” (Ibid). Being wild, nomadic, and lacking a fixed habitation are all defining elements of the non-Iranians. As we can see, the Iranian/Fars vs. nonIranian/nonPersian, civilized vs. wild, urban vs. nonurban dualisms have consistently been employed and resulted in the production of a linear temporal regime.

In the same book, Bakhtiaris possess a language similar to ancient Persian and have fewer Arabic terms. Due to their resemblance to the ‘Iranian race’ and their *industrious* nature, they are considered purer and more noble than the Kurdish tribes, as they are more hardworking than the nomads. They also have ‘large heads and thick skin on their scalps’ (p. 141). Being Iranian here is primarily associated with the Farsness and Farsi (in contrast to Kurdish and Arabic). Furthermore, ‘Iranian’ identity is understood as a racial concept based on blood. The urban-nomadic dualism serves as a defining component that distinguishes Iranians from nonIranians. A similar portrayal is presented regarding another non-Persian people: the *Souzmanis*. It is stated that “their morals

¹³⁹ Only these three sentences have been dedicated to Baluchestan in the entire book. On the next and final page of the book, a few additional handwritten lines with a different handwriting have been added, addressing the territory of Makran, which is part of Baluchestan. Compared to the detailed descriptions of other regions, it becomes apparent how Baluchestan has been peripheralized. The situation of Arabestan and Bakhtiari is even worse, as no section of the book is devoted to these regions.

are extremely corrupt, they speak the Babylonian language. Among the tribes, this tribe has never been seen as more wicked and dishonorable ... They are highly unprincipled, committing all sorts of atrocities without any sense of honor” (p. 143). The Romani¹⁴⁰ people (*kolis*) are also depicted in a similar manner: “*Kuli* is a tribe that, much like the *Souzmanis*, has undergone little change in their morals over the past few thousand years. Their actions are base and abominable, their profession is pillaging, and their livelihood mostly involves theft and vile acts” (Ibid).

Expressing Farsist conception of Iranianness, it is stated that the inhabitants of the Torbat-e Heydariyeh region in Khorasan and Sistan consist of Iranians and races such as Arabs, Qara’I Turks, and Baloch (Kamal al-Dowlah, 1898: p. 213). Arabs, Turks, and Baloch are perceived as non-Iranians. It is also stated that most of the population in the Fars province are Iranians (p. 219). This implies that non-Iranians also reside in Fars, and these non-Iranians are essentially non-Persians. It is also mentioned that inhabitants of Bushehr city were originally Arab, and later mixed with Iranians, Turks, and Jews (p. 244). Therefore, Arabs, Turks, and Jews are considered non-Iranians. In the book *Collection of Treaties of the Persian Empire with Foreign Countries*, non-Persian populations (like The Karapapakhs or Terekeme) are not considered as Iranian, but rather described as “groups residing within the soil of Iran” (Pirnia, 1908: p. 152). In other words, as recently as 1908, non-Persians were still regarded as foreigners.

2.3. Farsist Historiography

As demonstrated in the preceding subsection, the production of Farsist specialized knowledge through historiography has played a pivotal role in in the production of Iran. Expanding on this, I will now explore how Iran has been written through Farsist historiography. During the late Qajar period, writing statist history became naturalized by the establishment of Dar-ul Funun and similar

¹⁴⁰ Bohemian or Gypsy.

institutions. It was through the historiographic practices of the state (as manifested in the systematic efforts to create a ‘pure Persian’) that ‘Iran’ as a Persian/Fars nation was born. This period marks the birth of Iran as an ‘imagined nation’ in and through the Farsist historiography. This imagined nation gradually gained more layers and become more concretized. A more systematic form of Iran-centric historiography began to develop around the time of the Constitutional Revolution.¹⁴¹ Specifically, it was through The Constitutional Revolution that we experienced the birth of Nation’s right discourse. However, this discourse – the imaginary idea of Iran as a nation – needed to be inscribed in time and space. This was implemented through the legalization of spacetime that was initially manifested in the state practices of national border formation, and later, in the Pahlavi period, extended to the legalization of national space through administrative divisions and urbanization (Chapter Four). The corpus of literature the key state’s intellectuals produced or inspired served as an essential benchmark for the next generations of historiographers of Iran.

Language has been central to the construction of ‘Iranian’ history and ‘Iranian’ nation. The Ottoman Empire is classified among semi-barbaric nations by ES (Etemad al-Saltanah, 1992: 760). He states, “we must deeply investigate whether any *qaum* residing in a particular land is native to that place or has migrated from elsewhere to settle there” (Ibid: 761). ES does not provide a definition of the term *qaum* itself. Although he criticizes the ancient Greek and Roman scholars for referring to any language other than their own as barbarian (Ibid: 763), ES ironically uses the same interpretation for the Ottomans. He immediately emphasizes the necessity of distinguishing tribes and nations based on their language (Ibid: 765). According to him, there have been no more

¹⁴¹ Although Matin-Asgari (2009a: 202) argues that Marxist historiography succeeded in Iran because it offered “an appealing alternative to the limitations of both modern nationalist and older elitist, dynastic, religious, racial, and ethnic-based approaches to history”, Iranian Marxism has also been largely nationalist.

than three types of authentic languages in the world, and the study of vocabulary, which the Farangis¹⁴² (Europeans) call linguistics, has been dedicated to defining these languages (Ibid: 765-66).

At the end of the book *Tatbiq-e Loghat-e Joghrafiyai*, which was published as an appendix to the third volume of *al-Dorrar al-tījān fī ta'rīk banī Aškān* (1891) Etemad al-Saltaneh (ES) asserts that “I have written and published beyond thirty volumes ... I [still] regret that our Persian language has become mixed with foreign languages ... There is no academy established in any Asian country to address this deficiency so that we would have at least thirty to forty thousand Persian words at our disposal, so we do not rely on non-Persian terms” (cited in Tavakoli-Targhi, 2016: 50). This process of Farsization was not confined to isolated efforts by individuals like E.S.; rather, it was carried out systematically and institutionally. The Society for the National Heritage of Iran (SNH) co-founded by Hassan Pirnia was composed of influential elites of the time with the overall goal of preservation of Iranian artifacts, architecture, archeological sites, and protection of the Iranian culture. One major move at the time of SNH was de-listing Arabic loan words and replacing them with old or new Persian words. It was intellectuals such as Sadiq Kiya and Ibrahim Purdavud who through their publications, and their focus on Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*¹⁴³ created a Persian vocabulary that was mainly New, Middle, or Old Persian in origin.

As I demonstrate (Section 2, Chapter 3), translation has been a fundamental mechanism in the Farsist historiography of Iran. This process has a historical trajectory and did not emerge spontaneously. In *Jahannama-ye Mozaffari* (1898), place names had not been translated into Farsi

¹⁴² The word farang is from Persian word farang or farangī, refers to Franks, the major Germanic tribe ruling Western Europe. Frangistan was a term used by Muslims and Persians in particular, during the Middle Ages and later periods, to refer to Western or Latin Europe. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farang>

¹⁴³ Abul-Qâsem Ferdowsi Tusi (940-1019/1025) was a Persian poet and the author of *Shahnameh* ('Book of Kings'), which is one of the world's longest epic poems created by a single poet, and the greatest epic of Persian-speaking countries. Ferdowsi is celebrated as one of the greatest in the history of literature.

yet. Systematic Farsization through translation had not yet been established. For example, reference is made to Arabestan instead of Khuzestan (Kamal al-Dowlah, 1898: p. 59).

The book *Collection of Treaties of the Persian Empire with Foreign Countries* (1908) was written by Hasaan Pirnia's brother, Hossein Pirnia. The book's title in French is *Recue'l des traités de 'l'empire Persan avec les pays étrangers*. As evident, the author considered Iran as equivalent to Persia. This politics of translation is also noticeable in the book, where, for example, Perse in French is translated to Iran in Farsi. In another instance, la Perse is translated as the countries (*mamalek*) of Iran. Moreover, the book refers to *Khartite* (the Arabic word for map) which states must draw for demarcating frontiers (Pirnia, 1908: p. 207). So, a Persian word for map (نقشه) is still lacking or at least not conventional. Iran is still represented as kingdoms (*mamalek*) rather than as a unified nation-state, and references are made to the 'King of the Iranian Kingdoms' (*shahanshah-e mamalek-e Iran*) (p. 50, 101). The concept of kingdom is used in different meanings, and as a result, it does not imply a unified scale (p. 212). Place names have also not been Farsicized yet. For example, references are made to Mohammerah and Jazirat al-Khezr (p. 201), which are later renamed/Farsicized to Khorramshahr and Abadan during the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Translation has played a central role in producing a Farsist history. Most legal books written during the Constitutional era were produced through translation, mostly from French, into Farsi. This process of translation itself played a key role in the Farsization of spacetime and the production of Iran. Mohammad Ali Foroughi, in his work *Constitutional Rights; the Manners of Constitutionalism of the States* (*Hoghough-e Asasi yani Adaab-e Mashrootiat-e Doval*), the first legal treatise after the Constitutional Revolution, translated 'Souveraineté nationale' as 'Saltanat-

e Melli' (National Monarchy) (Pouladi, 2023: 366-67).¹⁴⁴ Many legal terms in Farsi that are being used currently have their roots in this text. Rendering 'Souveraineté' as monarchy instead of *hakemiyat* (sovereignty) indicates either Foroughi's limited knowledge that sees any authority at that time within the framework of *Saltanat*, or it represents a linguistic-political strategy devised and imposed by an intellectual of the state to naturalize monarchy. The latter is most likely the case, particularly given Foroughi's significant role in establishing the University of Tehran and his position as the founder and first head of the Iranian Academy of Culture (*Farhangestan-e Iran*) which aimed to purify the Persian language¹⁴⁵. *Melli* (national) for him was equivalent to *Saltanati* (monarchical). The same approach has been employed in the ideology of Iranshahr developed by Tabatabai (Chapter Three).

Foroughi's mode of translation was mimicked and entrenched by the subsequent intellectuals/translators. The translation of 'Souveraineté' as *Saltanat Melli* (national monarchy) has continued in subsequent works¹⁴⁶. Another important legal work that reveals some of the key mechanisms of the production of Iran is the book *Constitutional Rights or Principles of Constitutionalism*, written and published in 1909 by Mirza Mostafa Khan Mansur al-Saltaneh (MS). The book presents a definition of *hokoumat* (rule, reign, administration, or dominion) and *dowlat* (state). He distinguishes between *hokoumat* and state, stating that *hokoumat* has two meanings: one is the *order* through which the monarchial authorities of the *nation* are executed. The second meaning is the *territory* ruled by a ruler. The term *state* has two meanings. First, it

¹⁴⁴ Foroughi has also translated another book from French to Persian. The book, written by Paul Beauregard and titled *Elements D'Economie Politique*, was published in Paris in 1886, and Foroughi translated it as *Principles of the Science of Nations Wealth* in Farsi (Osoul-e Elm-e Servat-e Melal) even though the French title does not mention any reference to 'nations'. This book not only introduces the science of economics in a systematic manner for the first time in Farsi but also incorporates many fundamental concepts of this field into Farsi.

¹⁴⁵ For a historical account of the differing perspectives of Iranian intellectuals regarding the purification of the Persian language, see Kia (1998).

¹⁴⁶ Javad Tabatabai's view is in fact a replication of this old tradition in the politics of translation.

refers to all members of the ruling body of *mamlekat* (country) who are responsible for executing the monarchical authorities of the nation, and second, it is used in a more limited sense to specify one of the state powers, the executive branch (p. 17). On the following page national rule is defined as an order in which supreme powers are in the hands of the nation itself who rule themselves (p. 18). In this definition, territory is not regarded as a constitutive part of *hokoumat*, rather government refers to the mode of governance. More importantly, whenever the term *hokoumat* is used, it predominantly refers to the first meaning, namely the mode of rule, and not the territory.

Like Foroughi, Mansur al-Saltaneh equated sovereignty with *Saltanat Melli* (National Monarchy). He even considered *Saltanat Melli* as an equivalent for ‘Gouvernement Démocratique’ (Mansur al-Saltaneh, 1909: 368). Mirza Seyyed Ibrahim Khan Oveysi, in his work Human Rights or the Foundation of the Domain’s Politics (*Hoghough-e bashari ya Asas-e Siasat-e Mamlekat*) written in 1913, translated sovereignty as *Saltanat* in Farsi and rendered *État* as *Mamlekat* (domain or realm) (Pouladi, 2023: 369). The same politics of translation has also continued in the Constitutional Law written by Mir Emad Naqibzadeh Tabatabai, published in 1925. According to him, *Saltanat Melli* means that the right to establish a state belongs to the nation (Ibid). This terminology was present even in the first translation of constitutional texts into Persian. In a book by A. V. Dicey written in French, ‘La souveraineté de parlement’ is translated as *Saltanat-e Parlemani* (Parliamentary Monarchy) (Ibid: 370). It is only in 1943 that the equivalent of *hakemiyat* (sovereignty) was used in the translation of Montesquieu’s *De 'esprit des lois* into Farsi.

2.4. From Natural to Political Frontiers

The *Principles of Geographical Science* (1881) by Najm al-Dawla (ND) is a turning point in the introduction of new principles of Western geography (Ganji, 1988: 53, 54). The author is heavily influenced by British-centric colonial historiography, and wherever the indigenous populations are

mentioned, it has been emphasized that they are vanishing and/or non-existent. For example, it is stated that native tribes in North America have been wiped out (Najm al-Dawla, 1881: 259, 271). ND divides geography into two categories: descriptive (*hekayati*) and cartographic (*soorati*). Descriptive geography is similar to the travel accounts that describe the relations between different countries, natural features, laws of monarchy, the extent of each kingdom, and its frontiers. This type of geography, although much easier, is ambiguous. Therefore, cartographic geography i.e., geographical maps was developed (Ibid: 14). According to ND, the depiction of the Earth's surface on paper and similar sheets was called geographical maps (Ibid: 50, 49). At the time of writing, there was still no equivalent for the term *continent* in Persian, and the interpretation of continent was merely transliterated into Persian letters as *kontinen* (کنتینن) or plate (*safheh*) (Ibid: 57). Asia was divided into 13 pieces (*ghteh*) (Ibid: 198), but no definition of these geographical divisions is provided.

The geographical terms in this book are still largely qualitative and not abstract. Precision and hierarchical organization of geographical concepts are lacking, and, for example, the term *mol*k (kingdom or realm) simultaneously refers to different entities like continent and nation (Najm al-Dawla, 1881: 104). États-Unis (*Etazoni*) are perceived as a realm (*mol*k) composed of thirty-eight states (Ibid: 260). This conceptual overlap can be attributed mainly to the fact that spaces were not as defined and demarcated as they are in contemporary times. For example, the whole of Africa was divided into three *mol*ks (realms): Northern *Nigeriti*, Southern *Nigeriti*, and Inner *Kaferestan* (Ibid: 229). At the same time, mention is made of the Portuguese realm (*mamlekat*) and the Greek realm (*mol*k) (Ibid: 11). Consequently, unlike today, Portugal and Greece were not categorized under the same homogeneous geographical scale. While the 'Kingdom' (*mamlekat*) of France is mentioned, reference is also made to the 'kingdoms' (*mamalek*) of Iran (Ibid: 5). The use

of the plural form for Iran implicitly suggests that during the Qajar period, Iran was associated with diverse geographies rather than a unified and cohesive territorial entity. Furthermore, the state is defined in terms of population, architecture, and monarchy (Ibid: 116, 117), with no mention of territory. Even until 1935, the state used the term *Mamâlek-e Mahruse-ye Irân*. As we can see, written on the stamps that were published on the occasion of Reza Shah's coronation, is not Iran, but *Mamâlek-e Mahruse-ye Irân*¹⁴⁷ (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1 (Left). A stamp titled *Mamâlek-e Mahruse-ye Irân's Post* in Farsi. From Malek National Library & Museum Digital Library.

Figure 2 (Right). A stamp titled *Mamâlek-e Mahruse-ye Irân's Post* in Farsi and Postes Persanes in French. From Malek National Library & Museum Digital Library.



Furthermore, the way the term *sarhad* (frontier) is used indicates that borders were still perceived as a natural phenomenon classified under physical geography (Ibid: 243), and therefore, the concept of frontier had not yet taken shape in a political sense, let alone national territories. In the *Branches of Geographical Science* (1884), similar to the *Principles*, the concept of *sarhad* (frontier) still refers to a natural phenomenon defined by rivers, mountains, gulfs, and so on. The territory is defined in terms of natural features. Besides, throughout the book, the term territory (*ghalamro*) is rarely used, but instead, words such as kingdom (*molk*) and realm (*mamlekat*) are more frequently employed. Even after three decades, the situation remains unchanged. The text *Collection of Treaties of the Persian Empire with Foreign Countries* still refers to the 'soil of Iran' rather than explicitly acknowledging the concept of 'territory' (Pirnia, 1908, p. 41). As discussed

¹⁴⁷ Parallel to the transition from the Qajar to the Pahlavi, we experience a shift from *mamalek-e mahruse-ye Iran* to *mamlekat-e Iran*. The same word, *mamlekat* that was once used to designate independent regions like Baluchestan was now used to refer to Iran as a whole. This indicates the term *mamlekat* in Farsi signifies the state or country.

in the theoretical framework, the unprecedented character of national territory means that it has ‘nothing to do with the natural features of the land’ (Poulantzas, 1978). So, the notion of territory, as both a concept and a defined entity, remains conspicuously absent in that period.

Jahannama-ye Mozaffari (Mozaffari Atlas) written by Mohammad Hassan Mirza Kamal al-Dowlah (hereafter, KD) published in 1898, consists of three parts: Natural Geography, Political Geography, and Description of Velayaat and Major Blocks and Their Frontiers (p. 5). Similar to ND’s work, the focus of Mozaffari Atlas is on the *land* of Iran (rather than its territory). The people of Iran is mentioned, but there is no mention of the Iranian territory (p. 165). The kingdom of Iran is mainly understood in relation to the land, as a natural phenomenon. In this sense land is deemed significant primarily due to its economic productivity. The concept of territory as a legal relationship (Elden, 2013) thus has not yet taken shape. Moreover, the concept of land itself is employed in a non-differentiated manner with various meanings. Frontiers are discussed under the first part, Natural Geography, rather than being placed within the second part, Political Geography. The descriptions were qualitative and not yet visualized (pp. 8-9).

Jahannama-ye Mozaffari does not refer to homeland (*vatan*) as a national space, and the term applies to *Ilats*, such as the Qashqai people (Kamal al-Dowlah, 1898: p. 137). For example, Balochestan is mentioned as the homeland of the Baloch people (p. 217). The book alludes to episodes of forced displacement of non-Persians for state purposes (p. 140). It can also be inferred that in 1898, there was no administrative divisions in the modern sense of the word. *Mamalek-e mahruseh* were divided into multiple provinces (*velayaat*), each with its own governor (Ibid: p. 172). Spatial division was still relatively fluid and not centrally imposed. Even the common perception that Iran is composed of several states (*eyalat*), and each state is composed of several provinces, is reversed here, as it is stated that Khorasan and Sistan provinces have been divided

into seventeen states (p. 200). Today, Isfahan is located at the heart of Iran's geography. However, in *Mozaffari Atlas*, Isfahan was considered one of the *southern* provinces (p. 246). This demonstrates the lack of a quantitative and abstract understanding of space.

Besides books on history and geography, a few publications emerged in the growing domain of *international* law. This suggests the initial stages of the formation of the international (both as a new geographical scale and social form) and its critical function in shaping national territories-histories. International law served as a vital discursive and legal framework enabling imperialist and colonial infrastructure projects. One of the earliest examples is a book titled *Hoghough-e Beinolmelal (International Law)*¹⁴⁸ written by Hassan Pirnia, published in 1899. Although books of this kind often lacked visual representations of territory or land, they do address the state problematic, its sovereignty, and thus playing a key role in the production of Farsist historiography of Iran, and through that, in Farsization of space. Pirnia addresses the question of whether domain rights are synonymous with property rights that an owner has over their property, or if there is a distinction between these two. It is stated that from the perspective of international law, all individuals and objects within a state's soil are subject to the state rule, but this does not preclude ownership rights of the state's subjects within it. In other words, not all the state's soil is owned by the state itself, which can exercise exclusive control and possession over it (as is the case with *Khaleseh* lands), and the property rights of individual owners must be respected (Pirnia, 1899: pp. 190-191). What is new here is that state soil has acquired a *legal* definition, signifying a legal relationship rather than merely a proprietary one. At the same time, the property relations and rights are also being legalized. Employing Elden's distinction between territory, land, and terrain, we can say that here state soil is differentiated from land as a property relationship, and hence this

¹⁴⁸ The book appears to have more than one volume, but I only had access to the first volume.

definition can be considered as the nascent formation of the concept of territory in Farsi. Pirnia distinguishes between the relationship of ownership and *hokoumat-e aalieh* (which apparently means sovereignty).

Pirnia's work indicates a significant shift in geohistorical perspectives, evolving from interpreting geography as a natural phenomenon to understanding it as a political construct. He emphasizes that delineating the boundaries of state soil is an important issue because the frontiers of the neighboring states must be clear (Pirnia, 1899: p. 191). According to him, a state has three distinguishing characteristics: defined frontiers, population, and sovereignty (p. 118). A state cannot participate in the *international* forum or have legal personality in international law without soil. Therefore, the absence of soil is one cause of state dissolution (p. 122). He divides frontiers into two categories: natural and artificial/conditional; the latter are those established through treaties (p. 192, 193).

Notwithstanding Pirnia's discussion of changes in the 'boundaries of state soil' (*hodoud-e khak-e dowlat*), the concept of territory [*ghalamro*] remains underdeveloped in Farsi, with terms like land and soil commonly used instead. However, terms such as 'state self-rule,' (*esteghlal-e dowlat*) 'self-rule within its own soil,' and 'supreme authority of the state within its own soil' are mentioned, indicating territorial sovereignty. State's soil is defined as follows: "lands and waters that are under the supreme authority of the state ... Soil here includes seas, lakes, and rivers" (Pirnia, 1899: p. 189). This definition closely resembles the definition of national territory, with the difference that in which the border is still not determining. Moreover, the state soil is not yet understood as equivalent to the abstract bounded space. State self-rule (sovereignty) within its own soil is referred to as *domain* rights (*hoghough-e mamlekati*). Therefore, there was still no conception of *national* rights (*hoghough-e melli*) and territory in Farsi.

The shift from qualitative to quantitative and fragmentary representations of space and time began in the early twentieth century. The eleventh chapter of the book *Collection of Treaties of the Persian Empire with Foreign Countries* addresses the arrangements known as the metric system (Pirnia, 1908: p. 226). This further demonstrates the interconnected nature of the production of national territory and the standardization of measurement units (of space and time). Abstract spacetime of national territory has been produced through the quantification of all aspects of life. The process of homogenization has been an imposed and top-down one, stemming from the necessities of the production of national space within the context of the emerging international space.

The quantification of space and time has manifested in various forms. The standardization of spacetime has been partially realized through administrative divisions, with electoral constituencies and districts serving as a specific example. Mirza Mostafa Khan Mansur al-Saltaneh (MS) made a significant advancement in his 1909 work, *Constitutional Rights or Principles of Constitutionalism*, by providing the first systematic treatment of electoral constituencies and districts. A table is included at the end of the book, titled 'Elections' which specifies the electoral constituencies. This division of space is, in fact, one step towards the legalization of space as a precondition to produce Iran as a national territory. Interestingly, in this table, the electoral constituencies include two types of entities: cities or regions, and tribes (like Shahsavan, Qashqai, Turkmen, Bakhtiari, and Khamseh). So, the dualism of sedentary versus nomadic was not yet established. Both cities and tribes were recognized in a non-hierarchical way showing the absence of a national spatiotemporal matrix of the state.

The transformation from quantitative to qualitative, or from concrete to abstract, has been linked to a shift from natural to political representations of space. While in texts like *Resale-ye*

*Tahghighat-e Sarhadieh*¹⁴⁹ natural features such as rivers and mountains were considered as the basis for describing and demarcating frontiers, in Pirnia's book, infrastructural features, such as poles, are utilized for determining boundaries. For instance, reference is made to the poles with specific numbers. This implies that the focus is no longer solely on natural features, but now political factors also play a role in defining certain frontiers. However, this process had not yet become fully dominant. It is said that in 1844, an agreement was reached to restrict the uncontrolled migration of inhabitants of neighboring states of Iran and Russia, as explained in the fourteenth chapter of the Treaty of Turkmenchay¹⁵⁰ (p. 142). The issue at the time was to establish a limit for such migration. Therefore, it has been emphasized that no one can enter each other's soils without a permit and a proper travel document (p. 143). The travel permit can be seen as another step towards transforming frontiers (*sarhad*) into borders (*marz*). However, legal character of frontiers should not be equated with the formation of a territory. Here, we encounter the initial stages of the legalization of space that functions as a basis for the formation of national territory. Even decades later, territory was not regarded as a constitutive element of the state. The textbook *New Geography* for the first year of high school has been published by Mohammad Mohit Tabatabai. As seen in the third edition of this book published in Tehran in 1937 governance (*hokoumat*) is still understood as ruling over people, *qaums*, or nations, rather than ruling over land or territory (pp. 116-17).

¹⁴⁹ A report by Mirza Sayyed Ja'far Khan Moshir al-dowla, regarding the process of determining the frontier lines between Mamalek-e Mahruse-ye Iran and the Ottoman Empire, which took place between 1849 and 1855. The revised version of this book was published in 1969 by the Foundation of Iranian Culture, an academic institution established in 1964 with the aim of preserving and promoting Farsi. The publication of works like *Resale-ye Tahghighat-e Sarhadieh* (*A Treatise on Frontiers Investigations*) should be seen as a historiographic practice of the Farsist production of knowledge.

¹⁵⁰ The Treaty of Turkmenchay was an agreement between Iran and the Russian Empire, which concluded the Russo-Persian War (1826–1828). It forced Persia to cede or recognize Russian influence over the Erivan Khanate, the Nakhchivan Khanate and the remainder of the Talysh Khanate. For a detailed territorial account of the fluctuating frontiers and border formation during the Qajar period, and their impacts on the emergence of Iranian nationalism, see Kashani-Sabet (1997, 1999).

2.5. Non-Persian Spaces and Infrastructural Absence of Iran

In the 19th century, visual representations of ‘Iran’ were rare, suggesting that the central state lacked the infrastructural and technological capacity to produce its own territory. *Branches of Geographical Science* and *Principles of Geographical Science* both written by ND lack maps. Another book by ND called *New Atlas: Geography of the Modern Era*, however, consists of 48 maps of the new divisions in Europe after the Industrial Revolution, but does not include a map of Iran (Karamzadeh, 2017: 123-24). In another book titled *Sufficiency of Geography (kefayat al-joghrafi)* though, ND included an old map of Iran (Ibid: 124).

The *Principles* (1881) presents a world map (Najm al-Dawla, 1881: 71) in which there is no evidence of territorial divisions based on countries or national states. Iran is absent from this map¹⁵¹. This map categorizes space based on white, yellow, black, and mixed races. This racial classification is entirely biological (Ibid: 108-109). It is mentioned that some of the yellow race still lack certain attributes of civilization and cannot be distinguished from animals (Ibid: 110). The black race is defined as follows: “they have thick, black, and woolly hair, and their civilization, intelligence, and progress are lower than all other classes, and many of them are cannibals” (Ibid). It is also noted that the major Caucasian or white race tribes are Arabs, Ottomans, Turkmen, Persians (also known as Tajiks), Uzbeks, Afghans, Baloch, Armenians, Georgians, and Kurds (Ibid: 203) showing the absence of an Aryan conception of space that later dualistically contrasts Persians and non-Persians. Another important point is that the author mentions Persians (*Farsian*), Turkmen, Kurds, Baloch, and others but makes no mention of Iranians.

¹⁵¹ It should be noted that the references in this book are to Herodotus and Eratosthenes, both of whom mention *Persia* rather than *Iran*. Another interesting point is that Najm al-Dawla mentions that most of the existing maps in Iran are *French* maps (Ibid: 184).

The book *Dorrar al-tījān fī ta'rīk banī Aškān* (1889), a history in three volumes of the Parthian period, has an important appendix, which has been published separately under the title *Comparing Ancient and Modern Geographical Terminology of Iran*. This appendix briefly touches upon maps and cartography but does not specifically discuss map-making (Etemad al-Saltanah, 1992: 759). In another case, Hossein Pirnia's book, *Collection of Treaties of the Persian Empire with Foreign Countries*, was written in both Persian and French during the reign of Mohammad Ali Shah, the sixth Qajar king. Absent in the book are maps specifically related to the borders. Although references are made to both prospective maps (Pirnia, 1908: p. 21, 22) and completed ones (p. 18 appendix); the whereabouts of these maps is not clear.

Absence of cartographic representations in fact reflects a significant reality: Qajar 'Iran' consisted of several *independent* kingdoms or realms (Kamal al-Dowlah, 1898: p. 134). In the *Principles* Balouchestan is portrayed in this book not as part of *mamalek-e mahruseh* but as one of the four extensive kingdoms (*mamalek*) in South Asia alongside Indochina, India, and Arabia (Ibid: 200). In another geographical work titled *Safarnama-ye Arabestan* (Arabestan Travelogue) (1882) ND shows how the center sees the independent *mamalek*, particularly Arabestan in late Qajar era. *Safarnama-ye Arabestan* was later revised and published as *Safarnama-ye Khuzestan* in 1962 during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. By way of translation, Arabestan, highlighting the Arabic character of the region, was *replaced* by the Persian term Khuzestan. In the introduction to the revised edition of this work, Dabirsiaghi mentions that the word Arabestan is translated as Khuzestan to refer to that land by its 'true name' (Najm al-Dawla, 1962: vii). Aside from this politics of translation, this book contains very important primary data. ND's view clearly demonstrates that many of Iran's *mamalek-e mahruse* were largely unknown and inaccessible to the center. The representation of Lurestan, for example, is quite telling. It is stated, "the roads of

Lurestan and Bakhtiari are both ruined ... and as long as these two roads remain unconstructed and uninhabited, Arabestan cannot be counted as part of Iran” (Ibid: 18). The Lur and Bakhtiari populations and their environment are depicted in a derogatory manner: “the kingdom of Arabestan is separated from Iran by two great barriers, namely the wild beasts of Lurestan and Bakhtiari” (Ibid: 25). This dehumanizing representation played a key role in the naturalization of internal colonization and the production of Iran.

The independence and autonomy of the guarded domains had a physical and infrastructural dimension. Britain and the Qajar state made efforts for over two decades to open the 200-kilometer route between Khorramabad (in Lurestan) and Dezful (in Arabestan), but in vain. This physical isolation and disconnect persisted until the Pahlavi era, and the Pahlavi military aircraft bombed the black tents of the Lur tribes of Amir Ahmadi to expand the state’s physical presence in these remote independent regions that were separate from the center. Interlinked processes of military attacks, forced displacement of Lurs to Khorasan and central areas by the Pahlavi regime, accompanied by the simultaneous flight of the people from *Posht-e Kooch* towards the west (modern-day Iraq) (Roohi, 2023) have been in place for centuries. Infrastructural projects, specifically the Trans-Iranian Railway in the following years, primarily served to establish a physical connection between Tehran or the central state and the independent frontier regions.

These infrastructural practices have been crucial in the physical production of the national territory, as a necessity in the context of imperialist economy. Imperialism has been associated with the railway system. Although it was the advent of the new steelmaking technology that gave further impetus to the use of iron and steel products (the dominant use values produced in the imperialist stage), it was the extensive construction of railways that first stimulated the demand for these products (Bell, 2009: 193). Due to the delay in entering capitalist relations, the Iranian

railway system did not primarily serve this function. The Trans-Iranian Railway, connected the state based in Tehran to Arabestan while providing the means to suppress centrifugal forces and internal colonization, leading to the execution and displacement of non-Persians residing in frontiers of *mamalek-e mahruse*.¹⁵² Road construction during the reign of Reza Shah was, in fact, a process of occupying frontier regions or *mamalek*. These practices indicate a crucial infrastructural layer in the production of Iran. The motorization of transportation played a key role in eliminating the non-Persian pastoral-nomadic spatiotemporal regimes.

This infrastructural dimension is manifested in other historical sources. In the index of Hossein Pirnia's book, *Collection of Treaties of the Persian Empire with Foreign Countries*, two treaties with Kalat¹⁵³ are noticeable, one in 1871 and the other in 1894. The subject of these treaties is frontier agreement. Kalat included Balochistan and Makran, and in the text, reference is made to the specific domains (*molks*) of the independent state of Kalat (Pirnia, 1908, Appendix 18). The table also lists the treaties with other states. This means that Kalat was considered a state on a par with Germany, England, États-Unis (the U.S.A), the Ottoman Empire, and Iran.

A significant portion of treaties between 'Iran' and other countries pertains to telegraphs. This highlights the infrastructural nature of emerging imperialism and its *international* foundation.

¹⁵² This process was not exclusive to Lurs, Bakhtiari, and Arabs. Kurds, Turkmen, Baloch, and others have also been subjected to this national colonization. Many of the *mamalek-e mahruse* during the Qajar period were not considered as inherently Iranian or part of Iran from the perspective of those Farsist elites residing in the center. For example, Ehtesham ol-Saltaneh, the Governor of Kurdistan in 1900 explicitly referred to the Hawraman and Marivanis, stating that they "were neither Ottoman nor Iranian" (Ehtesham al-Sultan, 1988: 441). Ehtesham ol-Saltaneh, was a Qajari nobleman and constitutionalist politician. At age nine, while continuing his traditional education in Arabic and Persian, he was sent to the Dār-al-fonūn. In 1898 he was made governor of Kurdistan.

See: <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/ehatesam-al-saltana-1>

¹⁵³ The Khanate of Kalat was a khanate that existed from 1512 to 1955 in the centre of the province of Balochistan, Pakistan. Prior to that they were subjects of Mughal King Akbar. Mehrab Khan II Ahmedzai ruled the state independently until 1839, when he was killed by the British. The princely state of Kalat in Balochistan acceded to the Dominion of Pakistan in 1948, after having declared independence earlier in 1947. It was accepted by the Governor General Muhammad Ali Jinnah, making Kalat an integral part of Pakistan. Whether it had the consensus of its subjects remains disputed and Insurgencies against the state of Pakistan continue till the present day.

For instance, among the 12 treaties with Britain spanning from 1857 to 1903, 9 of them are telegraphic protocols. Out of the 14 treaties with Russia between 1828 and 1905, 6 of them are related to telegraph, and others are related to customs and frontiers delineation. From the total of 14 treaties with the Ottomans between 1639 and 1902, 4 are associated with telegraphic infrastructures, two with postal services, and five with borders. This indicates that in treaties with major neighbors (Britain, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire) the focus was primarily on communication infrastructure. This signifies the dialectical link between the production of Iran and the imperialist-driven formation of infrastructures (Pirnia, 1908).

The production of communication infrastructure has historically played a key role in the physical production of Iran. Majority of the treaties delve into details regarding telegraph wires, the installation of iron poles instead of wooden ones, methods of obtaining poles and wires, telegraph stations, as well as the logistics of transporting them to designated locations. The transition from wood to iron – the characteristic use value of the imperialist stage – also represents a shift from a heterogeneous, soft, and qualitative space to a homogeneous, hard, and quantified one. A significant portion of communication infrastructure is dedicated to the production of Tehran as the center of the national state. Tehran transformed into a center through these (mostly British-oriented) infrastructures (pp. 71, 73). The infrastructural production of Iranian territory entailed the production of internal/national colonies.

3. The Scientific Production of Aryan Racism as ‘Specialized Knowledge’

The statist production of historiographic knowledge, as explored in its initial stages in the preceding sections, was rooted in racial and dualistic notions. However, during the Qajar period, such racism had not yet received the backing of the emerging scientific institution, a key tool for

the central state in justifying its colonial violence. The responsibility of reframing this racist, dualistic knowledge into ‘scientific’ discourse fell to the next generation of state intellectuals. These intellectuals are pivotal in reinforcing the colonial dynamics and obstructing transformative social change. As part of the middle classes, these intellectuals ‘occupy intermediary spaces between the center and the peripheries’ (Lefebvre, 1976: 26) and bridge the gaps through nationalist ideologies that are systematically penetrated ordinary people’s everyday life. Central to this process is a fundamental dualism: the division between intellectual and manual labour. Like all dualisms, here we are also faced with a hierarchical-colonial relationship between two poles/spaces. Here, intellectual labour is deemed superior to manual labour¹⁵⁴, resulting in a systematic reification of intellectual labour, with Aryan nationalism as a prominent embodiment. Intellectuals of the nation-state, relying on Farsist ‘specialized knowledge’¹⁵⁵ present the national state form and its spatio-temporal matrix as the ultimate form of organization of space.

The state intellectual’s endeavor resulted in the creation and naturalization of the Aryan hypothesis in and through Farsi. So, the Farsist production of knowledge should be seen in connection with the intellectual invention of Aryan race and Aryan nationalism. At the late 19th century, “northern Europeans began to classify themselves as ‘Aryans,’ racially superior to and purer than their shorter and darker neighbors to the south and east” (Gibson, 2020: 100)¹⁵⁶. To many modern scientists the answer to the ‘Southern Question’ was race. It was argued that ‘savages’ and ‘barbarians’ were closer to animals than to civilized humans (Ibid: 102).

¹⁵⁴ This is symbolically manifested in a passage in Ramakian, the Thai version of the Ramayana, where mind-body dualism is symbolically represented: All the cities are the body; The king is the mind” (Winichakul, 1994: 133).

¹⁵⁵ Specialized knowledge is integral to the state’s tendency to *reduce* contradictions. The defining rhythm of the state is *stasis*. The state reduces contradictions in and through the production of abstract spacetime. Dialectics can provide a critical theory of the national state since, after all, dialectics is ‘the theory of contradictions’ (Lefebvre, 1991: 333).

¹⁵⁶ In *Criminal Man*, Cesare Lombroso identified race as fundamental to the etiology of crime in Southern Italy. Originally published in 1876, the book had been translated into French, the common language of European intellectuals.

Investigating the historical evolution of the term Aryan, Zia-Ebrahimi (2016) shows that there is absolutely no trace of the ‘Aryan race’ throughout Persian literature until the 1890s. He explains that every mention of Arya in ancient sources should not be taken as a sign of the eternal existence of the Iranian nation with an independent racial identity, because we still do not know exactly what the meaning of Arya was in ancient sources.

As shown in the previous section, characterizing non-Persians as *savage*, *harsh*, *uncultured*, and *uncivilized* can be frequently found in history books and reports of the late Qajar era. Thus, it can be demonstrated that an emerging (Farsist) racism was laying the foundation for a colonial relationship between the center and non-Persian peripheries, serving as the cornerstone of the Iranian ‘nation.’ Aryan racism that was produced as a specialized knowledge have been essential in the production of ‘Iran’. The inferior races, in this view, have a lower mental/reasoning capacity. That is why science is considered above the everyday lives of the ‘savages’ and ‘barbarians’.

Aryan racism has been a fundamental constitutive feature of ‘Iranian’ nationalism. However, Aryan racism and nationalism, along with national scale itself, are simultaneously shaped by an emerging international context. The rise of scientific racism, nationalism, and more specifically, nationalist historiographies has been an outcome of the imperialist capitalism and uneven and late character of ‘Iranian’ (and other) nation state formations. It was in this emerging context that a particular ‘we’ emerged to answer the so-called civilizational decline of the ‘Persians’. In the Pahlavi era, “this was a Persian defined by a pure, ancient culture, separate from Islam and focused on the continuous history of the land that came to be modern Iran¹⁵⁷” (Kia, 2020: 2). In this context Persian intellectuals “turned to European racism, seized upon its concept of Aryanism, and

¹⁵⁷ It is then claimed that this notion of place and origin produced a certain kind of Persian which “its most hallucinatory version conceived of Iran before Islam as secular by equating Zoroastrian politics and society with post-Enlightenment ideals of human rights and justice, supposedly emancipated from religion.” (Kia, 2020: 2-3)

extended it to themselves” (Ibid: 3). Drawing on ‘scientific’ racist Persian supremacy that was made possible internationally, “Arabs became savages, Afghans thieves, Indians smelled, and Turks stupid” (Ibid).

As race science reached its European zenith in the 1880s and 1890s, the Western-educated “Qajar intellectual elite began to adapt and instrumentalize racial discourses to serve emerging forms of nationalism” (Burton, 2021: 37). Scientific discourses on race, medicine, and hygiene were explicitly deployed for projects of ‘internal colonialism’ (Ibid: 13). The development of anthropometry and human genetics showed that although nation states acted against (Western) colonialism, at the same time, executed ‘internal colonialism’, by establishing a hegemonic national identity (Ibid: 35):

Member states of the League of Nations repeatedly manipulated demographic realities to create ... the degree of ethnic homogeneity necessary to make claims about national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Iran, one of the League’s founding members sought to homogenize its population and claim European identity through reference to an Aryan race (Burton, 2021: 55).

As a result of a century of racist knowledge production, today, the majority of Iranians identify themselves with a distant past – the era before the so-called invasion of Arabs – and specifically with the so-called Aryan race. These common ideas about the superiority of Iranians over Arabs and other non-Persians are part of an ideology which is called ‘dislocative¹⁵⁸ nationalism’ (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 2). It means the Iranian nation’s detachment from its empirical reality, i.e., a

¹⁵⁸ Dislocative or racial nationalism which was born in the works of Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani revolves around a series of principles which include the idea that Iran is an eternal nation that has existed uninterruptedly since at least 2,500 years ago. In addition, the glory of Iran should be found in the pre-Islamic golden age. Third, Iran’s decline should be attributed to Islam, which Arabs imposed on Iranians by the sword. Finally, Iranians are of the Aryan race and therefore are utterly different from Arabs (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 3).

society with a Muslim majority geographically located in the East¹⁵⁹. The hypothesis of the Aryan race makes such mental detachment possible. As Zia-Ebrahimi says, there is absolutely no trace of the ‘Aryan race’ throughout Persian literature until the 1890s. Aryan discourse was a product imported from Europe and reworked in and through Farsi.

The formation and solidification of racialist ideologies should be understood within the context of imperialism, and the emergence of the ‘national economy’ in Germany. By the second half of the nineteenth century, European theories of Indo-European linguistic affinities gradually acquired racial overtones. Thus, Germans were tied to an ancient ‘Aryan’ race, originating somewhere in the Orient, and linked to ‘Iran,’ a term made synonymous with ‘the land of Aryans.’ Awash with anti-British and anti-Russian sentiments, ‘Iran’ too was ripe for a German alliance when World War I broke out. Thus, a significant partnership between Imperial Germany and Iran’s fledgling constitutionalist nationalism began. When Russian armies threatened to capture Tehran in the fall of 1915, a mostly Democrat Party faction of Majles deputies left the capital and formed a German-backed ‘provisional government’ in Kermanshah (Matin-Asgari, 2018: 50). The activities of this “Berlin Circle” of Iranian nationalists were funded by the German state, which also paid its members living stipends (Ibid: 51).

Thus, the Berlin Circle¹⁶⁰ – as the embryonic form of Iranian/Persian diaspora – began to articulate a comprehensive Iranian nationalist worldview in its flagship periodical *Kaveh* (Ibid). *Kaveh* was equally deferential to German intellectual authority, and particularly Orientalist

¹⁵⁹ The concepts of East and West have their own history. For example, Spain, the former global imperial power called and drew what is known as the East today as the West. See: Padrón (2020).

¹⁶⁰ Lasting slightly more than a decade (1915 to the mid-1920s), the Berlin Circle brought together the most influential members of the post-Constitutional era’s political and cultural elite such as Hasan Taqizadeh, Hasan Kazemzadeh-Iranshahr, Mohammad Qazvini, Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh, Ebrahim Purdavud, Moretza Moshfeq-Kazemi, Taqi Arani, Sadeq Rezazadeh-Shafaq, Mahmud Afshar, Gholam-Reza Rashid-Yasami, Heydar Amuoghlu, and Abbas Eqbal-Ashtiani (Matin-Asgari, 2014: 53).

scholarship. In addition to naming the journal after the legendary hero of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, the changing of Iran's modern tricolor flag to "a form closer to historical truth" was proposed. The flag's Lion and Sun emblem, presumably linked to Seljuk Turks were to be dropped and its colors changed to red, yellow, and purple, corresponding to Kaveh's flag, as described in *Shahnameh* (Ibid: 52).

This should be seen in the context of the rise of Imperial Germany and its infrastructural aspect. By the mid-1880s, Bismarck initiated a maritime expansion project, with German expansionism's overland path. This initiative was epitomized by the Berlin-Baghdad Railway and politically manifested in Imperial Germany's alliance with the Young Turks upon their ascent to power. Distressed by the longstanding imperialist pressures from Russia, France, and Britain, the Ottomans found natural allies in Germany. 'Iranian' nationalists also felt that the Constitutional Revolution's goal of national sovereignty was undermined by the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement, which led to imperialist military interventions and, ultimately, Iran's occupation during the First World War (Matin-Asgari, 2014: 52). It was in this context that "inspired by Orientalist scholarship and Aryan race theorists such as Gobineau and Ernest Renan had glorified pre-Islamic Iran as the golden age of "national" grandeur, unsullied by the intrusion of Arabs" (Ibid).

3.1. Language of Aryan Racism

At a time when philology had become a credible academic discipline, "by the 1850s, the Indo-European language family and the alleged Aryan race that spoke these languages had become established 'facts'" (Vaziri, 2013: 29). The Aryan hypothesis as an 'internalist' ideology enabled elites to disconnect the so-called Aryan race/civilization from all outside influences. The linear classification of Farsi language (into three consecutive periods), and the production of a linear temporality, were made possible by connecting language to race. Defining 'Iranians' as Aryan, in

explicit contradistinction to Arabs, Turks, and other non-Persians, the Orientalists “forged the name of Iran not only to stand for a people but also for a language family, a civilization, a culture” (Vaziri, 2013: 4). Philology and linguistics were employed to separate periods of time and parcels of space. They produce mutually exclusive temporal periods and spatial extensions based on bounded boundaries. Farsi was spatially separated from its absolutized others like Arabic, and historically established as a continuous linearity. Concomitantly, other languages in Iran were trivialized. The history of a single language (Farsi) was linked to an entire geographical zone (Vaziri, 2013: 5-6).

This process initiated in Qajar period¹⁶¹ but the scientific production of Aryan racism as the basis of Iranian nationalism is mostly the output of the Pahlavi period. Following the European Orientalist methodology as an embodiment of the dualistic thought of bourgeois society¹⁶², a generation of ‘Iranian’ historiographers was produced in the very process of national state formation. Persian supremacy, supported by a firmly established Orientalist knowledge, then formed the core of Iranian historiography. “*Yadegar*’s first issue (1944), a prominent magazine edited in Tehran by the historian Abbas Eqbal¹⁶³ opened with declaring the magazine’s goals as

¹⁶¹ For instance, Comte de Gobineau’s contribution is highly influential in this period. His “devotion to biological racism and Aryan-ness energized him to write enthusiastically what came to be known as the bible of racism, *Introduction à l’Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1854)” (Vaziri, 2013: 109-110). For him, the defeat of the Persians at the hands of the Macedonians was the result of “the mixture of the Persians with the *inferior* and *indigenous* Semitic people (Ibid: 110). Contrary to Gobineau’s view, as Hamd Allah Mustawfi has mentioned in the *Delight of the Hearts* (1339), Iran is part of Sam’s lands (P. 20 Persian edition, 1957). His account shows when the Aryan myth had not yet been invented by the state’s intellectuals, ‘Iranians’ were considered as Semitic peoples.

¹⁶² Orientalism is defined based on a particular ‘other’, i.e., Orient. It is “a powerful ‘fantasy’ in which the Orient existed as a place isolated from European progress” (Koefoed & Haldrup, 2009: 39). This dualism is as always, a hierarchical relationship in which “the ‘other’ (Orient) is often imagined in as primitive, barbaric, and wild in contrast to the European, which is pictured as civilized, advanced, rational” (Ibid). Orientalism in this sense is inherently racist. The Oriental logic however is multiplied at different scales. In the context of the production of Iran for instance the Oriental logic functions to create and naturalize a dualism of Persian-nonPersian. All these dualisms have a crucial spatial aspect. Orientalism is associated with an absolute territorialism. Moreover, “Eurocentrism is the condition of possibility for Orientalism” (Sundberg, 2009: 638).

¹⁶³ Abbas Eqbal Ashtiani, literary scholar, historian, and translator was educated at Dar ul-Funun (House of Sciences) in Tehran and University of Paris. In 1944 Eqbal founded the monthly periodical *Yādgār*.

helping the readers better appreciate what makes Iran *superior to other countries and ethnicities*” (Matin-Asgari, 2009a: 202).

The naturalization of Aryan racism was expanded through the introduction of this ideology in school textbooks. The textbook *New Geography* for the first year of high school has been published by Mohammad Mohit Tabatabai is one of the first school textbooks that introduces the Aryan hypothesis. As seen in the third edition of this book (1937), the author believes that there is such a significant difference in appearance of human beings that it is difficult to consider them all derived from a common *origin* (p. 101). According to the author, the white race has two branches: Aryan, which includes Iranians, and Semitic, which includes Arabs and Jews, among others (p. 102, 103). From the Mohit Tabatabai’s perspective, language plays a significant role in the categorization of races. The book considers linguistics as the foundation of a new approach to racial studies (p. 108). The author refers to the classification of important languages into three categories: Indo-European, Semitic, and Asian/Turani, placing Persian among the Indo-European languages (p. 108). Turkic language, however, is categorized as Asian/Turkic. Interestingly, here, Asian is equivalent to Turani. Considering that in the *Shahnameh*, Iran is defined in opposition to Turan, this linguistic strategy distinguishes Iran from the entirety of Asia¹⁶⁴ making it closer to the Europe.

Highlighting Persian (p. 110), while disregarding non-Persian languages, indicates a state strategy aimed at Farsization of the history. Racist assumptions were consolidated through the medium of science. Krischner and his wife, who have travelled to Iran and measured hundreds of

¹⁶⁴ This hierarchical, supremacist approach is replicated in various interconnected forms. For instance, the book adopts a *hierarchical* approach to classifying religions, positioning polytheism against monotheistic religions, and asserting the existence of polytheism among people lead to a savage life (p. 114). A similar approach can be found in the textbook *History* for the fourth grade of literature that was published in the year 1964. The association of monotheism with civilization and polytheism with savagery is of the dualisms that naturalizes the sedentary state.

In another attempt in 1939, Henry Field writes “under the policy of His Imperial Majesty Reza Shah Pahlavi, the tribes are being disbanded, so that within a relatively short span of time tribal divisions will no longer exist” (Burton, 2021: 60). Field is known for proposing a racial designation: ‘Iranian Plateau Race’. He justifies this by saying that “a new term is desirable to signify the basic population of Iran ... to differentiate this basic Irani from allied racial stocks in Iraq and in Afghanistan. I suggest the new term ‘Iranian Plateau Race’” (Ibid). Henry Field’s book *Contributions to The Anthropology of Iran* (1939) was translated into Farsi in 1964. The front cover of the Persian translation (Figure 5) reveals the theoretical framework of the book, which is based on a scientific – biological – racist account of human history.



Figure 5 (left). Front cover of Henry Field’s book *Contributions to The Anthropology of Iran* in Persian (مردم‌شناسی ایران). (ایران).

Figure 6 (Right). Iran’s Anthropology Map. The map has divided Iran’s population into different races of Ajam, Turkmen, Kurd, Lur, Bakhtiari, Elami, Arab, Fars, Hindu, and Tajiks. Henry Field’s book *Contributions to The Anthropology of Iran* in Persian (p. 75).

Aryan racism has also been utilized to produce the concept of ‘Iranian plateau’. To my knowledge, it is in the *Principles* (1881) that for the first time the ‘Iranian plateau’ (*falat-e Iran*) has been used in Farsi (Najm al-Dawla, 1881: 190, 197). A portion of the book *New Geography* (1937) by Mohammad Mohit Tabatabai focuses on the ‘Iranian Plateau’. This, as far as I know, is the first

definition of the Iranian Plateau in Farsi (p. 67)¹⁶⁷. It is stated that the Iranian Plateau includes Afghanistan, Iran, British Baluchistan, and a small part of Armenia, with Iran, which has an area of one million six hundred forty-five thousand square kilometers (p. 72). Apparently, during the 1960s, the process of naturalizing the ‘Iranian plateau’ based on Aryan racism was initiated. The geography textbook for the third year of high school (Bina et al., 1961), published in 1961, begins with a focus on the ‘Iranian Plateau’. It is stated that Iranians belong to the Aryan race and migrated to this plateau around three thousand years before the birth of Christ. However, “the Arab invasion and the invasion of wild and aggressive eastern tribes prevented the expansion of civilization and progress in our country” (p. 9). It is stated that “our country is part of the vast Iranian plateau, located between the Mesopotamian (Iraq), the Indus-Punjab (Pakistan), and Turkestan plains” (p. 5). In the entire book, there is no mention of the history of the Iranian plateau, and its existence is taken for granted. The unsubstantiated reference to the Iranian plateau, as an ahistorical phenomenon, is used to justify the existence of Iran during the Achaemenid and Sassanian periods.

In this narrative, the Iranian plateau is depicted as separate from historical and political processes. Iranian plateau is thus removed from history. The conceptual moment of the production of spacetime implies that social phenomena do not exist separated from their representations. It is illogical to assert that ‘Iranian plateau’ existed before the concepts of Iran and plateau were formed. If the term ‘plateau’ was coined in 1743¹⁶⁸, it would be wrong to claim that the Iranian plateau¹⁶⁹ existed before this year. The book *History* (written by Abbas Parviz, Nasrollah Falsafi, and Ali Asghar Shamim) for the fourth grade of literature that (1964) begins with the sentence: “The word

¹⁶⁷ I have utilized the scanned version of the book. In this version, there has been a jump from page 132 to page 67. Readers should be aware that this page 67 is different from the page 67 preceding page 132.

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plateau#word-history>

¹⁶⁹ To date, there is no comprehensive research covering the history of ‘plateau’ from a social perspective, indicating a significant gap that future research should aim to fill.

Iran means the land of Aryan peoples. It is mentioned in the *Avesta*, and Darius the Great also referred to himself as an Aryan in his inscriptions” (p. 1). It then proceeds to define the ‘Plateau of Iran’ or *Najd-e Iran*: Iran is one of the high *plateaus* of Asia, bordered to the east by the Tibetan and Pamir plateaus, to the west by the Armenian plateau and the Mesopotamian plain, to the north by the Caspian Sea basin and the Aral Sea, and to the south by the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. No reference or history is provided for this definition. According to this book, the ‘Iranian plateau’ existed before the arrival of the Aryans (p. 4). It remains unclear how Iran could have existed before the arrival of the Aryans (Iran’s Paradox). This inclination de-historicizes Iran.

The production of racist specialized knowledge was further entrenched by the cumulative body of writings on the subject across various disciplines, ranging from anthropology to literature. *Two Centuries of Silence*¹⁷⁰ (1957) by Abdolhossein Zarrinkoob (1923-1999) has been one of the several manifestations of the racist nationalism during the Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s reign. Zarrinkoob reveals his deep abhorrence of Arabs and Arab culture in the most blatant way. His contribution has been extremely influential in shaping the Iranian racist psyche. The produced conception of Iranianness in this sense is dissociable from Persian supremacy which is characterized by a tendency to highlight the unique quality of Persians/Iranians.

Aryan myth is so entrenched that even the Islamic reactions to Zarrinkoob’s view, including in *Khadamāt-e moteqābel-e Eslām va Īrān* (Islam and Iran: A Historical Study of Mutual Services) by Morteza Motahhari¹⁷¹, acknowledge the Aryan myth. Ali Shariati (1933-1977), an Islamist socialist revolutionary goes even further and promotes Iranian-Arab racial dualism. He believes

¹⁷⁰ The work is a historical account of the events and circumstances of the first two centuries of the Iranian history following the Arab conquest of Iran in the 7th century AD until the rise of the Tahirid dynasty, a Muslim dynasty of native Iranian origin.

¹⁷¹ Morteza Motahhari (1919-1979) was an Iranian Twelver Shia scholar, philosopher, lecturer. Motahhari is considered to have an important influence on the ideologies of the Islamic Republic.

that the Aryan and the Semitic can be distinguished by their insight: “Semites see the tree, but Aryans see the jungle and the tree” (Shariati, 2013: 376).¹⁷² Shariati, dubbed as ‘the main ideologue of the Iranian Revolution’, asserts that “Aryans are never safe in the presence of Semites. The Aryan feels that the Semitic might attack him like a ‘wild cat’ at any moment” (Ibid: 378). He says Aryan thought is multidimensional, but Semites think one-dimensionally (Ibid: 379). Shariati goes as far as ridiculing Arabic language and poetry and tries to develop an ‘Iranian’ (Shi’ist) Islam against Arabs/Semites through Aryan race/culture (Ibid). Where Shariati compares the Aryan and Semitic races, he does not say anything affirmative about the Arabs and continuously describes them mostly with negative traits (Ibid: 394). Fusion of the Aryan race and Islam, Shariati argues, has resulted in Iran’s Shiism (*tashayo-e Iran*). Shia Islam, Shariati concludes, represents the establishment of monotheism/oneness and the decline of dualism (Ibid: 412). He, however, prioritizes Aryans over Semites and therefore reproduces a geographical dualism that contrasts Shia Iran with the Sunni Arab world.

The historiographic practices of the national state, after at least one hundred years, has been able to shape Iranian worldview (in and through Farsi). It has produced and established a particular conceptual framework which shape and delimits the theoretical horizon of Iranian (Fars) intellectuals. As a result, almost all the oppositional responses to the existing political order are restricted to this Farsi ontology. More importantly, historiographic practices have been linked to spatial strategies. The production of Aryan racism was not confined to the discursive level; its inscription in space was a prerequisite for the materialization of the racist scientific discourse.

¹⁷² I used a digital edition of Shariati’s book. Page numbers might differ from the original paper edition.

3.2. Architecture of Aryan Racism

The scientific production of Iran as a national history could not remain limited to national historiographies or nationalist agenda in school textbooks. The social production of national space is simultaneously conceptual and physical. For a national history to exist, it must be engraved in physical space; a process that fundamentally relies on the state's institutional capacity. A range of interconnected institutions (in the Pahlavi period) was created to promote historiographic knowledge. For this 'scientific' ideology to become effective in the state formation, spatialization was necessary. According to my theoretical framework, the material order that emerges on the ground can itself become the vehicle conveying meaning (Schmid, 2022). Architecture and architectural practices were employed to engrave national history in space. As expected, intellectuals played a crucial role in the process:

the Society for National Heritage¹⁷³ (*anjuman-i āṣār-i millī*) [SNH], a group of Iranian politicians, scholars, and intellectuals, undertook the construction of new mausoleums for famous deceased poets, scholars, and statesmen ... which involved the exhumation of their remains. The Society used the recovered skulls not only to reconstruct portraits and sculptures of these men but also to pronounce them "true Aryans" according to craniometry (Burton, 2021: 57).

Such architectural monuments were the actualization of Aryan-scientific national history. As Grigor (2009) has shown, the designing of the mausoleum of Ferdowsi "functions as a booster of national pride based on the *Shahnameh*'s representation of ancient Iran ... initially designed by French architect and archaeologist André Godard (1924-34) in Tus and became known as Ferdowsiyeh with its distinctive pre-Islamic design and Zoroastrian ornamentation" (cited in Raza,

¹⁷³ In *Building Iran: Modernism, Architecture, and National Heritage Under the Pahlavi Monarchs* (2009) Talinn Grigor has discussed the pivotal role played by the Society for National Heritage (SNH) in executing a major modernist architectural transformation in Iran.

2011).¹⁷⁴ Officially established in 1922 (terminated in 1934, to be re-launched in 1944), the SNH became a venue through which more than sixty monuments, preservation projects, and Iran's first archeological museum were constructed (Karimi, 2011). The founding members of the SNH, including the German archeologist Ernst Herzfeld and the French architect/archeologist Andre Godard as well as Iranian intelligentsia (the court minister, Abd al-Hossein Teymurtash; the foremost historian of modern Iranian education, Isa Sadiq; Hassan Pirnia; and the Zoroastrian representative to parliament, Arbab Keikhosrow Shahrokh), they all were advocates of Aryan supremacy. Seeing in this light, it makes more sense when Grigor describes Reza Shah as the 'architect' of Modern Iran (Ibid).

The state strategies for producing a national space were not limited to the architectural practices. Internal colonization was a broader strategy for inscribing scientific Aryan racism in space. Internal colonization is mostly manifested in the violent politics of both Pahlavi and Islamic states towards non-Persians¹⁷⁵ and their effort to represent them as 'ethnicities' within the broader category of an already 'unified' Iranian nation. This issue becomes even more problematic when even critical historians classify non-Persians as ethnic groups. However, given the context outlined here, it is essential to approach categorizing non-Persians as ethnicities or ethnic groups with caution, as they risk reinforcing reductive colonial frameworks. Critical historian, Elling (2013) for instance analyze non-Persians under ethnic groups while acknowledging that the choice of descriptive labels such as ethnicist versus nationalist often involves compromises (Elling, 2013: 10). The Islamic Republic has perpetuated and intensified domesticating "ethnic difference, ensuring that all of its expressions" (Burton, 2021: 118). I understand this 'ethnicization' of non-

¹⁷⁴ <https://www.ibraaz.org/usr/library/documents/main/talinn-grigor-building-iran.pdf>
<https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/29>

¹⁷⁵ It should be noted that neither Persians nor non-Persians identified themselves as 'nation' prior to the Pahlavi. Nationalizing collective identities should be considered in its very recent geohistorical context.

Persians as a form of dressage¹⁷⁶. By ‘dressage’ I mean the systematic disciplining and training of the body by the state. A century of centralized colonial education-dressage has produced and normalized a particular state-centric nationalist form of (geo)historical knowledge preventing the formation of critical histories of Iran.

This systematic process of domestication and ‘dressage’ should be seen in direct connection with internal colonization and the suppression of the regional indigenous autonomist movements in Iran. It is only by the early 1970s, when “recalcitrant khans had been killed or exiled and the tribes forcibly disarmed, neutralizing their potential threat to the central government” that the central state expanded support for cultural anthropology on tribal groups (Burton, 2021: 223). A decade earlier, that was not a possibility because nomads and tribes were not subjugated yet. It was through such physical interventions by the state that the non-Persian (nomadic, tribal, rural) populations were pulled into the *internally* colonial production of Iran. This process enabled the state to begin advertising the exotic nature and touristic appeal of nomadic groups (Ibid). It was instrumental in the production of Iranian national state by paving the way for expropriation of nature (Chapter Four). Domestication of the non-Persian nomadic (and sedentary) populations/bodies has been a necessary part of the production of Iran. Since the foundation of the Pahlavi state, this internal colonization had been framed in terms of Aryanism (Ibid).

4. Racism and Colonial Legalization/Production of Space

Space and territory have a crucial legal dimension. Seeing territory as a juridico-*technical* relation which is neither reducible to land (a relation of property or a *political-economic* relation) nor terrain (a relation of power or a *political-strategic* relation) (Elden, 2013: 9-10, 323), I argue that

¹⁷⁶ I have taken this from Lefebvre’s *Rhythmanalysis* where he says, “one can and one must distinguish between education, learning and dressage or training [le dressage]” (Lefebvre, 2004: 39).

the production of Iranian national territory should be understood in relation to the development of land surveying and other new techniques like cartography. The birth of national administrative divisions has been closely linked with the legalization of space, a process well-documented in various historical sources, including school textbooks such as the book *Resale-ye Talimat-e Madaniye* (A Treatise on Civic Education, 1911) written by Seyyed Zia ol Din Tabatabaee, which was prepared for teaching in the fifth and sixth grades of elementary school. In this book, the national state is equated with the constitutional state (p. 4), and its foundation is considered the sovereignty (*hakemiyat*) of the nation. The author also defines a subject (*tabaeh*) as someone who is obedient to the laws and regulations of a state (p. 49). There is no mention of the state *territory* though. Consequently, the object of sovereignty (Elden, 2013) remains ambiguous. The term citizen has not yet been introduced, but instead of the conventional term, ‘subjects’ (*raaya*), the term ‘individual inhabitants of the state’ (*afrad-e ahali-e mamlekat*) is used. The book discusses the administrative divisions of Iran saying that “our country, Iran, is divided into three levels of administrative divisions: states, provinces, and blocks (*eyalaat, velayaat, and blocks*) for the ease of administering affairs” (p. 34).

Examining the historical formation of administrative divisions, a fundamental mechanism in the production of Iran, directs our attention to the production of provinces as the primary administrative units of national territory. Iran’s provinces are historical products. The formation and reconfiguration of these provinces constitute a crucial aspect of the production of Iran as a national territory. This process has been shaped by a racist conception of space wherein non-Persian populations have been systematically marginalized and deemed inferior. In this section, through the analysis of primary sources, including educational textbooks, I will demonstrate that

the production of provinces has functioned as a central mechanism in the nationally colonial production of Iran.

A Brief History of Iran specifically designed for the third and fourth grades of elementary school is authored by Mohammad Ali Foroughi, Zoka-ol-Molk. Its eleventh edition was published in 1892. On the cover, there is a schematic image of Iran, depicting Iran as branches of a unified tree (Figure 7). The provinces depicted on this image. There is no trace of Kurdistan. In the *Pocket Atlas of Iran* (Eghbal, 1926), there is no mention of Kurdistan, but instead, the historical name Ardalan can be seen (Figure 8). This implies that at that time Kurdistan was not yet produced as an Iranian province. Given the absence of administrative divisions, each map in this atlas features several regions where borders are not clearly demarcated.

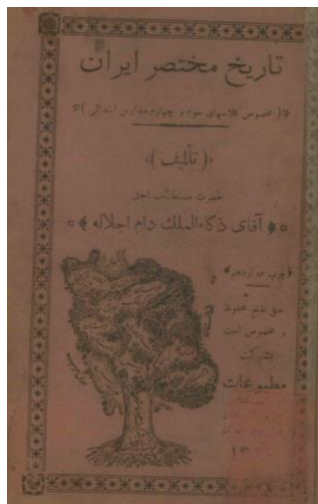


Figure 7 (Left). Front cover of *A Brief History of Iran* (1892).

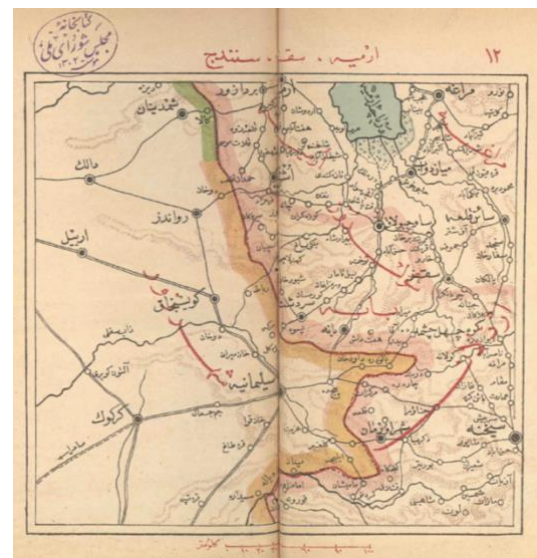


Figure 8 (Right). Urmia, Saqqez, Sanandaj from *Pocket Atlas of Iran* (1926).

The most significant characteristic of these maps in the second volume (Political Geography) of *Detailed Geography of Iran* (Keyhan, 1932a) is that their primary features are lines and dots, rather than defined bounded parcels or geometric shapes. As a result, clear and precise differentiations between the existing spaces on each map are not prominent. In very few cases where internal divisions (e.g., between cities) are highlighted (such as the Political Map of Fars and Ports), they are depicted using faint dashed lines (Figures 9). To clarify my point, the previous maps can be

compared with the Political Map of Azarbaijan (Figure 10) that shows the administrative divisions have not been systematically established. This indicates that abstract space was in its early stages of development.

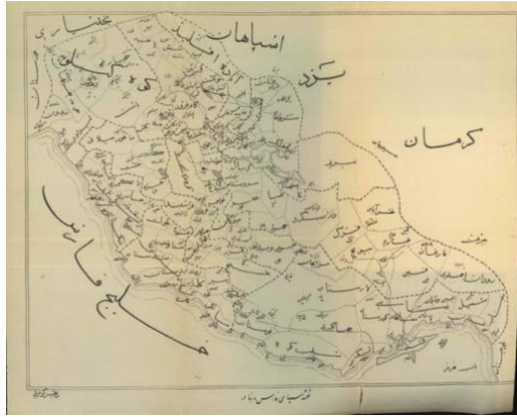


Figure 9 (Left). Political Map of Fars and Port from *Detailed Geography of Iran*, Vol. 2 (1932a).

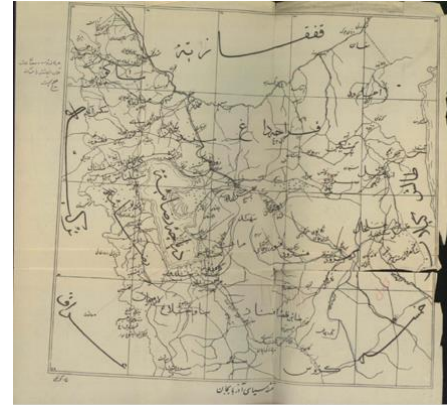


Figure 10 (Right). Political Map of Azarbaijan from *Detailed Geography of Iran*, Vol. 2 (1932a).

The textbook *New Geography* (1937) by Mohammad Mohit Tabatabai, discusses the provinces (*velayaat*) and states (*eyalaat*) of Iran. It divides Iran into twelve divisions, of which currently four parts are referred to as *states*, while the rest are referred to as provinces and governorates. The four states are Azerbaijan, Khorasan and Sistan, Kerman and Baluchestan, and Fars and Larestan. It is mentioned that these divisions are subject to change (p. 87). The terminology of *velayaat* and *eyalaat* remained predominant, indicating that province was still in its nascent stages of formation.

The Geographic Encyclopedia of Iran (Farhang-e Joghrafi-ae-e Iran), compiled by Hossein Ali Razmara, is a comprehensive collection consisting of 10 volumes (1949-1953) that provides detailed information about all the settlements (*abadiha*) in Iran. The first census in Iran was conducted in 1956, but *the Geographic Encyclopedia of Iran* was prepared a few years earlier, making it the first unofficial census in Iran. This encyclopedia laid a solid foundation for the Farsization of spacetime through translation and correction of historical texts written in the pre-national era in the following decades. In terms of details and elaboration, this geographical

encyclopedia is the first of its kind in Farsi. Each volume, which covers one ‘province’ (*Ostan*), includes detailed maps of the administrative divisions. So, this work can be regarded as the earliest systematic effort to delineate and formalize the provinces of the Iranian nation-state. However, the level of abstraction only reached the representation of counties, and the internal space of the counties themselves was still mostly indistinguishable. This indicates that in the late 1920s and early 1930s the cartographic technology was at the early stage when it had initiated representing the internal divisions of counties (*shahrestanha*) in an abstract manner. As can be seen on the maps in some provinces, such as the first province, the counties within the province were not contiguous, and there were discontinuities between counties. For example, in Figure 11, which illustrates the boundaries of counties in Azerbaijan, we also observe that Ardabil (اردبیل) is divided into two discontinuous pieces (positioned in the northeast section of the map). This indicates that the spatial representation was still to a great extent qualitative. Moreover, geographic units such as settlements (*abadi*), cities (*shahr*), and districts (*qasaba*) have not been defined¹⁷⁷.



Figure 11. Boundaries of Azerbaijan’s Counties from *the Geographic Encyclopedia of Iran*.

The Fate of Baluchestan and Its Borders (1959) provides detailed information about (natural and political) history and geography of Balochestan, and it includes three appendices. One focuses on

¹⁷⁷ These data provide abundant opportunities for researchers, including approximately determining the percentage of the population who spoke a language other than Farsi, and then, after 70 years, comparing to see how the state interventions have affected linguistic diversity. Based on the data from this geographical culture, detailed maps of language distribution, schools, tribes, clans, etc., can be generated.

providing detailed descriptions of the nomads and tribes of Balochestan. The names of the settlements for each tribe still retain their local and Balochi names without being Farsicized. The title of the last map¹⁷⁸ in the book is as follows: Map of Balochi Nomads (Figure 12). This map, presenting the Balochi tribes as territorial entities, is the first of its kind in Farsi. This indicates how the cartographic practices of the state produce spatiotemporal matrices of the national state by internalizing nomadic entities and representing them as bounded territories. However, at that time, these tribes were not yet referred to as ‘Iranian,’ and the process of ethnicization of non-Persians had not yet begun.

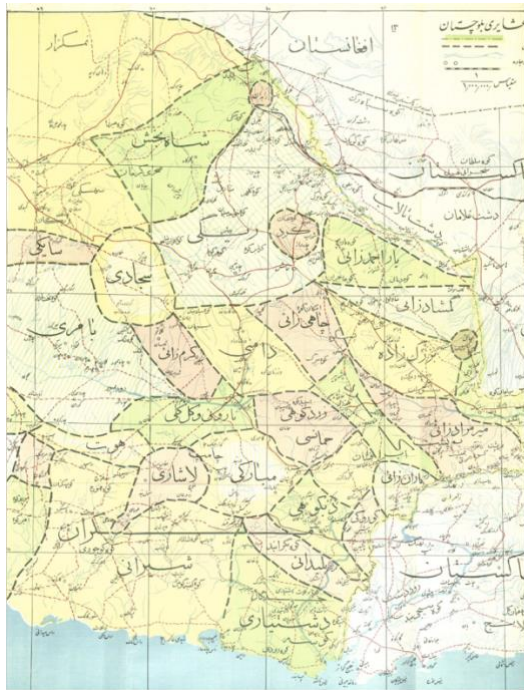


Figure 12. Map of Balochi nomads from *The Fate of Baluchestan and Its Borders* (1959).

Despite the use of dashed lines and efforts to associate tribes with bounded territories, this map demonstrates that spatial divisions, especially in frontier regions like Balochestan, were still highly qualitative, even when represented on the map. Another revealing point in this book is the direct reference to the suppression of certain Baloch tribes by the central state which has been crucial in

¹⁷⁸ The book contains 18 maps in total.

internal colonization. At the physical level, one can mention the military suppression of certain tribes and specifically the exile of Sardar Jomeh Khan Ismailzai. At the conceptual level, as mentioned in the third appendix of the book (Jahanbani, 1959: 37), after the exile of Jomeh Khan to Shiraz, the name of the tribe was changed from Ismailzai to *Shahbakhshi*. Although the primary objective of this name change, as evident in the term *Shahbakhshi* (forgiven by the Shah) was to demonstrate the benevolence of the king, it aimed at Farsization of space.

The book *Geography of Iran* authored by Mohammad Hassan Ganji and Hossein Khalilifar (1970) contains a map (p. 17) displaying the administrative divisions based on provinces (*ostan*) with their name (Figure 13). However, the provinces are still identified by numbers as well. In fact, the names of the provinces are marked on the map in a smaller font than the province numbers. This can be considered as one of the first maps of administrative divisions of Iran in textbooks. The book proceeds to introduce each of these provinces separately.



Figure 13. Administrative divisions from *Geography of Iran* (1970).

The map of Administrative Divisions of Iran in *Iran's White Revolution* (1972) (Figure 14) shows the most abstract representation of administrative divisions. The administrative division map is the most abstract representation of Iran compared to all the previously examined maps. In this map,

not only are the provinces divided, but their internal spaces are also further subdivided into bounded spaces. The table drawn in the map shows that Iran is divided into 14 provinces and 9 general governorships. Among these, the southern coastal province stands out as it did not exist with this name either prior to or after the given date. On the other hand, the use of the term ‘general governorship’ (*farmandari-e kol*) represents a step towards producing new spatial divisions. These general governorships prefigure the establishment of provinces (*ostanha*). This process of the production of provinces has been an integral part of the production of Iran as a national state spacetime. For instance, if in the 1950s provinces such as Hamadan and Ilam were considered part of Kurdistan province, after two decades, due to political necessities of the national state, it became imperative for Hamadan and Ilam to become separate provinces. I characterize this practice as a state-led separatism aiming at suppressing the non-Persian spatiotemporal regimes and diminishing the political power of non-Persian regions.

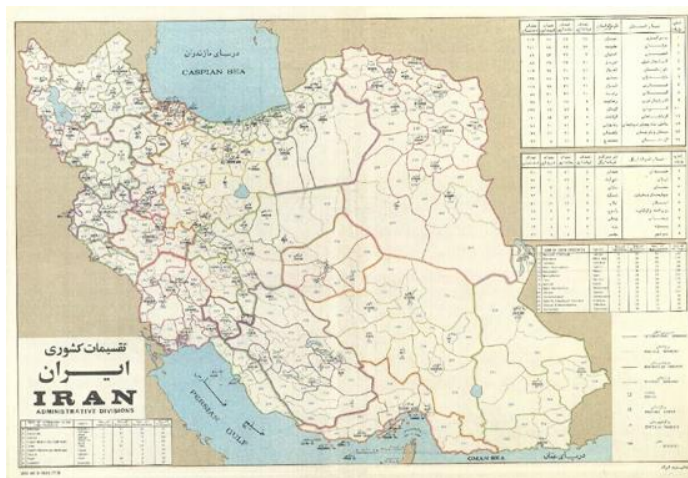


Figure 14. Administrative divisions of Iran from Iran's White Revolution (1972).

5. Production of Abstract Time and the Birth of Tehran

I argue that to critically understand Iranian state formation, we need to analyze the production of Iran as a process of internal colonization. This spatiotemporal process has been linked with the production of Tehran as the center. In 1868, implicitly implying the hierarchical colonization of

peripheral regions by Tehran, Qazvini notes that “an entire Iran has been destroyed many times over so that Tehran could be built up” (Qazvini, 1991: 67). The state production of Farsist knowledge through historiographic and cartographic practices has led to the formation and naturalization of specialized knowledge. This state-centric body of knowledge has produced and promoted nationalist conceptions of space and time. But they are not just *conceptions*. Conceptions are inscribed in the material matrices of the national state. It is through this process that a dualism has been established: a dualism of everyday non-Persian life versus specialized Farsist knowledge¹⁷⁹. The historiographic practice of the state paved the way to produce a linear conception of history. However, this linear conception required spatialization. I argue that the production of Iranian linear history has been tied to the production of an abstract time/temporality. Given the dialectical relationship between time and space, the production of abstract time is inextricably connected to the production of abstract space. The production of Tehran as the nation’s capital was pivotal in the spatialization of the abstract temporal regime of the nation state.

Here we are talking about the *material* matrix of national time, not its representation per se. It is this material matrix of spacetime that gives rise to ‘theoretico-ideological representations of time and history’ (Poulantzas, 1980: 110-11). The State concretizes this temporal matrix “by setting down the standard of measurement, or ... the frame of reference of the variations of temporalities” (Ibid: 113). This standard that revolves around a center is produced spatially by the state. In the context of the capitalist production of abstract labour, there is an essential connection between clock/abstract time and communication infrastructures (railways, roads, and telegraph lines). Abstract time is a manifestation of capitalism’s need to measure and control labour. The

¹⁷⁹ There is a longstanding tradition of Marxist critique of these dualisms. Lukacs argues that *theory* and *praxis* refer to the same *objects* (Lukacs, 1971: 126). Although the reality is the criterion for the correctness of thought, the most important point is that “reality *is* not, it *becomes*, and to become the participation of thought is needed” (Ibid: 203).

imposition of clock time serves not only to quantify labour but also to regiment life according to a colonial temporal regime. This temporal regimentation is crucial for synchronizing and maximizing the productivity of labour across different sectors of the economy. The development of infrastructures, such as railways and roads, in the 20th centuries were integral to the imperialist capitalism and the colonial production of space. They facilitated the rapid movement of labour and goods, providing the physical condition for the formation of an abstract temporal regime.

However, the geographical scope of this new temporal regime was extremely limited and dispersed. In early twentieth century, the majority of population in dispersed geographies of Iran were not incorporated into or even connected to the abstract temporal regime of capital. It was through travel that part of ordinary people became conscious of a new temporal regime that was emerging: “clock time had the crucial function of quantifying the exact amount of time it took to travel” (Koyagi, 2021: 119). A clock-time consciousness thus could not be in place earlier than the late 1930s. It was only by the production of physical infrastructures of railways and roads that a new spatiotemporal regime was made possible. With the 1938 opening of the Trans-Iranian Railway, it became possible to travel from Tehran to Ahvaz by train in twenty-five hours. It also took eight hours from Tehran to Basra by car (Ibid: 117). This reflects a qualitative change in spacetime. Journeys that took days in the mid-1930s were now made possible within hours.

The mechanical clock¹⁸⁰ marks a watershed. Prior to the mechanical clock, hours were not precise and quantified. Time was perceived in terms of daylight or darkness. Water clocks also

¹⁸⁰ Atabaki highlights two crucial moments in the history of the production of clock time: the inauguration of the eight-hours working day in 1923 and changing the official time of the country for the first time in 1977. These two moments show how the state manipulates and produces its own (national) temporal regime. One should acknowledge that the genesis of abstract time and labour predates 1923, yet these two moments seem to mark the formal introduction of this abstract temporal regime into Iran; a process I see as essential in the production of Iran itself. We must wait, however, until the post-Second World War period when the maximum eight-hour day and the 48-hour week were adopted nationwide (Atabaki, 2007: 14-15). Prior to the 1950s, the working day was not universal across the country. This signifies the absence of the nation state and its material matrix or the national spatiotemporal regime.

worked on the principle of ‘unequal’ hours (Atabaki, 2007: 6). Atabaki believes that industrial and urban life, or modernity, necessitated a high level of cooperation and organization that was made possible by the mechanical clock. This, however, was not merely related to industrial and urban life or modernization. It was not merely limited to the exact and quantified measurement of the time either. A qualitatively new spacetime or the spatiotemporal regime was on the verge of formation. The mechanical clock essentially facilitated this process.

This new temporal regime was made possible and produced through the infrastructural production of the railway. Through this physical infrastructure, an abstract time was materially produced. It is only by the development of the railway that clock time is inscribed into the state’s spatiotemporal matrix. This means that a national temporal regime was absent prior to the geographical spread of the railway (and centralized road) system. Legalization of this new temporal regime had been started earlier in 1927 when the Iranian parliament “adopted a resolution confirming the solar calendar as the official calendar of the country and the 24-hour clock as the official clock” (Ibid: 7).

The expansion of communication and energy infrastructures was pivotal for Tehran to effectively be produced as the center. The production of Tehran as a center required all other locations to *measure* themselves in relation to Tehran in terms of spatiotemporal distance. This process has essentially laid one of the technological foundations of the internal colonization. The national time was produced through the technological and infrastructural possibility of comparing local time differences with Tehran as the center of national space. The imposition of a center, a particular spatiotemporal regime, on a plurality of spatiotemporal regimes, has been the basis of the nationally colonial production of Iran. Tehran is produced as the center through this process of spatiotemporal distancing. Such a process would not have been made possible without

technologies like clock time. It is only by 1930s that Iran is systematically defined by the state through a range of abstract spatiotemporal features like longitude.

It is no sooner than the 1950s that we observe numerous companies and industries established in the vicinity of Tehran predominantly due to the enhanced communication infrastructures. Moreover, the production of national space has been accompanied by technological mechanisms, including clock technology, which enabled the central state to produce a national time that corresponds to the time of the center, while other locations have their own time in relation to the national time. Therefore, the production of national time has been intertwined with the production of the capital of national space. For the state to establish its temporal centrality, it is also necessary to measure the distance between the main cities and the center, Tehran.

The process of the production of Tehran as the center has been documented in the historical texts. In *Joghrafiya-ye Mofasal-e Iran; Siasi* (1932a) Masoud Keyhan, for the first time, mentions the distance from the center. Around two decades later, it is the ten-volume *Geographical Encyclopedia of Iran*, published between 1949-1953 that the geographical distance of cities from the center acquires a systematic and central position. The difference in time zones between other cities and Tehran is noticeable in the entries of the encyclopedia. The time difference is indicated in hours, minutes, and seconds, indicating that time, too, became abstracted alongside space.

The book *Geography of Fifth Grade* (by Ganji, Khalilifar, & Mofakham Payan) was published in 1959 and reissued in 1964 without any changes in its illustrations. At the end of the book, a colorful image of a world map titled Worldwide Time Diagram is presented (Figure 15). Instead of indicating place names on the map, the central point of the map is to represent the meridian as the origin, labeled as the “midday circle origin” or prime meridian. On either side of this line, images of clocks are displayed, visually illustrating the time differences of geographical

regions based on their spatiotemporal distance from the prime meridian. This visual representation demonstrates how the production of abstract space and of time are intertwined parts of the same process.

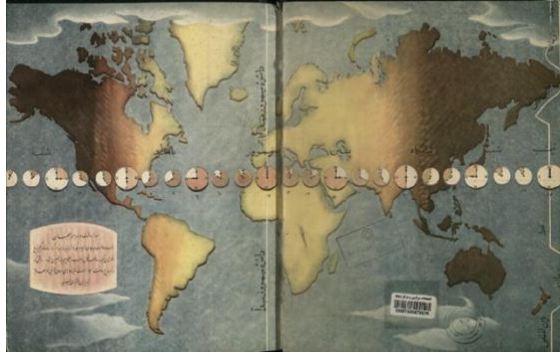


Figure 15. Worldwide Time Diagram from *Geography of Fifth Grade* (1964).

The Road Map of Iran, 1959, (Figure 16) by Abbas Sahab, in English, is apparently the first road map produced by a private institute. Alongside this map, a smaller map is visible, which is a relief map. In this map, the distances between cities, and most importantly, the distances of all other cities from Tehran, are detailed in the lower-left corner. The roads, railways, and their cartographic representations were conditions enabling the production of Tehran as the center and the simultaneous production of Iran as a national territory.



Figure 16. Road Map of Iran from *Atlas of Old Iran* (2019).

Conclusion:

In this chapter I demonstrated the absence of a national temporal regime in late Qajar period. I indicated how 'Iran' as a unified nation has been systematically produced through historiographic practices of the state. By highlighting class dimensions of the historiographic production of knowledge and drawing on a dialectical conception of intellectuals that put them in their *spacetime*, this chapter offered a critical analysis of the role intellectuals played in producing national history. By analyzing primary historical sources through a spatial conception of history, I showed that the historiographic practices of the state have not only challenged the assumed taken-for-grantedness of 'Iran' but have paved the way to produce a linear conception of history.

I then demonstrated how Aryan racism facilitated the production of a Farsist temporal regime as a material foundation of Iran as a linear history. I argued that the production of historiographic knowledge, as a form of Farsist specialized knowledge, was fundamentally shaped by dualistic structure of Aryan racism. The production of a sedentary-national temporality by the state was in fact achieved through the repression of non-Persian temporal regimes that prevents the emergence of alternative subaltern (spatio)temporalities.

I argued that in order to be actualized across the dispersed geographies of Iran, this linear conception of history had to be inscribed into the temporal matrix of the state. I showed how the linear history became actualized through the colonial legalization of administrative divisions. I demonstrated that the production of Iran's linear history has been tied to the production of an abstract time/temporality. Accordingly, I showed how the production of Tehran as the nation's center was pivotal in the spatialization of the abstract temporal regime of the nation state.

Chapter Three

Iran's Language: Farsist Practices of the State

Introduction: Farsi's Spacetime

In the preceding chapter, I argued that nationalist historiographies should be regarded as a central mechanism in the production of statist-scientific knowledge. This historiographic knowledge mechanistically introduces, naturalizes, and establishes a nationalist conception of spacetime (and Iran) to the detriment of other conceptions. By taking the existence of Iran for granted, naturalizing and ahistoricizing it through the production of a linear temporal regime, Farsist historiographies assume precisely what must be explained. The historiographic practices of the state laid the foundation for the Farsist production of knowledge. To further examine the problem, this chapter asks what has been the role of Farsi in the production of Iran? What has been the historical relationship between the Iranian nation-state and Farsi, and between Farsi and space-time? I investigate crucial practices through which Farsi was transformed into and is reproduced as the *national* language, the language of the emerging nation-state.

The main objective of this chapter is to spatiotemporalize Farsi. I examine how has Farsi as an ideology and political technology, been produced by the emerging Iranian state and how Iran has been produced as a Farsist spacetime. The chapter begins with a short history of Persian language or Farsi and continue by analyzing the politics of translation as a crucial form of production of Farsist knowledge. The politics of translation was enacted through various mechanisms; all directed toward a singular objective: the Farsization of Iran through the Farsist production of knowledge. I explore how Farsi was produced as a racial-colonial-class relation. To

do so, I study the space of Farsi social thought and indicate that the space of Farsi is a dualist pre-given space, associated with linear monorhythmic time. I analyze the underlying assumptions of the *Iranshahr* ideology as the condensation of Farsi's spacetime and the culmination of Farsist Irancentrism. I examine how Farsi has been naturalized in the writings of Iranian intellectuals. Focusing on language-dependency of social structures including Iran I analyze territorial concepts in Farsi by putting them in their spacetime. Delving into the matter and drawing on the works of Vaziri (2013), Kia (2020), Elden (2013), and Kashani-Sabet (1997, 1999), I suggest a conceptual history of territory in Farsi. By comparing spaces of Iran in specific historical texts – *Shahnameh*, and *Safarnameh* – in the next section I discuss how a selective focus on specific historical texts and ignoring others has contributed to the Farsization of *Iran*. I further analyze the colonial-class base of the Farsist dualisms in the context of British imperialism. I show that intellectuals have produced Farsi as a dualistic urbanist ideology. Dualist spatialities of Farsi is examined to highlight the racial-colonial-class nature of Farsi as produced by the state.

Finally, I will examine three instances of internal colonization and the pivotal role played by the Farsi in these processes. First, I analyze how the more recent discourse of ethnicities in Farsi has been trying to 'scientifically' neutralize the racist history of the production of Farsi. Then, I will examine the Farsization of time as the key mechanism in of the internal colonization. I explore the calendar reform as a Farsist practice of the state aiming at the suppression of non-Persian temporal regimes. I argue that the Farsist temporality of the colonial production of Iran is evident in the systematic erasure of regional histories which are forcefully replaced or subsumed within a national history. I conclude with discussing the Farsization of space as an associated mechanism of the internal colonization, to analyze how Farsization goes beyond the discursive level and is inscribed into the spatial matrix of the stat

1. Persian Language or Farsi: A Short History

Drawing on Gilbert Lazard's contribution, the mainstream discourse¹⁸¹ classifies Persian in a linear manner and states that Modern or New Persian¹⁸² is a continuation of Middle Persian, an official language of the Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE), itself a continuation of Old Persian, which was used in the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE). Persian in this sense is defined as a Western 'Iranian' language belonging to the 'Iranian' branch of the Indo-Iranian subdivision of the Indo-European languages (Danilenko, 2021: 89-90). In the mainstream discourse, Middle Persian is considered to be the language of the Sasanian Period. However, this discourse does not refer to a range of different languages were spoken at the time¹⁸³. Vaziri traces this tripartite classification back to the works of prominent orientalist like James Darmesteter (1849-1894) and Edward Granville Browne (1862-1926)¹⁸⁴.

Vaziri questions why we should characterize the Achaemenid language as Old Persian when the actual name of the Achaemenid language remains unknown. Referring to it as a variation of Persian appears to primarily serve nationalist projects aimed at establishing hegemony through Farsist practices of the state intellectuals. Given that contemporary Farsi is included in the category of New Persian, defining the Achaemenid language as Old Persian would bring a geohistorical

¹⁸¹ For a detailed mainstream history of (Early New) Persian see:

<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/persian-language-1-early-new-persian#article-tags-overlay>

¹⁸² New Persian literature was first recorded in the ninth century, after the Muslim 'conquest' of Persia, since then adopting the Perso-Arabic script. The new Persian itself is divided into three subcategories of Early New Persian (8th/9th centuries), Classical Persian (10th–18th centuries) and Contemporary Persian (19th century to present). Based on critical narratives, we know that New Persian varied according to regions and therefore did not form a unified homogeneous category (Danilenko, 2021: 89-90).

¹⁸³ For instance, in *al-Fihrist* Ibn Nadīm recognizes that five languages existed at the end of the Sasanian period: Pahlavi (or Fahlavi), Dari, Pārsī, Suryānī, and Khuz. Lazard believed that "they were spoken, respectively, in Fahlā country (ancient Media), by the people of the capital, by the mobeds and scholars, by the people in Sawād, and by the people of Khuzistān (the last two of which Lazard identifies as nonIranian and Semitic)" (Vaziri, 1993/2013: 121).

¹⁸⁴ As Vaziri explains, "Darmesteter, Browne, and a few others asserted that the Farsi language was an extension of Middle Persian, which was itself an extension of Old Persian" (Vaziri, 1993/2013: 121).

continuity to mind. This Farsist/Persian periodization of history has been part of the production of Iran as an imagined nation. The term ‘Middle’ exemplifies the tendency to impose an imagined continuity between the Old and the New. What cultural strategy would better serve the ruling class hegemony over the vast and highly heterogeneous geographies of guarded domains of Iran?

Language classification, the resulted production of Farsi as an Indo-Iranian language, and its associated periodization of Iran has been fundamental in mapping the world. The Indo-European language classification resulted in the formation of the Aryan racial hypothesis (Vaziri, 1993/2013: 22). Invention of such language classification should be seen in the context of the historical shift in the European gaze from Egypt to India¹⁸⁵ that was related to the “sheer racism toward black Africa and Egypt” (Ibid: 23). This shift should be seen in the context of imperialism and the associated rise of nationalisms and more specifically, German nationalism. It was Schlegel who advanced this process: he studied Sanskrit in Paris and became the first to connect language and race (Ibid: 24).¹⁸⁶

How could an extensive range of peoples residing in highly disconnected local/regional geographies speaking diverse languages and practicing different indigenous cultures think of themselves as part of a broader whole? It is exactly to meet this necessity that “in the early stages of formation of the proto-national consciousness, the popularization of vernacular languages became primary” (Vaziri, 2013: 17). During the Pahlavi era, Farsi was claimed as a common national language and linguistic differences were deemphasized through compulsory acquisition of Persian in schools and the use of Persian in publications (Ringer, 2012: 268). Normatively

¹⁸⁵ Up until the eighteenth century, Hebrew was recognized as the mother language. Then, European scholars began to reject the Egyptian influence on European civilization.

¹⁸⁶ The turning point was a new ‘discovery’: that “the German and Celtic languages were connected with Old Persian”. Herder even believed that Germans might be related to the Persians racially. Schlegel coined the term Aryan from the words meaning ‘honor’ in both Sanskrit (ari) and German (Ehre). It was then assumed that the Aryan people were racially superior to other races/ethnicities (Vaziri, 1993/2013: 29).

imposing a national language on the highly heterogeneous local differences was a decisive mechanism to produce Iranian nation. As leading nationalist thinkers argued more than a century ago, the elimination of diversity in regional languages, cultures, lifestyles, and local economies – particularly pastoral nomadism – has been an essential part of the formation of an Iranian nation by a centralizing state (Matin-Asgari, 2024: 312). Farsism thus functions as a strategy to produce an abstract homogenized nation. Iran, as an imagined nation, was produced in and through Farsi¹⁸⁷.

Gramsci considered language as a living reality, full of tensions and contradictions, necessarily dynamic, historically, and spatially. He conceptualizes Italian as it *actually* (not as it could have been) developed as an abstract reality and believes that an organic linguistic unification was absent. Gramsci considered this as an indicator of weak national unification. Gramsci's analysis of the Italian situation is an analysis of the deeply contradictory, weak, and inorganic formation of Italian as national language-in-formation. A similar process can be recognized in the Farsist production of Iran. I argue that in late Qajar and the whole Pahlavi periods, Farsi was an insufficiently organic and therefore too weakly hegemonic and too overtly repressive force in the process of national unification of Iran. Even today, after a century of systematic historiographic and cartographic practices by the state, Farsi cannot be considered fully hegemonic¹⁸⁸.

The linguistic strands of Irancentrism are in fact multiple, not reducible to the vicious coherence of the Aryan thesis. To avoid an abstract stance that might characterize Farsist

¹⁸⁷ This abstraction would gain materiality and become concretized in the process leading to the formation of Farsi as a concrete abstraction. Farsi is the foundation of 'Iranian' national thought.

¹⁸⁸ Majority of non-Persian 'Iranians' are suffering from the cultural alienation caused by the colonial imposition of Farsi (Farsization) over the past century. The right for education *of* and *in* non-Persian languages has not still been acknowledged by the central state. The regional non-Persian autonomist movements have been active after the Islamic Revolution (1979) all the way to the present. The Mahshahr and the Zahedan massacres are just two recent episodes of the systematic elimination of non-Persian peoples of Iran:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahshahr_massacre

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Zahedan_massacre

nationalism and its intellectual proponents as coherent and monovalent, my research discusses the multiple and often contradictory forces, practices, and mechanisms of the Iranian state formation. Influenced by Gramsci, I focus on understanding the inorganic and abstract ways in which Farsi was promoted as a national language. I argue that these ways indicate the weakly hegemonic character of Iranian state, and its intellectuals¹⁸⁹. In this way, my work highlights the incomplete, late, and weak character of Iranian state formation (and its defining features including Farsi

2. The Colonial Politics of Translation

Here I investigate how crucial translation practices – as a key mechanism of the Farsist production of knowledge – have been in the ‘scientific’ production of Iran. The construction of Iran as a nation state has been intertwined with the linguistic and philological practices of the state intellectuals. Considering the birth of disciplinary knowledge as a result of the production of space, Lefebvre argues that linguistics as a new specialization “set itself up as ... the ‘science of sciences’” (Lefebvre, 1991: 103). Farsist worldview as a form of ‘specialized knowledge’ is integral to the state’s tendency to *reduce* contradictions. The state is defined with the logic of homogenization and identity. The state is reducer (of diversities, autonomies, multiplicities, differences) and ‘the integrator of the so-called national whole’ (Lefebvre, 2009: 108). I show that how Farsi, as produced through the politics of translation, has been a crucial mechanism in reducing, flattening, and eliminating the differences (including non-Persians).

Following Elden, I understand territory as a form of political technology, in both the limited and broader sense of the word. While advancements in geometrical tools, land surveying instruments, navigation, cartography, maps, statistics, and population controls – that will be

¹⁸⁹ Although Gramsci defines these intellectuals as ‘traditional’ (and not organic), I conceptualize them as organic intellectuals of the national state. They were inorganic to the reality of social forces, but organic to the nation-state formation.

explored in Chapter Four – are pivotal in the development of national territory, technique is broader than this and includes “legal systems; theories and practices; works of literature and dictionaries; myths” (Elden, 2013: 16-17). In this broader context, Farsi, or more precisely, Farsist knowledge, can also be regarded as a form of political technology.

When discussing the role of Farsi in the formation of Iran, I am referring to a set of state practices. Firstly, it is important to note that state intellectuals (statesmen, princes, governors, bureaucrats, literary figures, military commanders)¹⁹⁰, beginning in the late Qajar period, gradually became involved in producing texts about ‘Iran’ in Farsi. The process of producing these texts, which were predominantly translations from languages such as French, English, Arabic, Russian, Turkish, etc., indicated a transformation in the nature of the state. Unlike earlier periods, the aim of producing these texts was to generate state knowledge to facilitate the functioning of the central state and/or drafting a history of ‘Iran’. Previously, text production was not exclusively in Farsi. Therefore, the late Qajar period marks the beginning of an era in which state knowledge was systematically and centrally produced in and through Farsi. For the first time we witness the formation of institutions that later expanded and increased during the Pahlavi era. I highlight the central role of practices like translation in this process.

¹⁹⁰ The privileged strata in Qajar era included princes and tribal chieftains, governors and military commanders, upper-level bureaucrats, and the *‘olamā’*. Members of the privileged strata paid no taxes and were often granted benefices (*toyūls*), salaries, pensions, and subsidies. Prominent Qajar princes and powerful tribal chiefs formed the backbone of the governing and military elite and often ranked among the country’s largest landowners. The tribal chiefs of major tribes – the Afšār, Arab, Baḳtīārī, Baluch (q.v.), Kurd, Lor, Qarāgozlū, Qašqā’ī, and Turkman – constituted the traditional military aristocracy. For a detailed description of classes in Qajar period see: <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/class-system-v#:~:text=In%20Persia%20under%20the%20Qajars.and%20laborers%20in%20agriculture%2C%20traditional>

Influential state intellectuals in the late Qajar period included figures such as Reza Qoli Khan Hedayat¹⁹¹, Jalal al-Din Mirza¹⁹², and Etemad al-Saltaneh¹⁹³. Not only did these individuals translate texts into Farsi, but they also founded institutions exclusively dedicated to this endeavor. Reza Qoli Khan Hedayat published the book *Fehres al-Tavarikh* in 1851, which was the first textbook for the newly established Dar ul-Funun school. This book primarily referenced the *Avesta* and *Dasatir* texts. By 1860, Hedayat had further contributed with *Nejadname-ye Padshahan-e Irani-Nejad*, emphasizing writing in pure Persian. He established a private printing house in Tehran named Dar al-Hedayah. In a similar vein, Jalal al-Din Mirza published the book *Nameh-ye Khosravan* with a focus on pure Persian. This book, written for teaching at Dar ul-Funun, referred to the writings of Zoroastrians or Parsis. Etemad al-Saltaneh wrote the book *Dorar al-Tijan* during the same period, primarily referring to the works of Henry Rawlinson. Etemad al-Saltaneh also established a translation bureau and undertook the production of the first Persian encyclopedia, *Mar'at al-Buldan-e Nasseri*. Such translational practices laid the foundation for the first Farsist historiographies by individuals like Fath Ali Akhundzadeh. Akhundzadeh, the son of a Turkish merchant¹⁹⁴ who was brought up in the tsarist Caucasus and took service as a translator

¹⁹¹ Hedayat was born in Tehran in 1800 to a renowned family which was descended from the prominent 14th-century lyric-poet Kamal Khujandi. He was given the title of Khan in 1830. In 1838 Mohammed Shah instructed him to remain at the court and in 1841 selected him as tutor to his son Prince Abbas Mirza Molk Ara. In 1847 he was appointed governor of Firuzkuh. He was minister of education in 1852 and principal of the Dar-ol-fonoon College. In 1857, he was selected as tutor of Mozaffar al-Din Shah.

¹⁹² Jalal al-Din Mirza was born in 1827 at the court in Tehran, the capital of Qajar Iran. He was the fifty-fifth son of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar (r. 1797–1834). Being one of the last sons of Fath-Ali Shah, Jalal al-Din Mirza still had access to some benefits that the royal family enjoyed, particularly education learning classical Persian literature and the French language.

¹⁹³ Mohammad Hasan Khan E'temad os-Saltaneh (1843-1896) was an Iranian statesman, scholar, and author active during the reign of the Qajar shah (king) Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (r. 1848–1896). He was the son of Ali Khan Maragha'i, a member of the Moqaddam tribe who served as the farrash-bashi (court minister) during the early reign of Naser al-Din Shah. His mother was from the Qajar dynasty.

¹⁹⁴ The lived experience of Akhundzadeh was one of translation, travel, and multilingualism, and not subalternity, immobility, and oppression. As a subject of Russia, he was fluent in both Turkish and Persian. 'Where' you are born in a class society is of great significance. Particularly in the context of national colonization, being born into a wealthy family in one of the urban centers plays a key role in determining the class status of the intellectuals. Birth in these urban centers largely indicated that Farsi would be the first language of these intellectuals or as a second language, they have been able to learn it in a much less alienating manner.

for the Russian viceroy of Transcaucasia based in Tiflis. To achieve his purpose, of identifying an exceptional history for the newly created Iranian nationalism, Akhundzadah must ignore the centuries during which this geography was ruled by world-empires, all of which were non-Persian. (Cole, 1996: 38-39).

Pro-socialists like Dehkhoda have also been among the most tenacious Iranian nationalists. Dehkhoda was the author of the *Dehkhoda Dictionary*. First published in 1931, it was the largest comprehensive Persian encyclopedic dictionary ever published. Many entries in Dehkhoda's *Dictionary (Loghatnameh)* are based on *Geographical Encyclopedia of Iran* (Razmara, 1949)¹⁹⁵ signifying how geographical surveying and encyclopedic historiography – cartographic and historiographic practices of the state – have been essential to one another, both playing a pivotal role in the production of Iran. The initiation of such texts, beginning in the 1940s, marks the transformation of the central state into a national state. It is only the national state that undertakes the production of dictionaries, defines the official language, and produces geographical encyclopedias. Dehkhoda's *Dictionary* commences with the conventional three-stage linear classification of 'Iranian' languages into Old Iranian, Middle Iranian, and Contemporary Iranian. The dictionary thus becomes not just a tool for understanding language but also a means of reinforcing a national narrative and its Farsist periodization of history.

The politics of translation was not enacted through a single mechanism; rather, it was implemented through a complex array of interconnected strategies. All these strategies leading to the same result: the Farsicization of Iran through the Farsist production of knowledge. One of these strategies is recognizable in al-Mas'ūdī's book *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*. Where the original Arabic text refers to 'Moluk al-Fors' [Kings of Persis/Fars], the translator has rendered

¹⁹⁵ See Chapter Four.

it as Kings of Iran. This book was translated by Abolghasem Payandeh in 1965 (Elmi va Farhangi Publications). In the original Arabic text, Tabarestan is considered separate from Iran, but the translator, by omitting the related title, has represented Tabarestan as part of Iran. Another point is that while the Arabic text use both Al-Iran and Al-Fors, the Persian translator has translated both into Iran (pp. 181 and 232 of the Arabic text, al-Mas'ūdī 2005).

In another example, Jafar Shi'ār translated sections of Ibn Hawqal's *Surat al-Ardh* (The Face of the Earth) and published it in 1987 (Amir Kabir Publications). Shi'ār has titled the work "Iran in Surat al-Ardh," arbitrarily designating certain sections as part of Iran and elaborating on them. This is despite the absence of any focus on 'Iran' or 'Iranian' geography in the original text (Ibn Hawqal, 1938). In Persian translation, the Kingdom of Iranshahr, centered around Babylon, is equated with the Persian Empire or Kingdom of Fars. However, such a categorization does not exist in Ibn Hawqal's text. The Persian translator, who also collaborated with the Dekhoda Lexicon Institute for six years, has deliberately omitted the entire Iraq section, retaining only Mada'in, to emphasize its pre-Islamic significance (Persian translation, p. 7). Alongside deleting the Iraq section as part of the strategy of Iranianizing Mada'in, the translator also excluded the Sind section. In the Arabic version, Sind includes Turan and Makran, but they are absent in the Persian translation (Ibid: 256). This indicates an Iran-centric practice of translation and how 'symptomatic silences', 'omitted representations', 'absences' and 'the not-said of the work' (Goonewardena, 2004) are crucial in producing a nationalist Farsist Iran. In yet another example, Mahmoud Mahdavi Damghani has translated both the terms 'Fars' and 'Ajam' as 'Iranian' in his translation of the book *al-Akhbar al-Tiwal* (Al-Dinawari, 1985). He has also rendered *al-Tarikh al-Farsi* as *The History of the Iranians*.

Regarding the impact of the politics of translation in shaping a Farsist and Iran-centric ontology, a crucial example is the Persian translation of Ibn Khaldun's work, *The Muqaddimah*. This case specifically exemplifies how dualist perceptions are introduced and naturalized in and through Farsi. The translation of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* is doubly significant because Javad Tabatabai bases his own dualist methodology on a non-dialectical interpretation and translation of Ibn Khaldun. This reductive interpretation has laid the foundation for Tabatabai's anti-Arab racism. Lacoste, for instance, challenges the dominant narrative around the so-called 'Arab invasion' which bears similarities with the dominant historical narrative of Iran and its relationship with Arabs. In this narrative, Arabs are the main cause that destroyed the so-called glory of ancient Sasanian empire (Lacoste, 2017)¹⁹⁶.

In contrast to the dominant interpretation of the thesis of the nomadic-sedentary relationship, there is no basis for any *total*, metaphysical opposition between nomadic and sedentary groups. There are no known examples of conflict between purely sedentary and purely nomadic groups. More importantly, the nomadic tribes never made any real offensives on their own initiative. The myth did not arise by chance. It was deliberately forged. E.F. Gautier, one of the ideologues of colonialism, the theoretician of the Nomadic-Sedentary antagonism. He believed only a settled population can love the land. Gautier writes that "in order to have a sense of history, one must belong to a nation" (Lacoste, 2017). The same arguments have been employed and reiterated by Javad Tabatabai. As he says, "Ibn Khaldun has explained that the Arabs are farther from politics and statecraft than all other nations" (Tabatabai, 2004: 120). Contrasting them with 'Iranians', Tabatabai perceives Arabs as a monolithic entity devoid of civilization, urbanity, and industry:

¹⁹⁶ *The Muqaddimah* does contain certain much-quoted passages condemning the behaviour of the Arabs but in other passages Ibn Khaldun praises the moral qualities and political virtues of the Arabs as well.

“The Arab is the furthest from industries. Thus, sciences were considered part of urbanite practices ... and in that era, urban people were the Ajams (Iranians)” (Ibid: 122). Tabatabai insists that Arabs lacked the capacity for governance, and it was the Iranians who taught them politics.

In all these discussions, Tabatabai’s reference point is Mohammad Parvin Gonabadi’s¹⁹⁷ Persian translation of Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah* (Ibn Khaldun, 2011). Significantly, whenever Ibn Khaldun in the original Arabic text mentions al-Fars or Ajam, the translator renders them as Iranians. One can compare page 288 of the Arabic text (Volume I) with page 287 of the Persian version. The translator also translates Iraq Ajam as ‘Iraq of Iran’ (p. 190 of the Arabic text). Ajam however refers to non-Arabs, including Berbers, and is not limited to Persians (Wehr, 1976: 593); it means peoples and languages that are non-Arab (James, 2014: 684). Even if Ajam is translated as referring to Persians, the crucial point remains that not all Iranians are Persian. Therefore, such translations can be seen as part of Farsization of space and the simultaneous production of Iran.

It has been through these translation politics that a Farsist mode of understanding geohistory and spacetime has been made possible. In most analyses written in and on Iran and Farsi, space has been perceived as a given background. The space of social thought in Farsi is static, pre-given, and often associated with linear monorhythmic time. The ideology of *Iranshahr* embodies this static space and linear time; it reflects the condensation of Farsist spacetime. As Tabatabai says: the reason why Iranians have understood themselves as a unified nation but have not coined a word for it is that ‘the process of nation-building in Iran has been natural’ (in Aghajani, 2020)¹⁹⁸. Farsi is also perceived as a *natural* language: “the natural *continuity* of the Persian language is just one

¹⁹⁷ Parvin Gonabadi was born in Gonabad into a clerical family. He helped Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda to write the landmark *Loghatnameh*. He joined the Democrat Party’s chapter in Mashhad, and the Socialist Party during the 1920s. In the first congress of Tudeh Party held in 1944, he was elected as a member of the central committee (Abrahamian, 1982).

¹⁹⁸ <https://paniranist.org/8831.html>

aspect of the inclusive unity in Iranian history” (Ibid). The ideology of *Iranshahr* preconceives space(time) as synonymous with a dualistic, bounded space(time). Tabatabai argues that Iran has existed ‘outside’ of Islam: “it never became part of the umma ... If someone defines themselves based on the umma, they cannot have the *Shahnameh*, because the *Shahnameh* is national history.” This spatial exteriority is associated with a temporal one: “we have been outside from *the beginning*”. This dualistic spacetime of Farsi, which manifests in various forms¹⁹⁹, reflects the ‘spatiotemporal matrices’ of national state and its legal system, which condition citizenship on a pre-existing national identity and do anything to preserve its territorial integrity.

Drawing implicitly on the prior mistranslations of Mohammad Ali Foroughi (see Chapter Two, Section 2), Tabatabai perpetuates a nationalist understanding of Iran. In *Iranshahr* ideology, the notion of Iran is synonymous with that of empire or Reich. According to Tabatabai, “Iran had a national reality before we equated the word *mellat* with nation” (Tabatabai, 2017).²⁰⁰ He appeals to Hegel and says, “The Reich in its precise meaning is the same as our previous *shahanshahi*” (Ibid). Therefore, when it is said that Iran existed as a nation, it means that Iran has always been a *shahanshahi* [Reich] from the beginning. However, Tabatabai still insists on using the term “national state” [*dowlat-e melli*] and *mellat* instead of *shahanshahi* (Ibid). He says, ‘Iran has been a national state before national states emerge²⁰¹’ and it is ‘our’ duty to defend this Reich!

¹⁹⁹ From civilization vs barbarism or culture vs nature to male-female, and Persian-non-Persian.

²⁰⁰ Tabatabai, Javad. (2017): Iran as *Iranshahr*

<https://www.cgie.org.ir/fa/news/180189/%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1---%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C>

²⁰¹ National consciousness could not exist before an actual nationalism was geohistorically realized. Only when there were concrete examples of nationhood, i.e., physically ‘embodied in a nation state’, could different groups know what they were conscious of. And that happened after the French Revolution in 1789 (Davidson, 2000).

Tabatabai believes that diversity has been recognized throughout the history of Iran (Tabatabai, 2023).²⁰² He fails to acknowledge that the central powers of that time lacked the technological and infrastructural capabilities necessary to effectively suppress diversity. In other words, diversity had not yet emerged. Diversity and the suppression of diversity both are modern products. Under such circumstance, it is illogical to speak of ‘unity in diversity’. As soon as Reza Khan had the material, military, and infrastructural means (roads), he began to repress, displace, and/or kill the mostly non-Persian nomads and tribes. Thus, Tabatabai’s ‘unity in diversity’ is a reactionary ideology whose main function is to prevent the emergence of differences. This ahistorical emphasis on diversity is a linguistic-political strategy that seeks to *a priori* invalidate any emphasis on diversity and difference here and now and render them as non-relevant claims.

Consistent with his earlier arguments, in a derogatory note²⁰³ responding to Kamran Matin’s interview with BBC Persian on ‘territorial integrity’, Tabatabai stated that *former* Iranians who have migrated and acquired a different nationality are no longer Iranian (Tabatabai, 2023). Iran and Iranians, from this perspective, are pre-existing and pre-formed packages that stand exterior to history and geography. It is based on this dualist conception of spacetime that genocide has been made possible²⁰⁴. Targeting the logic of the nation-state then means to challenge the hierarchical dualisms, the Farsist process of their production, and their inscription in spacetime.

Tabatabai, and other intellectuals of the national state, do not discuss the relationship between language and hegemony, while their own practice exactly exemplifies it precisely. Following Gramsci, one can argue that the unity of theory and practice is part of a historical process

²⁰² <https://t.me/jtjostarha/364>

²⁰³ <https://t.me/jtjostarha/363>

²⁰⁴ As Poulantzas says, genocide refers to the removal of foreign bodies from national history and territory. He explains that genocide, like concentration camps, is inscribed in the spatial matrix of the national state. Genocide, and one can say, internal colonialism, become possible “only when the national space is closed on *foreign* bodies within its very frontiers.” (Poulantzas, 1978: 107)

possible only through a struggle *for hegemony*. Philosophy²⁰⁵ is thus defined as a ‘relationship of hegemony’ (Thomas, 2009: 38). I accordingly characterize Farsi as a philosophy and a relationship of hegemony. Gramsci distinguishes between a philosophy of *common sense* and a philosophy of *praxis*. The former, the *spontaneous* philosophy of the multitude, is the *uncritically absorbed* conception of the world, and the latter, is a perpetual struggle (Gramsci, 1971: 334-335). I conceptualize Farsi as the ‘Iranian’ common sense, the artificially imposed and *uncritically absorbed* conception of the Persian ideology. Farsi has been nationalized in an inorganic way. The imposition of a national language created by a small elite on the lives of others with very different geographic conditions is an attempt to suppress their creativity, intelligence, and humanity (Ives, 2004: 57). In 1918,

The prevalent conception of Iran as a unified nation has been produced directly through Farsist historiographic and cartographic practices. In addition to Persian historiography and cartography, we face the historiography and cartography of Persian/Farsi. If in the former Iran’s history-territory is narrated-mapped in Farsi, in the latter, Iran’s history-territory is produced as the history-territory of Persian/Farsi, which is simultaneously a ‘masculine history.’²⁰⁶ Farsism is accordingly a political technology that alongside other key technologies such as cartography has played a fundamental role in producing Iran. The naturalization of Farsi has been a linchpin of the production of Iran’s nature²⁰⁷.

²⁰⁵ Gramsci uses ‘Esperanto’ to connect his analysis of how ruling classes “impose their visions of the world and propagate general ideologies that do not represent subaltern classes,” to his philosophical “critiques of positivism and his concern with ... knowledge production²⁰⁵” (Ives, 2004: 60).

²⁰⁶ A book written by Reza Baraheni.

²⁰⁷ A different Iran must be produced. Narrating the history of peripheries/colonies, or more precisely, the subaltern – untold and buried – geohistories gains strategic importance here because it is precisely these geo-histories that have been consistently denied, erased, and suppressed by the ontological Iran-centrism.

In a class society, translation, as a form of knowledge production and part of the production process in its totality, is a class activity predominantly arising from the concerns and motivations of the upper classes (including merchants, clergy, courtiers, landowners, etc.) and, therefore, is typically disconnected from the everyday lives of the oppressed (mostly non-Persian) classes. Language itself is a class relation, and one could argue that the imposition of Farsi serves to perpetuate the existing class order. The ruling classes have their own specific intellectuals. Therefore, the priorities in translation and authorship are derived from the desires and interests of the Farsist ruling class. These intellectuals of the integral state – as translators – have been responsible for creating the discursive space of the past century. Following my spatial theoretical framework and seeing class in its spatiality, I ask residing in which geographies have they narrated Iranian history and mapped its territory? Politics of translation is not merely limited to the act of translation itself. It occurs in and through specific spaces.

To have a more concrete understanding of the state's intellectuals, we need to put them in their spaces. This will allow us to see the interconnection between class domination and colonial spatial hierarchy. The ability to move is a class question. Most of the contemporary historians of Iran have completed their entire academic education abroad, benefiting from the opportunity to access libraries and research centers across a diverse range of countries and cities. They have been involved in a diasporic politics and the 'nationalism from abroad'. Ebrahim Pourdavoud²⁰⁸, is a perfect example in this regard. He was born in Rasht, Iran, to a mother who was the daughter of a clergyman and a father who was a reputable merchant and landlord. In 1908, he traveled from Qom, Sultanabad, Kermanshah, Baghdad, and Aleppo to Lebanon. In Beirut, Pourdavoud attended

²⁰⁸ It is worth noting that Jamalzadeh and Pourdavoud were both members of The Berlin Circle. See: Chapter Two, Section 3.2.

the Luique College to study French language and literature. After two and a half years, he returned to Rasht, and later, in September 1910, he went to France where he met Jamalzadeh²⁰⁹. He returned to Iran and, after a short stay, traveled via Baku and Vienna to France in 1919, pursuing legal studies at the University of Paris, where he attended lectures by Charles Gide. Together with other passionate young men, Pourdavoud established the Committee of Iranians Nationalists. Pourdavoud and Jamalzadeh traveled to Baghdad and then Kermanshah to incite the nomads and tribes of western Iran to resist the Russians and the British²¹⁰.

3. *Language-Dependency of Iran*

In a way that is reminiscent of Elden's approach, Vaziri historicizes the concept (and language of) Iran. Despite Vaziri's contribution, there is still a lack of clear conceptual distinction between Iran as a territory, nation, Persian cultural entity, empire, monarchy, or state. Historians often do not theoretically differentiate these concepts. A prime example is Shapur Shahbazi who believes the idea of Iran as a national entity had originated in the Avestan period (Shahbazi, 2005: 100). Shahbazi does not differentiate nation and empire (Ibid: 103). This nationalist representation of Iran was criticized in 1990s²¹¹. More recent endeavors have also been made to historicize the

²⁰⁹ Moḥammad 'Ali Jamāl-zāda, a prominent Iranian intellectual and a pioneer of modern Persian prose fiction, and of the genre of the short story. His father, Sayyed Jamāl-al-Dīn Wā'ez (Hamadāni) Eṣfahāni, was the famed cleric and preacher. His mother was Maryam Kānum, daughter of Mirzā Ḥasan-Bāqer Khan, an Eṣfahāni notable. See: <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jamalzadeh>

²¹⁰ How was such extensive mobility possible for Pourdavoud? His class background played a determining role. He was the son of Hajji Davoud, a landowner and merchant (Pourdavoud, 2005: 10, 12). Moreover, during the period of translating the *Avesta*, it was the central state that financially supported Pourdavoud. Ehsan Yarshater was one of Pourdavoud's students during those days. Yarshater was the founder and director of The Center for Iranian Studies. This partially exemplifies the importance of class status and the intergenerational connection among Iranian scholars. As Marashi (2020: 1, 4) explains, Pourdavoud's trip to India, had been "sponsored by civic leaders associated with the two main Zoroastrian communities of South Asia".

²¹¹ Bert Fragner for instance argues that "Iranian nationalists had deployed the historical hegemony of the Persian language high culture to construct a modern Iranian identity ... Fragner saw Persian linguistic hegemony as crafted ... via dominant elite cultures, and not as a "national" heritage shared by a homogeneous Iranian people" (in Matin-Asgari, 2012: 182). Gnoli also rejects the existence of Iran as a homogenous entity by challenging the Sasanian image of Iran as a cohesive entity and characterizing it as a political propaganda (Ibid).

concept of Iran. Focusing on the genre of *tazkirih*²¹² Kia has developed a historical method which is explicitly sensitive to the geohistorical specificities of the concepts. We usually “imagine a *natural* link between land and language, with Persian as the language of a place we call Persia” (Kia, 2020: 19). We however need to avoid linking language to land. Persians were not people from Persia. Outside European sources, a place called Persia does not exist (Ibid: 15).

To understand territory (*ghalamro*) in Farsi we need to employ an approach which is sensitive to the spacetime of concepts in general and *spatial* concepts in particular. In the ‘Iranian Identity’ entry of the *Encyclopædia Iranica*²¹³ Ashraf talks about ‘pre-modern, non-Western nations’. Earlier, however, he said that ‘nation’ is a Western concept. This confusion is partly because Ashraf does not spatiotemporalize the concepts. He disregards the highly differentiated geohistory of the nation and its international aspect. If by the nation Ashraf means *mellat*, it has nothing to do with nation in the modern sense until the formation of the Pahlavi state. Not seeing history and geography as differentiated, contradictory, and stratified, Ashraf talks about a single geohistory called Iran as if it has continuously existed in a fixed spatial extent since the beginning of history. Contrarily, nation (or *mellat*) has not always had the same meaning in Asia and ‘Iran’. It is so primarily because Asia and Iran not always existed. They have been historically produced and this a fortiori applies to *mellat* and nation themselves.

Ashraf believes that “Western ideas of nationhood have been historically based on the specific *boundaries*, the development of legal-rational communities, and civic cultures” (Ashraf, 2006a). This, however, is simply not the case²¹⁴. In addition, there is no homogenous body of

²¹² Derived from Arabic *tadhkirah* meaning something that causes one to remember or memorandum, is a form of bibliographical dictionary or bibliographical compendium which flourished in the 16th-century Ottoman Empire.

²¹³ <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/iranian-identity-iii-medieval-islamic-period>

²¹⁴ Up until the bourgeois revolutions in the 19th century, the Western ideas of nationhood have been based on *racial* identity (Davidson, 2000: 24, 33).

‘Western ideas of nationhood’²¹⁵. There is no such homogeneous thing as ‘pre-modern non-Western nations’ either. Nations and ideas about nation in the West have long, multilayered, and contradictory histories that fly in the face of homogenous imaginaries typical of European nationalism, as elsewhere. In contrast to Ashraf’s view, we know that in the so-called pre-modern period, in the Scottish Declaration of Arbroath of 1320, “the feudal ruling class still considered themselves to be a nation in the racial rather than the modern sense” (Davidson, 2000: 49).

Referring to Vaziri (1993) and Fragner (1999), Ashraf (2006a) says “a number of authors have recently questioned the revival and reconstruction of Iranian identity in the Islamic period. Such interpretations of Iranian identity seem to have been influenced by *Eurocentric* notions of national identity, drawn from Western civic-territorial experiences of nationhood”. Contrary to his assertion, Ashraf’s viewpoint mirrors Eurocentric dualistic logic. His absolute rejection of the applicability of the ‘Western’ or ‘European’ models to examine ‘Iranian’ nationalism and nation is a duplication of the internalist ontology of Eurocentrism in the form of Irancentrism. This conception sees the ‘Western’ and ‘European’ as spatiotemporally bounded and exclusive entities. Irancentrism implicitly maintains that there is no past prior to Iran. Iran has existed uninterruptedly. Ashraf thus presupposes a dichotomy between the West and Asia, between Iran and non-Iran, and removes the geohistorical, multilaterally constitutive, relations that discredit any dualistic separation between these geographies. Following this dualist ontology, Ashraf says, Western ideas of nationhood are not rooted in ‘fictive origins and vernacular culture and religion’.

²¹⁵ Davidson recognizes at least three periods of nationalism: psychological formation (c.1450–1688), geographical extension (1688-1789), and social diffusion (1789–1848) (Davidson, 2000: 28)

This, however, is simplistic. There is a significant historical similarity between Western and Asian ideas of nationhood²¹⁶.

I concur that the Eurocentric connotations of terms like ‘nation’ must be critically examined. However, in contrast to Ashraf, I approach this critique using a dialectical method. The rivalry and conflict between the religious and secular sources of power in the historical production of nationhood and territory are also recognizable in Farsi. Persian equivalents of nation, nationhood, nationality, and nationalism as we use them nowadays are *mellat*, *mellat-boudegi*, *melliat*, and *melli-gerai*, respectively. *Mellat* denotes a religious community²¹⁷. Ajoudani²¹⁸ shows that around 1906, *mellat* implies Sharia. It means the followers of Islam (Ajoudani, 2003: 177-78). *Mellat*, therefore, is more like Ummah (Ibid: 179). In this context, religion and *mellat* are defined in contrast to the state and the king (Ibid: 180). *Dowlat-e melli* (national state) thus refers to a state that follows Sharia (Ibid: 181). It was only by the Constitutional Revolution and introduction of the juridical framework for a nation–state that “*mellat* came to mean a nation rather than a religious community, and “Iran” referenced a single country, rather than a plurality of countries (*mamālek-e mahruseh*), hitherto joined together in a premodern confederate structure (Khazeni cited in Matin-Asgari, 2024: 312).

So, ‘national’ rights (*hoghough-e melli*) in the constitutional era are equivalent to religious rights. As a result, the state law is distinct from the national law. Legislation regarding national rights is within the authority of Sharia not the state (Ajoudani, 2003: 183). Even in the pre-

²¹⁶ Both have been formed based on mythological narratives (tripartite divisions of the world by Noah, for instance, and its Iranian version; by Fereydun among his three sons) and similar understandings of religion, language, and race.

²¹⁷ For a conceptual history of the territorial terms land, *vatan* (homeland), and *mellat* (nation) in late-Qajar period, see Kashani-Sabet (1997: 30-36; 1999: 47-74).

²¹⁸ *Mashrooteye Irani*. [in Persian]. Ajoudani conducts a historical analysis of the term *mellat*. Nonetheless, nothing has been said about territory or the state space itself. In addition, Ajoudani takes Iran for granted. He does not historicize Iran. Ajoudani sees space and territory as a static and neutral background.

constitutional era the same contrast and distinction between *mellat* (Sharia or alternatively, a community of Muslims) and *dowlat* (the state or the kingship) was in place. There is an explicit distinction between the state's subjects (*raaya*) and *mellat* (Ibid: 185-86). It is only during the late Qajar period and specifically the constitutional era that *mellat* gradually gained new connotations. Until the constitutional era, religious community was the dominant meaning of *mellat* (Ibid: 167). Throughout the whole Islamic era prior to the Qajar rule (651-1789) there was a clear distinction between the state (kingship, monarchy, or the royal court/*darbar*), nation (*mellat*), and the people (*raaya*). This traditional conception of *mellat* was used even in 1924 (Ibid: 200).

This religious connotation of *mellat* is also manifested in the maps of the constitutional period including the map of the city of Tabriz during the revolution, 1908 (Figure 17). The legend highlights several key features including areas controlled by state forces. The map differentiates between *state* and *national* fortifications suggesting the religious nature of the revolution, the map indicates that during the Constitutional Revolution, the 'national' emerged in a religious sense, opposing royal absolutism.

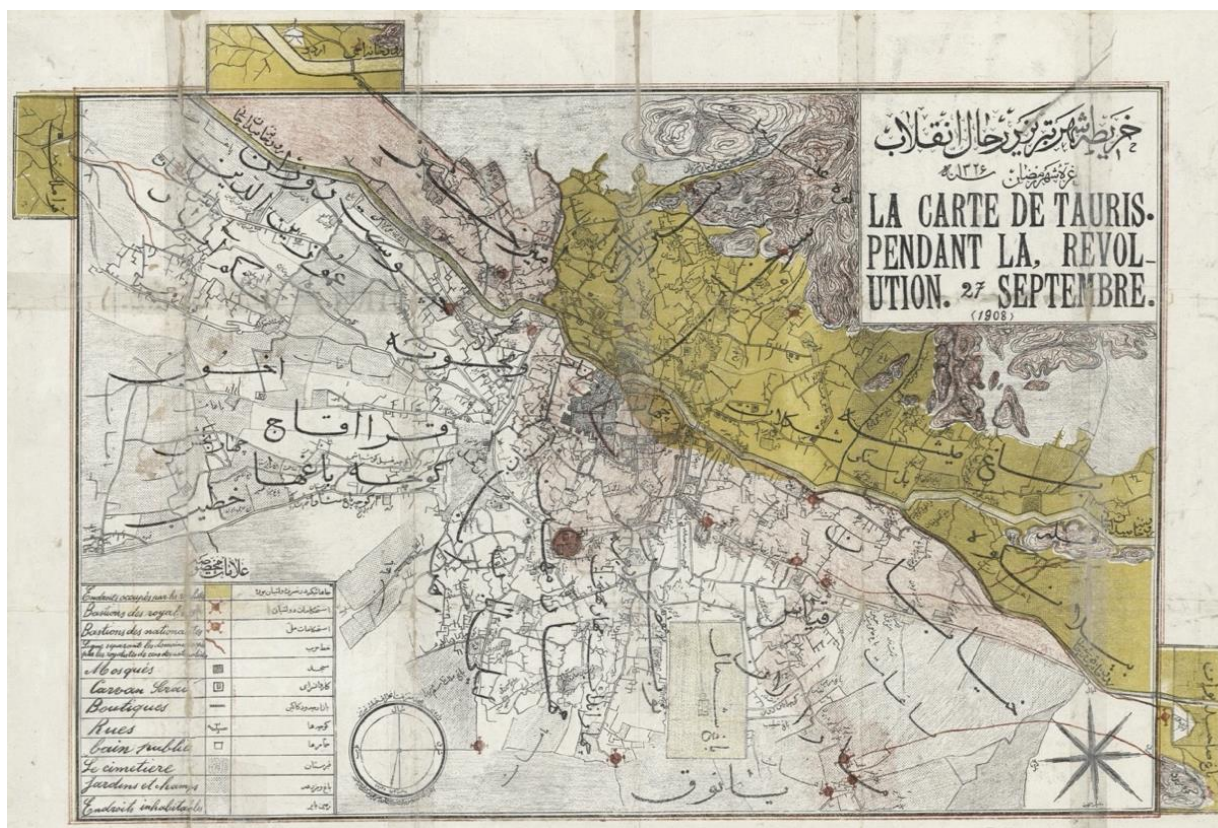


Figure 17. La Carte de Tauris. Pendant La, Revolution. From Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN.

Elite (nationalist) intellectuals like Majdoleislam Kermani who could read English or French, used new terms like the nation as it was known in the European context. This made their conception of nation alienated from the geohistorical context they lived in. This partially explains why the constitutional revolution remained to a great extent an inorganic²¹⁹ attempt aiming at introduction of new/Eurocentric ideas on the 'Iranian' context with a long Islamic history. The sameness of the nation and the state was not even dominant in the restricted circle of elites themselves (Ibid: 197). The writings of intellectuals like Akhundzadeh and Aqa Khan Kermani were never publicly published. More importantly, at that time, only 5 percent of the population were literate. In

²¹⁹ Inorganic in terms of its distance from the subaltern interests. But it was organic to the state since it was promoted by the state's intellectuals. By the state here I mean political society not the integral state. I am not employing 'organic' here exactly as Gramsci meant in his discussion of organic intellectuals. These traditional intellectuals were able to develop organic relations to the national state.

addition, the dispersed rural and nomadic geographies and absence of communication infrastructures made it physically impossible for the peoples of these island-like geographies to have access to the texts produced in Tehran and a few other urban centers. At the beginning of the century, less than 15 percent of the total population was urban residents (plus 60 percent villagers, and 25 percent nomads) (Abrahamian, 2008: 2). Ironically, most of these nationalist writings were written in Persian but less than 50 percent of the population understood Persian at the time (Ibid).

4. Spaces of Farsi Literature

This section explores the contrasting historical narratives offered by two important historical works: *Shahnameh* and *Safarnama*. *Shahnameh* and *Safarnama* offer two distinct historical narratives. *Shahnameh*, as suggested by its title, *The Book of Kings*, presents a highly abstract narrative centered around rulers and elites – kings, princes, heroes. These two works not only serve different purposes but also represent and produce different representations of space. In contrast, *Safarnama* provides a concrete narrative of the ordinary people's lived experience, reflecting the everyday encounters of a traveler narrating tangible realities on the ground. They capture two contrasting rhythmic. While *Safarnama* (*The Book of Travels*) is concerned with the concrete, lived, and therefore, heterogeneous spacetime of common peoples, *Shahnameh* captures a totally different rhythm: that of an epic, mythical, and linear history. *Safarnama* embodies an everyday account of space and time, whereas *Shahnameh* offers a statist representation of space and time. This difference accounts for why the *Shahnameh* has turned into the cornerstone of Iranian nationalism. The dominant interpretation of *Shahnameh*, produced by the state over the past century, actually reflects the elitist spaces of the 'Iranian' ruling class – rather than those of ordinary peoples. In this section, I will delve into these contrasting themes in *Safarnama* and *Shahnameh*.

*Shahnameh*²²⁰ is “popularly seen as the repository of a quintessential “Iranian-ness,” or “Persian-ness”” (Davis in Amanat and Vejdani, 2012: 39). *Shahnameh* therefore has been pivotal in forming Farsist/Iranian nationalism. A close look at the geographical elements and settings in the *Shahnameh* is vital to understand whether it is primarily on Iran(ian) territory and identity. It was the journals *Kaveh* and *Iranshahr* – the Berlin-based Persian-language journals – that made the vital link between the nineteenth-century Ferdowsi cultural-literary revival and the more formalized twentieth-century political canonization of Ferdowsi as undertaken by the Pahlavi state (Marashi, 2009: 94). Even more influential are the articles written between 1920 and 1922 in which Taqizadah summarizes and extrapolates on the work of ‘German’ orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930) (Ibid: 96). It was his 1895 article ‘Das Iranischen Nationalepos’ which became the seminal European scholarly work presenting the *Shahnamah* as the Iranian ‘national’ epic (Ibid). The work ultimately found its way into an English translation, commissioned by the Parsi community of Bombay’s Cama Oriental Institute in 1930, as well as into a Persian translation by Buzurg Alavi²²¹ in 1948 (Ibid).

²²⁰ The *Shahnameh* (The Book of Kings), also transliterated *Shahnama*, is a long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between c. 977 and 1010 CE. Abul-Qâsem Ferdowsi Tusi (940-1025) was born into a family of landowning aristocrats (*dehqans*) in 940, near the city of Tus, in the Khorasan region of the Samanid Empire. One might argue that Dante’s relationship to Italy is analogous to Ferdowsi’s relationship to Iran. Breuilly (cited in Davidson, 2000: 35) used Dante’s two essays “to argue that national consciousness could be found as early as the thirteenth century.” Davidson explains that in one, ‘On Vernacular Language’, Dante claims to have discovered the Italian language, which he in turn identifies with the Italian nation. In the other, ‘On the Monarchy’, Dante argues for establishing a universal monarchy to establish harmony across Christendom as a whole. Breuilly argues that the divergence between these two positions is proof of both ‘the existence of some kind of national consciousness in late thirteenth century (Davidson, 2000: 36). Davidson however argues that the vernacular language to which Dante is referring was “in fact the Florentine dialect adopted by intellectuals like himself who belonged to the bourgeois of the most advanced Italian city-state” (Ibid: 35). As Gramsci has said, Dante’s view should be seen in its class context. Dante here discusses two class positions that are in conflict: “a bourgeois-popular one expressing itself in the vernacular and an aristocratic-feudal one expressing itself in Latin” (Ibid).

²²¹ He was a founding member of the communist Tudeh Party of Iran in the 1940s and – following the 1953 coup against Premier Mohammad Mossadegh – spent the rest of his life in exile in East Germany, first during the Pahlavi regime, then once more following the 1979 revolution. It is interesting that it was a communist, i.e., Buzurg Alavi who translated the work of a German Orientalist, Nöldeke. This is important since reveals the close link between Iranian Marxism and racist nationalism. Nöldeke’s work, *Das Iranische Nationalepos*, has been translated into Persian, under the title of *Hamasey-e Melli-e Iran* (The Iranian National Epic) and published in 1978 in Tehran. Alavi has also been one of the founders of Iranian Studies at Humboldt University of Berlin. Jalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, another

It is argued that paying even cursory attention to the poem's narratives demonstrates that "notions of an Iranian identity, as they are embodied in the *Shahnameh*, are complicated, and often apparently self-contradictory, and that they strongly resist attempts to essentialize the concept" (Davis in Amanat and Vejdani, 2012: 39-40). Responding to his question that "how far does the geography of modern Iran correspond to the implied geography of the *Shahnameh*?" Davis says: "not very closely ... the Iran of the legendary *Shahnameh* is clearly located in the Parthian homeland". These places fall outside the boundaries of Iran (Ibid). The geography of the legendary *Shahnameh* corresponds to the present-day Khurasan, western Afghanistan, and central Asia. This is not the only Iran that is referred to in *Shahnameh*. The second Iran, "centering on Estakhr in Fars and bounded in the west by Ahvaz, in the north by Isfahan, and in the east by Kerman, is the "Iran" of the period between the death of Rostam and the beginning of the Sasanian era" (Ibid: 41). So, the geography of Iran, as represented in the *Shahnameh*, is 'an equivocal category' that shifts. In the initial tales of the poem, the primary focus is on a region *beyond* Iran, around the Oxus. Towards the end of the poem, the main area of interest shifts once again *beyond* the current borders, to the Tigris (Ibid).

The key strategy that Davis employs involves historicizing the problem that shifts the focus away from central figures such as Rostam²²², instead turning to their parents and ancestors. By introducing this temporal component, Davis shows that neither Kay Khosrow nor Rostam was 'Iranian'. Both Rostam's father and mother have demonic characteristics. Davis thus argues that "Rostam's lineage is as much, if not more, demonic than it is Iranian" (Davis in Amanat and Vejdani, 2012: 42). This narrative is fundamentally in contrast with the prevalent image of the

influential Aryanist, has endorsed this book as still one the best research on *Shahnamah*. See: <https://t.me/bahmanbookz/723>

²²² Rostam or Rustam is a legendary hero in Persian mythology, the son of Zāl and Rudaba, whose life and work was immortalized by the 10th-century Persian poet Ferdowsi in the *Shahnameh*.

heroes of the *Shahnameh* as individuals of Iranian origin possessing racial/ethnic purity (Ibid: 43). We know that Rostam is from Sistan. Whenever Rostam is dissatisfied with the Persian court, he returns to Sistan, which is beyond the reach of the king. The Sistan referred to in the *Shahnameh* is not Sistan in Iran but Helmand, in Afghanistan. Rostam's mother is from Kabul, and Rostam himself dies in Kabul. In this sense, Rostam is not Iranian but specifically Kaboli and even Indian, as Kabul is considered part of India in the *Shahnameh*. Moreover, Rostam often shows reluctance to aid his kings. In the story of Rostam and Esfandiyar, the reader is confronted with the perplexing fact that the enemy Rostam is prepared to face is the Iranian army. Initially, this may appear to be an exception in the *Shahnameh*, but Rostam had two sons, Sohrab and Faramarz, both of whom fought against Iranian forces at different times (Ibid: 46).²²³

In this narrative, it is extremely difficult “to extract an idea of a unitary Iranian identity from the mythological and legendary sections of the *Shahnameh*” (Davis in Amanat and Vejdani, 2012: 47). Logically speaking, Iran cannot be considered Zoroastrian before the advent of Zoroaster. However, in the *Shahnameh*, we see Zoroastrian concepts such as Ahriman and Ahura Mazda continuously referenced in the court of Goshtasp before Zoroaster's appearance. Therefore, “pre-Zoroastrian Iran is by implication made Zoroastrian *avant la lettre*” (Ibid: 48). For Davis, the *Shahnameh* is rife with contradictions that are extremely porous rather than exclusive and divisive. Accordingly, the *Shahnameh*, which is full of non-Iranian components, should not be considered as a repository of a ‘uniquely Iranian identity’. Ferdowsi's method “is always to emphasize unity

²²³ Rostam's relationship with Zoroastrianism also supports this hypothesis. It is said that “although Ferdowsi in his *Shahnameh* plays down any such suggestions, several other texts that preceded the *Shahnameh* state that Rostam emphatically rejected the new religion of Zoroastrianism” (Davis in Amanat and Vejdani, 2012: 46). It is important to note that “Parthians were Mithraists, in contrast to the Sasanians, the majority of whom were Zoroastrians” (Vaziri, 2013: 262-3). Although texts such as Tabari and Tha'alebi, and *Shahnameh* depict the conflict between Rostam and Esfandiyar as based on pride and a sense of ‘lineage and royal *amour propre*’, there are marginalized texts that interpret the conflict as a religious confrontation stemming from Rostam's outright rejection of Zoroastrianism.

and continuity” ... rather than diversity and discord (Ibid). This tendency to purge and eliminate any conflict and contradiction from the geohistory is an elemental feature of the ideology of *Iranshahr* or Sassanian Iran. Such racist perspective tends to remove the class conflicts to maintain the hegemony of the ruling class.

The inconsistencies of the *Shahnameh* can be further supported by Pourshariati’s (2008) research. For example, the fact that Rostam never went to the court of the Sasanian kings and fought against the Iranian army may indicate that Rostam either belonged to the Parthian kings himself or was loyal to the Parthian rather than the Sasanian kings. This demonstrates how misleading can be the use of the concept of ‘Iran’ in understanding the periods of the Parthians and the Sasanians. The simultaneous rule of both Parthian/Pahlavi and Sasanian²²⁴/Parsig families, as Pourshariati’s research shows, support this view.²²⁵ Her work challenges the linear narrative of dynastic succession – Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, Sassanian. While it is commonly accepted that the Sassanians were destroyed by the Arab conquest, little attention is given to the fact that the Parthians were not destroyed at the time (Pourshariati, 2008: 463). The Parthians “played a crucial role in the demise of the Sasanians through their agreement with the Arabs” (Ibid). Pourshariati argues that the Arab conquerors’ main goal was not to conquer and colonize Iran, but rather to bypass it to reach the trade centers in Transoxiana. Consequently, the downfall of the

²²⁴ The early Arab conquest of Iraq did not happen in the commonly accepted timeframe of 632-634 AD after the ascension of the last Sasanian king, Yazdgird III (632-651) to the throne. Instead, it occurred between 628 and 632 AD, precisely during the time of internal internecine warfare between the Pahlav and the Pārsīg.

²²⁵ Pourshariati’s work does not historicize ‘Iran’. Taking ‘Iran’ and ‘Iranian plateau’ for granted, Pourshariati characterizes the Sasanians “an *Iranian people*, the Persis, the early migrants to the *Iranian plateau* who had settled in the region of Fārs (Pārs) in southwestern *Iran*” (Pourshariati, 2008: 22). As it is said, “through their very presence in the post-conquest centuries, the Parthian families promoted the continuity of the Iranian national tradition” (Ibid) or “there was no such thing as a revival of ancient Iranian traditions during the tenth century, for these had never become extinct to require resurrection in the first place” (Ibid: 464). If Pourshariati had followed the logic of her argument, she would have not referred to Iran, but rather would have discussed the Sassanians and Parthians, dynasties.

Sasanians did not lead to the end of the Parthians. Thus, the linear narrative of Iranian history as either pre-Islamic or post-Islamic should be deemed as inaccurate.

Contrary to the conventional perspective (the traditional Orientalist approach of Arthur Christensen), the Sasanian not only was *not* a homogeneous centralized state, but also managed to stay in power only by collaborating with the Parthians “through a decentralized dynastic system, the backbone of which was the *Sasanian–Parthian confederacy*” (Pourshariati, 2008: 2). It was not only the Romans who distorted the history of the Parthians. The Sasanians themselves have contributed to our distorted view of 400 years of Parthian history (Sarkhosh Curtis and Stewart, 2007: 2). Pourshariati says that “as the *Shāhnāma* bears witness, the Pahlav dynasts continued to speak the Parthian language until the end of the Sasanian period and probably for centuries thereafter” (Pourshariati, 2008: 460). This problematizes the three-stages linear periodization of Persian language into Old, Middle (Sasanian), and New Persian.

Pourshariati’s work thus implicitly represents a non-linear, multitemporal approach in which different temporal regimes co-exist (Harootunian, 2015). Therefore, the Arab conquest ought not be viewed as a total overhaul of the political structures of the Sasanian realm (temporality 1)²²⁶. Although the Arab armies destroyed the kingship of the house of Sāsān, the power of the Pahlav domains and the Parthian power over them (temporality 2) remained largely intact during the Umayyad period (temporality 3) (Pourshariati, 2008: 5). This historical case shows that how an older temporality (2) can in a non-linear stagist (beyond temporality 1) way continue to exist simultaneous with a newer temporality (3). This perspective challenges the linear periodization of

²²⁶ This non-linearity of ‘Iranian’ history is not confined to that particular era. When it comes to the religions, the same heterogeneous non-linear histories are observable. In the treaty related to the frontier peace between Nader Shah and the Ottoman Empire, which was concluded in 1746, it is stated that “the people of Iran have abandoned the improper practices that were established during the Safavid era and have embraced the principles and beliefs of the Sunni school” (Pirmia, 1908: p. 195). This indicates that contrary to the conventional view, the process of Shi’ization of ‘Iran’ as the main unifying mechanism during the Safavid period was not a widespread and permanent process.

‘Iranian’ history. This reflects my argument that narrating history geographically can help avoid the pitfalls of linear narratives centered on dynastic succession or transition. By focusing on the concrete realities of each period, we can move away from assuming the pre-existence of abstract entities such as ‘Iran’.

In addition to the immanent critiques that have problematized *Shahnameh*’s geographical assumptions by engaging with its own content, a comparative approach can further challenge the spacetime of *Shahnameh*. Living around the same time²²⁷ as Ferdowsi (940-1019 or 1025), Naser Khosrow’s (1004-1070) historical account, *Safarnama*, offers a valuable historical account that underscores significant points of divergence. By juxtaposing *Safarnama* with *Shahnameh*, we can more effectively critique the spatial and temporal frameworks of Ferdowsi’s narrative. This comparison underscores the heterogeneity of Farsi prior to its national production by the nation-state, revealing it as a language filled with contradictions and opposing perspectives. Prior to the nation state and its Farsist practices, Farsi, was far more varied than the singular, homogenized vision of *Shahnameh*.

Safarnama is an account of Khosrow’s seven-year journey through the Islamic world. He initially set out on a Hajj, the obligatory Pilgrimage to Mecca. Examining the spatialities of *Safarnama*, one can argue that Iran as a geographical entity was absent in Ferdowsi’s time. In contrast to the *Shahnameh*, *Safarnama* presents a markedly different conception of space. Notably, the term ‘Iran’ is entirely absent from the text of *Safarnama*, highlighting a distinct approach to territorial boundaries that diverges from the nationalistic framework often associated with

²²⁷ Naser Khosrow and Ferdowsi both lived during the time of the Ghaznavid Empire (977-1186) and were born in Khorasan, Nasir Khosrow in Qubadiaon (A town in the Khatlon Region of Tajikistan) and Ferdowsi in Tus (An ancient city in Iran near Mashhad).

Shahnameh. Khosrow's descriptions of places are more local and concrete. Describing the Hejaz²²⁸ and Yemen, it is said that we will reach the domain of (*velayat-e*) Yemen, and the land of Yemen and Hejaz are connected, and both valayaat are Arab-speaking (Khosrow, 1956: 90). Khosrow mentions three seas: Basra Sea, *Gholzom* (Clysmā) sea²²⁹, and *Bahr*²³⁰-*e Mohit* (Ibid). Despite using the most specific names for places and geographical entities, Khosrow does not refer to the 'Persian Gulf' here. Persian Gulf was not yet produced through the Farsist practices of the state. Moreover, one and the same sea was called by different names: "somewhere they call it *Gholzom*, somewhere else it is called *Eizab*, and again somewhere else it was known as *bahr-ol-naam*" (Ibid: 83). This underscores the heterogeneous nature of space during that time that entails the absence of a singular state-imposed narrative of space.

Khosrow's narrative demonstrates that the abstract, bounded conception of space was not yet formed. Contrary to the anachronistic method that arbitrarily assigns absolute, exclusive names to places from nowhere, Naser Khosrow's *Safarnama* provides us with a specifically geohistorical, comparative, and relational perspective showing that places were understood as social relationships.²³¹ From the geohistorical standpoint of Naser Khosrow there was nothing like the Mediterranean Sea. He instead talks about *darya*²³²-*ye room* (Khosrow, 1956: 48). Additionally, the text makes no reference to Iran. Naser Khosrow says that he saw many cities (*belad*. plural of *balad*) and castles around the world in Arab, Ajam, India, and Turk's *belad* (Ibid: 10). He does not

²²⁸ A region in the west of today's Saudi Arabia. It includes the cities of Mecca, Medina, Jeddah, Tabuk, Yanbu, Taif, and Baljurashi.

²²⁹ The Red Sea, today.

²³⁰ Bahr is the Arabic equivalent of sea.

²³¹ Responding to Bertrand Russell's example that 'we can think of' the location of Edinburgh as North of the location of London regardless of whether humans exist on Earth, Gramsci argues that without the existence of man, one cannot think of 'thinking' (Cited in Ives, 2005: 464). Gramsci understands North and South to "arbitrary and related to specific historical developments such as Californians accepting Japan as the 'Far East' (even though they travel West to arrive there). But they are also objectively real, 'they correspond to real facts, they allow one to travel by land and by sea, to arrive where one has decided to arrive'" (Ives, 2005: 464).

²³² Darya is the Persian equivalent of sea.

refer to Persia or Iran. Persia or Perse is more a Greek and Roman representation of a region which includes vast non-Persian regions²³³.

Khosrow discusses another city named *Mahrooban*. He notes that when he arrived there, the city was in the hands of the sons of Bakalijar, who was the ruler of Pars (Ibid: 121). Then, Khosrow narrates his travel from *Mahrooban* towards Isfahan: “we went to Isfahan by way of the mountains ... and we reached *Lourdeghan*²³⁴ where was located 40 Parasangs²³⁵ from Arjan²³⁶” (Ibid: 122). Khosrow asserts that “*Lourdeghan* is the frontier of Pars” (Ibid: 122). As we can see, on his way from Basra to Isfahan, Khosrow passes through a few cities like Kazerun and *Lourdeghan*. If the latter is the frontier of Pars, it can be said that at that time, Pars corresponded to the current Fars region in Iran. This also indicates that in Khosrow’s time, Iran as a geographical entity was absent.

The absence of Iran has also been documented in various other historical sources. The thirteenth-century *Book of the World (Jahānnāma)*²³⁷ in Persian which was ‘the first treatise in the Islamicate world to explicitly design a world map with a coordinate system’. Discussing the *Compendium of Chronicles (Jāmi‘ al-Tavārīkh)*, commissioned by Ghāzān Khan and Öljeitü (1304-16), Danilenko argues that Rashīd al-Dīn created the *Compendium* in both Arabic and

²³³ It is important to note that this nomenclature primarily stems from the Roman perspective of the region. The Romans, during their military campaigns in the region, would categorize any people speaking a language other than Latin as ‘Persian’ in a broad, homogenizing manner. This perspective is not exclusive to the Roman-Persian relationship. For instance, ‘Germanic’ is a general identity that the Romans used to refer to a diverse array of tribes. In the first episode of the TV series “Barbarians” (Heckmann, Nolting, & Scharf, 2020), there is a dialogue between tribal leaders in which one leader addresses the group as ‘Germans’ and another leader, surprised, asks ‘Germans’? Since when we became Germans? He then hears the response that the Romans call them so because they cannot discern their differences. The other leader retorts that the Romans must be blind, as he, a Cherusci, shares no commonality with other tribes. So, it is important to note that rather than the inhabitants of Iran’s geographies identifying themselves as Persian, it has been others who have done so. Similarly, Arabs have historically used the term ‘Ajam’ to refer to all non-Arabs.

²³⁴ Lordegan today is a city in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, Iran.

²³⁵ A historical unit of walking distance, the length of which varied according to terrain and speed of travel. The European equivalent is the league. In modern terms the distance is about 3 or 3½ miles (4.8 or 5.6 km).

²³⁶ Arjan, or Argan corresponds to the modern-day Behbahan in Khuzestan.

²³⁷ A geography book written by Persian geographer Muḥammad ibn Najīb Bakrān in 1206.

Persian, since “he meant to embed his chronicle in the Arabic tradition of the Islamicate world as well as the coeval vernacular” (Danilenko, 2021: 96). The first Persian geography, *Horizons of the World* (*Hudūd al-‘Ālam*) “dating from the end of the tenth century, had not yet put the Iranian lands first” (Ibid: 97). Examining all the maps in *Horizons of the World*, not even a single map depicts ‘Iran’. For instance, Daylam²³⁸, a non-Persian region, is depicted, but Iran is absent. This shows why we should not confuse Persian geography with Iran.

We know that Bakrān developed his work based on contributions such as Ibn Khurrādhbih’s and, more importantly, Nāṣir Khusraw’s *Safarnāma*. As is clear in the title of the *Jahānnāma* (*Book of the World*), the main purpose was not to portray ‘Iran’ in the world. Such a thing was not relevant at the time of Khosrow and Bakrān. Although Danilenko believes that it is only in 1340 that we confronted the first *world* map (Figure 18) focusing on *Iran* in the *Delight of the Hearts* (*Nuzhat al-Qulūb*), there is no *Iran* on the map. Ḥamd Allah Mustawfī (d. ca. 1344), the author, “dedicated over two-thirds of the *Delight*’s geographic section to *the Persianate world* including Khurasan and Azerbaijan” (Ibid: 99-100). The text speaks about Iran. On the map, however, it is not Iran but Fars, Kerman, Makran, Khorasan, Erāq-e Ajam, Erāq-e Arab and other regions that are drawn (Ibid: 100).

²³⁸ Also known in the plural form Daylaman (and variants such as Dailam, Deylam, and Deilam), was the name of a mountainous region of inland Gilan, Iran.

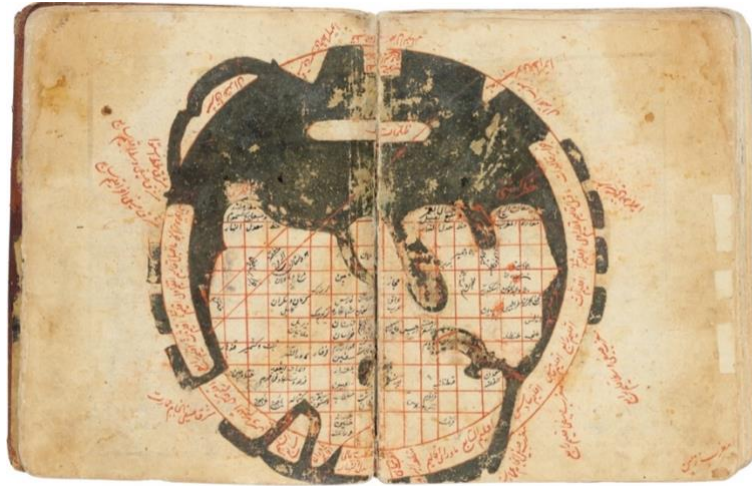


Figure 18. World map based on a copy of *Nuzhat al-Qulub* (1340) [*Delight of the hearts*] by Ḥamd Allah Mustawfī, created in Safavid Iran on 18 October 1641.²³⁹

5. Dressage and Internal Colonization:

Decolonization is a spatiotemporal process. Transformation of colonialism is “a strategy of appropriating *space* and breaking with linear-repetitive *time*” (Kipfer, 2011: 97). Colonization then should be treated as a spatial organization (Kipfer, 2007: 703). The logic of colonization is based on a racial dualism (of black and white), but this logic is in fact “a *spatial* relation of separation” (Kipfer, 2011: 97). Dualistic spatiality of colonialism denied the possibility of *freedom* as “a reciprocal relation between body and the world” (Ibid). As a result of the dualistic, colonial logic of Manicheanism, there is a sharp separation between rural and urban movements, even after the so-called decolonization (Fanon, 2004: 70-71). Fanon refers to an urban bias in which peasants are spatially organized in a *top-down inorganic* fashion (Kipfer, 2011: 100), representing the colonial logic of exclusivity. He instead sees a dialectical relation between rurality and urbanity (Fanon, 2004: 80-82) and does not exclude one to the detriment of the other, as the dualistic ontology of Farsism does.

Fanon’s conception of racism relates to how Gramsci conceptualizes language and his argument that a normative national language has decisive alienating impacts on the peoples with

²³⁹ From: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hamdullah_al-Mustawfi_al-Qazwini_\(d._1339_AD\),_Nuzhat_al-qulub.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hamdullah_al-Mustawfi_al-Qazwini_(d._1339_AD),_Nuzhat_al-qulub.jpg)

a different language and culture. Fanon's understanding of the effects of being colonized by language is illuminating here. For Fanon,

speaking the language of the colonizer meant that the colonized accepted, or were coerced into accepting, the collective consciousness of the colonial power, which identified blackness with inferiority, evil, and sin. In an attempt to escape the association of blackness with evil, the black man wears a white mask and internalizes white cultural values, creating a fundamental disjuncture between consciousness and body (McEwan, 2009: 328).

Iranian equivalent to Fanon's 'black man' is more extensive and differentiated. Corresponding to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, we can speak of 'non-Persian bodies, Persian veils'. Bodies here include individual and collective ones. From the standpoint of a socialist strategy, it is crucial to see the individual and collective bodies simultaneously. Veiling in Iran reflects two interconnected forms imposed by the central state: and Farsi (Persian language). One covers and alienates the individual bodies of women, and the other suppresses and alienates the individual and collective bodies of the non-Persian peoples. Both seek to tame and domesticate bodies. The ultimate purpose of these practices of veiling, or what Lefebvre might call, *dressage* (Lefebvre, 2004), is the production of docile bodies. I would argue that Farsi can be characterized as an entrenched form of enforced hijab that is imposed by the central state.

As I will show in this section, the internally colonial production of Iran is racist (Farsist-Shi'ist or, in brief, Farshiist). If racism, in general, is the belief that different 'races' possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially to distinguish them as inferior/superior to one another, then Farsi culture, as a predominant form of veiling in Iran functions as a mechanism to hierarchically classify peoples by their *biological* and *cultural* qualities. Persian/Farsist racism does have biological and cultural components. The Persian language is imposed on a hugely wide

range of non-Persian peoples, including the individual bodies of those with black and other non-white skins (Aryan racism). Farsi as a language, culture, and worldview, has systematically suppressed non-Persian languages and cultures of the colonized nations.

Fanon's conceptualization of colonialism and racism is elucidating here. He says, "speaking the language of the colonizer meant that the colonized accepted, or were coerced into accepting, the collective consciousness of the colonial power." We can make a similar argument about Farsi. More precisely, speaking Farsi; the language of the colonizer, means that the colonized (non-Persian peoples) have accepted, or is coerced into accepting, the dominant consciousness and worldview of the colonial national state, which identified non-Persianness with inferiority, separationism (*tajzie talabi*), and treason. Inferiority can easily be identified with 'corruption in the land' (*fasad fil Arz*) which is legally punishable by execution in Iran. Farsi is practiced in and through everyday life. A critique of 'Iranian' everyday life should then constantly be applied to the ingrained dualisms of Farsist culture/worldview. We need to overcome the binary system. We need then to transform the dualistic space of the national state. The focus on everyday life is a focus on the subaltern; the ordinary. This is crucial if we are going to go beyond the dominant elitist/nationalist historiography of Iran.

Therefore, we are encountering a deep-rooted socially constructed and spatiotemporally produced national worldview that is not reducible to either the Pahlavi regime or its inheritor²⁴⁰, the Islamic Republic. As Burton notes, we should be mindful of the fact that the public campaigns of Islamization like the Cultural Revolution "belied the extent to which the Islamic Republic co-opted much of the state structures and nationalist mythologies the Pahlavis had left behind. This

²⁴⁰ Seeing critically through a spatiotemporal lens, Iran as a modern state is essentially colonial, racist, paternalistic, Farsist, Shiist, and Aryanist. By the Islamic Revolution (1979), the combination of the ruling class changed, but the colonial nature of the state became even more explicit and consolidated.

included ... the central government's privileging of Persian language and culture as the normative national identity.” (Burton, 2021: 217) As Elling argues, the ideology of the Islamic state of Iran is “in essence not pan-Islamic or even Islamist, but indeed nationalist” (Elling, 2013)²⁴¹. This is mostly manifested in the violent politics of both regimes towards non-Persian peoples and their effort to represent them as ‘ethnicities’ within the broader category of the Iranian nation. The Islamic Republic, in fact has perpetuated and intensified this approach to “domesticating ethnic difference, ensuring that all of its expressions fundamentally identified with the Iranian nation-state.” (Burton, 2021: 118)

This systematic process of domestication or dressage should be seen in direct connection with internal colonization and the suppression of the regional indigenous autonomist movements in Iran. As Burton clarifies, it is only by the early 1970s, when “recalcitrant khans had been killed or exiled and the tribes forcibly disarmed, neutralizing their potential threat to the central government” that the central state expanded support for cultural anthropology on tribal groups. (Ibid: 223) A decade earlier, that was not a possibility because nomads and tribes were not subjugated yet. It was through such scientific interventions that the non-Persian (nomadic, tribal, rural) populations were pulled into the *internally* colonial production of Iran. But even before that, large-scale infrastructural projects (including railways and roads) were required so that the center (Tehran) can have physical access to the dispersed and island-like geographies of the Guarded Domains of Iran (*mamalek-e mahruse-ye Iran*). This process enabled the state, among other things, to begin advertising the “exotic nature” and “touristic appeal” of nomadic groups. (Ibid) ‘Tribal politics’ – or more precisely, the subordination of tribal leadership to state authority and the forced transformation of nomads into settled agriculturalists with the ultimate goal of eradicating the

²⁴¹ As he argues, the authoritarian concept of this political order is legitimized through an ideology of Islamo-nationalism (Elling, 2013: 83).

pastoral nomadic way of life – played a decisive role in Iranian state formation under Reza Shah (Cronin, 2007). By the 1930s, dispersed local uprisings had been suppressed, many senior tribal leaders had either been sidelined or eliminated, and Reza Shah’s authoritarian regime had implemented a harsh sedentarization campaign targeting pastoralist communities, effectively erasing the remnants of their autonomy (Ehsani, 2017: 435).

The mass nomadic sedentarization was essential not only in the production of Iranian national territory but also paved the way for the capitalist-colonial production of nature. Domestication of the non-Persian nomadic (and sedentary) populations/bodies has been a necessary action for this purpose. This domestication or dressage has been implemented through Farsization of space (and time). Discussing a particular example of the Qashqis, Burton argues that the middle-class, urban, and Persian-speaking Iranians who visited nomads’ campsites, were “unwittingly participating in a long tradition of internal colonialism.” (Burton, 2021: 223) Emphasizing the relationship between genetics and linguistics, Burton concludes that “since the foundation of the Pahlavi state, this internal colonialism had been framed in the ethnolinguistic terms of Aryanism.” (Ibid) So, to transcend the national(ist) state-centric representations and practices, we need to question the very colonial nature of the national state.

Language repression can be considered a part of racial domination. It involves the suppression or marginalization of the languages spoken by specific racial groups, which can have profound impacts on their cultural identity, access to power, and social mobility. Furthermore, language repression is intertwined with the structures of class and power. For example, dominant languages often correspond to higher socioeconomic status, better educational and employment opportunities, and greater access to social services and political participation. Thus, when the

languages of racial minorities are marginalized or not recognized officially, it contributes to the perpetuation of racial and class inequalities.

6. Farsi as A Class-Colonial Language?

It seems that the production of Iran is only made possible and realized through the state production of Farsist knowledge which is characterized by racist-colonial dualisms. Drawing on the production of space as the overarching theoretical framework, in this section I utilize Gramsci's spatial historicism to critically examine the dualist spatialities of Farsi. Gramsci recognizes "two competing pro-fascist currents that "mobilized competing imageries of urbanity and rurality to buttress Italian nationalism" (Kipfer, 2013: 89). He criticizes the dominant imageries of the city and countryside as manifested in "the widespread intellectual disdain for the *lived experience* of common Italians" (Ibid: 89-90). I argue that a similar process has been experienced in and through Farsi since the late Qajar. The urbanist-statist (anti-rural, anti-nomadic, anti-tribal) bias in Farsi has been a fundamentally constitutive element of the intellectuals of 'Iranian' state. More importantly, the dualism of city-countryside is related to internal colonialism. In his discussion of 'urbanity and rurality as claims to hegemony' Kipfer argues that the power of Gramsci's formulation about subalternity "lies precisely in his refusal to treat the city and the countryside divide as ... transhistorical conceptions of modernity/tradition ... and civilization/barbarism" (Ibid: 95). I argue that the urbanist bias of the Farsist intellectuals of the Iranian state manifested in their hatred and scorn for the peasantry and nomadic peoples should similarly be understood as inorganic claims to hegemony (Ibid).

The production of Iran is inextricably linked to the internal colonization and the associated urban-rural dualism. By examining Farsist dualisms within selected historical sources, I demonstrate how Farsist colonialism has produced a statist/sedentary national regime, positioned

in contrast to non-capitalist nomadic regimes. A deep-seated dualistic framework characterizes Farsism manifested in a range of interconnected dualisms²⁴². Farsist nationalism represents the culmination of this dualist ideology that has been inscribed in spacetime. Nationalism, as the fetishized incarnation of the ruling class's intellectual labour, is inseparable from language and class production of knowledge. I show that Farsist ideology is the national embodiment of a range of racist-class-colonial dualisms (civilized-barbarian, sedentary-nomadic, male-female, society-nature, state-family²⁴³, and urban-rural).

Farsism is marked by a deeply rooted dualistic structure, which presents itself in various distinct yet interrelated manifestations. There is a correspondence between culture-nature²⁴⁴, male-female, urban-rural, sedentary-nomadic, civilized-barbarian, and Persian-nonPersian dualisms. The school textbook *A Brief History of Iran* (1892) authored by Mohammad Ali Foroughi, Zokai-Molk begins with the following sentence: "we are Iranians, and Iranians are a very ancient nation" (p. 2). Under the section on the Chinggisids and Timurids, it is mentioned, Turanians or Turks "located in northeastern Iran, have always been wild and uncivilized, and have had conflicts with Iranians, but the worst among them are the Mongols" (p. 33).

According to the *Pocket Atlas of Iran*, the concept of population [جمعیت] had not yet been widely recognized in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Instead, the term *nofous* (meaning individuals) is used to refer to the number of inhabitants (9,970,000) (Eghbal, 1926: 19). Eghbal

²⁴² These dualisms are not exclusive to Farsi and are concretized differently in different geohistorical registers.

²⁴³ As Poulantzas says, "the family is established only in strict concomitance with the emerging public sphere of the modern State – not ... as the intrinsic outside of a rigidly demarcated public space" (Poulantzas, 1978/1980: 72).

²⁴⁴ The society/culture-nature dualism is associated with a gendered one; the male-female binary. I argue that the dualist spaces of the nuclear family and the national territory are mutually constitutive. They manifest the gendered division of labour. Legally produced as privately owned and mutually exclusive bounded properties, these spaces form a material barrier to the production of emancipatory spaces. In both family and national territory, the (individual or collective) body is *legally* defined as private property. In this sense, I think the nuclear family, or the marital space, is the cell form of the national state space.

divides these *nofous* based on *ergh* or identity into several categories: Fars, Turk, Kurd, Arab, Lur, Teymouri or Tatar, Baloch, Hazara, Armenian, Chaldean, Jewish, and Parsi (Ibid: 20). The Fars population is mentioned as a total of 5,500,000 individuals. More importantly, reflecting the sedentary-nomadic and Zoroastrian-nonZoroastrian dualisms of Farsist nationalism, Eghbal characterizes Farses as Iranians who are engaged in sedentary modes of life (agriculture and industry). So, non-Farses (Turk, Kurd, Arab, Lur, Teymouri or Tatar, Baloch, Hazara, Armenian) are implicitly excluded from the category of Iranian. A dualistic categorization of Fars-nonFars is employed and aligned with the civilized-barbarian dichotomy.

The production of state-centric geographical texts has been closely linked to military activities from the very beginning. Iran's military geography encompasses a twenty-volume book series on the military geography of different regions of Iran, published in the 1940s by Major General Haj Ali Razmara²⁴⁵ at the Geographical Headquarter of the Army. In one of the volumes titled *Military Geography of Iran: Fars*, published in 1944, the status of Farsi tribes and nomads is detailed showing the co-existence of two different spatiotemporal regimes (Razmara, 1944: 111-139). This book concludes with a racial categorization: "Fars means the true Iran. Farsi means an Iranian with pure blood and untainted emotions. Every true Iranian should take pride in the existence of this land ... This land is sacred to us" (p. 202). Perhaps no other paragraph more explicitly reveals the racist foundations of the production of Iran. The distinguishing features of being Iranian is Farsi. This Iran is an ahistorical and always existing land, and sedentary/urban mode of life. It becomes evident that the dominant portion of the nomadic population is composed of non-Persians (p. 131). This is a crucial point that demonstrates the significance of emphasizing what I call Farsism. It is historically evident that Persian people (Farses) or 'true Iranians'

²⁴⁵ Ali Razmara, also known as Haj Ali Razmara (1901-1951), was a military leader and prime minister of Iran.

geographically are resided in the center of what is known as the ‘Iranian plateau’, while non-Persians were in the frontiers – today’s national colonies – which were primarily nomadic rather than urban or ‘civilized’.

The most recent, systematically developed, and uncritically absorbed narrative of Farsist dualism has been articulated by Javad Tabatabai. His view is a prime example of this Farsist dualism. He believes that it is through Persian language that ‘we’ become a member of the nation. Tabatabai argues that the relationship between Iranian culture and Turkish culture is like the relationship between an urban-civilized (*shahri-tamaddoni*) culture and a rural one (*dehati*)²⁴⁶. This dualistic conception of the world, manifested here as urban-rural and Persian-Turkish, is associated with other deep-rooted dualisms, including civilization-barbarism, sedentary-nomadic, and culture-nature. This binary way of reasoning however extends beyond the domain of mainstream right-wing intellectuals. Mehdi Khanbaba Tehrani, an Iranian communist and a former political prisoner, exhibits a comparable urbanist bias. Describing the history of torture in Iran’s prisons during the Pahlavi period, he characterizes one of the famous torturers (sergeant Shabani) as “a really brainless, simple, and *rustic* man from somewhere around Azerbaijan²⁴⁷.” Mohammad Ghaed, another Persian writer, exemplifies the same dualist approach. He believes²⁴⁸ that “the *urban civilization* in Iran has alternately been trampled by the *desert dwellers*.” Ahmad Mohammadpour, a Kurdish scholar, believes²⁴⁹ that using terms like ‘ilat²⁵⁰’ (tribes) and ‘ashayer’ (nomads) is offensive and scornful. Mohammadpour’s view here represents the same dualistic

²⁴⁶ <https://t.me/jtjostarha/229>

²⁴⁷ https://t.me/tarikh_shafahi_iran_project/2917

²⁴⁸ https://twitter.com/about_ghaed/status/1571546880139567104?s=52&t=iJsMtGNv79OeUDa5BAmeZQ

Mohammadpour was responding to Reza Pahlavi, the former crown prince who gave a speech to address “the people of Iran”.

²⁴⁹ <https://t.me/AnthroRojhelat/277>

²⁵⁰ Il (plural: ilat) refers to a political alliance comprised of clans and tribal factions that unite either based on their familial bonds or due to specific political and social circumstances, thereby forming a tribal entity.

logic of “barbarians” versus “civilized” according to which, the moving/mobile bodies are categorized as savages and barbarians who must be tamed. This deep-seated dualism can be characterized as an urbanist bias. In this view, nomadic and non-statist modes of life are systematically and *a priori* represented as inferior to the statist sedentarist ones.

Being both leftist and Farsist²⁵¹ nationalist Shahrokh Meskoob²⁵² stands as a notable example for examination (Meskoob, 2005: 7). In “Iran in Asia: A Note on the Geography of Iran’s History” he says “Anshan was located near Susa, the ancient and magnificent capital of Elam, which ruled over the entire south and southwest of *Iran* in the distant past” (Meskoob, 1992: 14). One can ask how did the Elamites rule over the south of Iran, where and when Iran had not yet emerged? That specific area has their own names: Susa and Anshan. His ahistorical conception of Iran is linked to a deep-rooted dualism: that of urban/static versus rural/nomadic. Meskoob talks about a homogenous ‘us’ or ‘our’ culture. He contrasts this ‘us’ with the Kushan Empire and ‘desert-dwellers’ to the East, ‘nomads’ to the North-East, and ‘Arabs’ to the South-West. Meskoob cannot conceal his deep anti-Arab and anti-Turkic sentiment (Persian/Aryan supremacy) and dualistically contrasts Aryans and Semites (Meskoob, 1992: 13). Comparing the Sasanid and the Safavid empires, he asserts that their histories have many things in common: The historical ending of both Sasanian and Safavian has been realized at the hands of those ‘inferior’ peoples [Arabs and the Hotak dynasty, respectively], which was ‘humiliating²⁵³’ (Ibid: 21-22). This racist attitude towards

²⁵¹ By Farsist Left, I mean the nationalist left whose understanding of Iran, and its history is largely confined to the knowledge produced in and through Farsi by the central state over approximately the last hundred years. As such, the suppression of non-Persian modes of life and languages, which has been a principal factor in constructing the Iranian nation-state, falls outside the radar of this Left. This leftist orientation cannot move beyond a Farsist epistemology. The Farsist Left interprets class struggle primarily through the lens of economic exploitation, neglecting the nexus between exploitation and national colonization. Consequently, it tends to consider other forms of domination, such as gender oppressions, as secondary to the main problem, that is an abstract class question. The primary reason for these biases within the Farsist Left should be sought in its worldview, which is essentially a state centric Farsist perspective.

²⁵² For an earlier critique of Meskoob’s nationalist view, see (Boroujerdi, 1998: 48-52).

²⁵³ *Aghebat-e toam ba zabooni be dast-e naachiztar as khod.*

‘Others’ is also recognizable when Meskoob contrasts the Turkic peoples of central Asia with the Iranian. He says ‘Iran’ has been frequently attacked by these desert²⁵⁴ dwellers (Ibid: 22). Drawing on the basic sedentary-nomadic dualism, Meskoob treats Iran dualistically as a pre-given bounded space separated from its broader geohistory.

This entrenched detestation of nomadic (tribal and rural) modes of life (nomadic spacetimes) reveals the institutionalized urbanist-statist²⁵⁵ bias of ‘Iranian’ intellectuals that forms a pillar of spatiotemporal matrix of Iranian state. Meskoob relates history to urban civilization and therefore excludes the nomadic mode of life from history, civilization, and culture (Ibid: 11-12). Both nomadic and rural regimes are considered inferior to the urbanist-statist mode of life, and it is only the degree of their inferiority to the Persian urban culture differs (Meskoob, 1992: 18). This homogenizing perspective disregards the existence and contribution of non-Persian languages, cultures, and spaces in the production of Iran.

Meskoob and the dominant majority of Farsist intellectuals consider the ability to form a powerful central state/empire as a value in itself and accordingly look down on dynasties like Parthians (Ibid: 17) who apparently have not been able to achieve that level of centralized organization. Meskoob believes that nomads (*aghvam-e biabangard*) do not have a history since they are characterized by placelessness (Meskoob, 1992: 11). Meskoob reduces place to *sarzamin* (*keshwar* or country) and claims that nomads are ‘placeless’. Since he understands place as a fixed area, in terms of a property relationship, place is conceived as something to be owned. This shows Meskoob has internalized the statist conception of spacetime. His conceptual categories are the

²⁵⁴ Employing the spatial term ‘desert’ by Meskoob is ironic. Desert is used as the other of the urban-statist civilization even though major part of what is called the ‘Iranian plateau’ is composed of arid deserts.

²⁵⁵ Ruralist conceptions of Iranian nationalism can also be recognized but they are mostly limited to those academics in specific geographical departments focused on rural planning and rural development. As a result, a rural nationalism is absent in the Farsist public political arena.

fetishized social relations of the national (capitalist) state (Ibid: 16). Contrary to Meskoob's view, nomadic peoples are not placeless; they only do not see and use place as a fixed relation of property to be owned/exchanged.

Enayatollah Reza, a former member of the Iranian Communist Party, represented an even more extreme form of dualistic view in his nationalism. Reza claims that Turkmens, the people of Anatolian Peninsula, the people of Albania of Caucasus ('wrongfully called Azerbaijan'), and Azerbaijanies of Iran ('the true Azerbaijan') have never had *any kinship* with the Turks and Mongols (Reza, 1986/1995: 29). Reza's racism is also more explicitly evident when he implicitly despises the Turkish language by saying that 'Turkish geographical names are monotonous in which a range of basic names (like *qara sou*, or *aq sou*²⁵⁶) are constantly repeated.'²⁵⁷ Reza says it is necessary to mention that 'Turks lack purity' (Reza, 1988: 188). Showing his urbanist bias, he believes that the 'villagers did not possess sufficient culture to preserve their language' (Ibid: 201). He considers bilingualism as an 'entanglement/predicament' (Ibid: 205). Reza is also unequivocal in showing his Aryan/Persian supremacy, saying that Aryans had a higher culture and more exalted civilization than the indigenous peoples [of Iran] (Ibid: 207)

The class-colonial nature of Farsist dualisms is related to the conventional conception of Iranians/Persians as sedentary people that dualistically contrasts them with non-Persians. In historical texts, the term Iranian has been equated with *Dehqan*, indicative of an elite, landowning, Zoroastrian class. Iranianness is thus linked with the urban elites (Matthee, 2021: 84). The rise of Iranian/Zoroastrian nationalism must be seen in its imperialist context of international division of

²⁵⁶ In Turkish, qara, sou, and aq mean black, water, and white, respectively. *Qara sou* for instance means a large river.

²⁵⁷ Reza's claims are based on the works of Russian Orientalist Vasily Vladimirovich Bartold, also known as Wilhelm Barthold. His book, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* (1900/1928) was translated into Persian and published in 1973 by the Foundation of Iran's Culture.

labour, and specifically, the growth of Parsi community in British India. The early to mid-nineteenth century saw the emergence of an intellectual class of mostly Marathi Hindu Brahmins, and middle class Parsis (Doshi, 2014: 183). Between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, trading enterprises in Europe and Indian elites including Zoroastrian Parsis started to accumulate wealth and transforming the built environment. The Parsi merchant elites were key players in the profitable trade of cotton and opium with China, in partnership with the British East India Company. This commerce eventually positioned the Parsi community as the leader in the sectors of real estate and textile manufacturing. Those Parsi shetias who had prospered from trade and property leasing started to channel the surplus into establishing cotton mills in Bombay, with the first one inaugurated in 1854 by Parsi businessman Kavasji Nanabhai Davar (Ibid: 197).

The period of the 1860s to 1870s saw a surge in the creation of new educational institutions and media in local languages, accompanying the solidification of colonial educational policies. This era also saw the emergence of a colonial middle class, which included not just the traditional elite of high-caste Hindus and Muslim landowners from the United Provinces but also a diverse group comprising Persian-trained literati, schoolteachers, amateur writers, and salaried government officials (Goswami, 2004: 168). The Parsi community²⁵⁸ and Zoroastrians have been crucial in the production of Farsist knowledge that was profoundly connected to the mythical tales of Zoroastrian traditions. Jalâl-al-Din Mirzâ for instance utilized the 17th-century neo-Zoroastrian (Âzar-Kayâni) mythologized narratives like *Dasâter-e âsemâni* by the Zoroastrian Parsi Mollâ Firuz (a leading Zoroastrian scholar-priest residing in Bombay) and the widely disseminated *Dabestân-e madhâheb*. Jalal al-Din Mirza also published the book *Nameh-ye Khosravan* with a

²⁵⁸ For an illuminating analysis of the connection between the Parsi community in India and the formation of modern Iran see Marashi, A. (2020). *Exile and the nation: The Parsi community of India and the making of modern Iran*. University of Texas Press. Drawing on the frameworks of subaltern studies and postcolonial theory, Marashi (2014: 15-19) also offers a highly insightful analysis of Iranian nationalisms in comparison to Indian experience.

focus on pure Persian. The writings of Zoroastrians, or Parsis, served as the primary reference point for this book, which was written for educational purposes at Dar ul-Funun.

Moreover, the Parsi community has been directly involved in representing *Shahnameh* which formed the basis of Persian nationalism. The work of ‘German’ orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (his 1895 article ‘Das Iranischen Nationalepos’), the seminal European scholarly work presenting the *Shahnamah* as the Iranian ‘national’ epic found its way into an English translation, commissioned by the Parsi community of Bombay’s Cama Oriental Institute in 1930 (Marashi, 2009: 96)²⁵⁹. So, there seems to be a clear relation between the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces in British India and producing knowledge in and about Farsi.

7. Farsi and Internal Colonization: Farsist Colonization

Under feudalism, temporalities were dependent on the ‘natural time’ peculiar to essentially agrarian societies. Temporalities were not “divisible into equal segments; and nor do the various moments have a numerical frame of reference.” In feudalism, a linear materiality of time emerges under the influence of religion²⁶⁰. In this temporal regime, the territory-frontier does not yet exist²⁶¹. Pre-capitalist territories “have no historicity of their own, since political time is the time of the prince-body” (Poulantzas, 1980: 109-110). The capitalist temporal matrix, however, is entirely different. It is “the pre-condition of the new relations of production and consubstantial with the capitalist social division of labour” (Poulantzas, 1980: 110). This new relations entail “a

²⁵⁹ The Institute facilitates oriental and Persian studies through the maintenance of an extensive specialized library. Between 1922 and 1944 it also published *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute*. Space was provided for the Mulla Firuz Madressa, where Avestan subjects are taught. The Zoroastrian Research Society, the Parsi Lekhak Maṇḍal; and the Parsi Fasali Sal Maṇḍal were also established (Kanga, 1990).

²⁶⁰ This materiality was distinct from the cyclical materiality of Antiquity: “history now has a beginning and an end, located between the Creation and the Last Judgement. But it is still a present time: beginning and end, *before* and *after* are fully *co-present* in the constant essence of the Divine” (Poulantzas, 1980: 108-109).

²⁶¹ As Poulantzas clarifies, “pre-capitalist spatial matrices have the same foundation as the pre-capitalist temporal matrices: political historicity is transferred from the body of the sovereign, who is *not* himself sovereign of a territory-frontier” (Poulantzas, 1980: 109-110)

segmented, serial, equally divided, cumulative and irreversible time that is oriented towards ... expanded reproduction.” This time is measurable and controllable by means of clocks, stop-watches, and calendars (Ibid). The new relations of production raises the problem of unification. A new temporal regime was about to be shaped that reduces the multiple temporalities.

The capitalist temporal matrix – like the spatial matrix – is already implicit in the structure of the State. It is the capitalist state that produces its own (national) time and temporal regime, and it does so by setting down the norm/standard of measurement, functioning as the frame of reference of the various temporalities (Poulantzas, 1980: 112). The temporal matrix of capitalism is “the precondition of any possible science of history” (Ibid: 111). It organizes the forward/linear course of the nation and thus tends to monopolize the national history (Ibid: 113). The formation of nation-State involves eradication of the dominated histories: “the State establishes the modern nation by eliminating other national pasts and turning them into variations of its own history” (Ibid: 113-114).

In my research, this is manifested in the way in which non-Persian spatiotemporal regimes have been dominated through what I call Farsist internal colonization. As Poulantzas emphasizes, we are not merely dealing with “ideological mechanisms but on the role of these nation-States in the material organization of capitalist historicity” (Ibid: 114). As I will illustrate, the spatio-temporal matrices of the ‘guarded domains’ of the Qajar empire did not require a national homogenization and even helped to preserve difference. What makes these two kinds of spatiotemporal matrices different is Farsism, or more precisely, Farsization of time and space. In this section, I show that it has been the unprecedented role of Farsi in shaping Iran as a national state that marks the qualitative transformation of a pre-capitalist to a national social formation. Independent regions of the guarded domains were forcefully pulled into the ‘spatial and temporal

matrices’ of the emerging nation state. As I will show, it was through this process that a linear, abstract spatiotemporality was imposed on a different spacetime.

The emerging national state homogenizes differences, crushes various nationalities ‘within’ the frontiers of the nation-State (Poulantzas, 1980: 106). I will show how the Iranian nation state crushes various non-Persian nationalities ‘within’ its borders. Here, we can see the roots of *totalitarianism*: “individualization in order to obliterate differences” (Ibid: 107). More specifically, “the roots of totalitarianism are inscribed in the spatial matrix concretized by the modern nation-State – a matrix that is already present in its [capitalist] relations of production” (Ibid). Poulantzas makes a similar point about the temporal matrix of the nation state²⁶². It is thus the State that establishes the relationship between *history* and *territory* (Ibid: 114). National unity thereby “becomes *historicity of a territory and territorialization of a history* – in short, a territorial national tradition concretized in the nation-State” (Ibid).

7.1. From Race to Ethnicity: Ethnicization of the non-Persians

Before the introduction of Eurocentric orientalist conceptions like ‘ethnics’, Iran was composed of a range of states/kingdoms (*Mamlekat*)²⁶³ with fluid, spongy, and indeterminate frontiers. By the eighteenth century, “Persian was not an ethnicity in terms of real or imagined biological descent (Kia, 2020: 126). As Burton (2021: 259-60) explains, political sanctions hinder many aspects of Iranian scientific productivity, but they have not at all impeded the diasporic reproduction of nationalist ideas about who counts as ‘genetically’ Iranian. Iranian ethnicities that emerged

²⁶² As Poulantzas argues, “the premisses of modern totalitarianism exist in the temporal matrix which is inscribed in the modern State and which is already implied by capitalist relations of production and social division of labour” (Poulantzas, 1980: 114).

²⁶³ I have translated *mamlekat* as state. Kia however has translated the term *mamlakat* as “domain” “to preserve its most common connotation as a place with a recognizable character, history, and, at times, political and social autonomy” (Kia, 2020: 12).

decades earlier has been readily adopted by American institutions at the highest levels of academic prestige.

In contrast to the nationally colonial efforts advanced by state intellectuals, I contend that Kurds, Baluchis, Turks, Arabs, Turkmens, and other non-Persians have been *ethnicized* through the internally colonial dynamics of nation-state formation. To substantiate this argument, it is essential to historicize the concept of ‘ethnicity. For many on the left “it is perfectly acceptable to talk about ethnicity ... where it is no longer acceptable to talk about race” (Davidson, 2016: 17). The problem is that ‘ethnicity’ is used “to invoke precisely the qualities that used to be invoked under the ... notion of ‘race’” (Ibid). It is through this racist invention of ethnicity²⁶⁴ that the colonized peoples of Iran have systematically been defined as and reduced to ethnicities within the abstract umbrella-like ‘nation’ of Iran. The scientific production of ethnicities has been an integral part of the nationally colonial production of Iran, implemented through Farsization. From a socialist perspective, the structure that produces concepts like ‘ethnicity’ should be eliminated (Ibid: 30).

Specifying the inherent connection between linguistics and genetics, the racist categorization, or in fact, reduction of a wide range of different languages into the homogenizing and flattening class of ‘Indo-European languages’ is founded upon the idea of the Aryan race as the superior (Vaziri, 2013: 31). This linguistic *classification* was made possible and reinforced by another newly formed area of specialized knowledge: genetics, that uses ‘national’ labels to identify populations, “despite the fact that such labels do not constitute biologically meaningful

²⁶⁴ I appreciate Stefan Kipfer for pointing out that this is exactly what Paul Gilroy calls ‘ethnic absolutism’. This is “a reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable.” See: Gilroy, P. (1990): “Nationalism, History and Ethnic Absolutism,” *History Workshop*, 30, 114–120.

categories” (Burton, 2021: 7). As Kia explains, “to make descent a matter of biology is ... to take a particular interpretation of a physical fact as natural” (Kia, 2020: 124). Drawing on the newly coined discourse of ethnicity, the state characterized Iranians as “a supra-ethnicity – that is, a reified Iranian national identity grounded in Persian culture whose supporters alternately emphasized a shared language/literature, ancient history, Aryan racial ancestry (and a Shi‘i identity). All non-Persians became homogenized as ‘Iranian ethnicities’ (Burton, 2021: 224-25).

The racist history of internal colonization of Iran has yet to be written. Multiple episodes can be highlighted though. As for those enslaved along the northern borders, the majority of enslaved individuals in the southern regions were obtained through abduction (Ibid: 83). This system had been in place for so long that by the mid-seventeenth century, Baluchis had become a crucial component of the Omani royal army in East Africa (Mirzai, 2017: 244). Mirzai does not address the link between racism and internal colonization. However, the fact that slavery was predominantly confined to frontier regions and non-Persians such as the Baloch peoples and did not significantly include Persians, indicates the racist layer of internal colonization. Especially in southern regions of Baluchestan and Arabestan, the dark skin color of the inhabitants was one of the factors that led the central state and its intellectuals (including Najm al-Dowleh) to consider them as subhuman and therefore deserving to be enslaved. The rise of imperialism during this era was characterized by pervasive labour shortages for infrastructural projects, which played a significant role in the widespread enslavement of indigenous populations²⁶⁵.

²⁶⁵ In the early 20th century, in regions like Baluchestan, Kerman, Qarabagh, and Talesh, those engaged in canal construction, including their families were treated as commodities, bought and sold together with the lands they cultivated (Mirzai, 2017: 86). In certain instances, enslaved individuals served as the sole form of financial compensation, leading to taxes being levied in the form of enslaved Baluchis (Ibid).

More recent episodes of internal colonization must be highlighted. In March 1979, “Kurdish and Turkmen factions seized control of provincial resources to implement leftist policy reforms, demanding autonomy from the central state. The Revolutionary Guards were deployed to violently suppress these uprisings ... and many Kurds and Turkmens lost their lives” (Burton, 2021: 226). At the same time, Baluchi representatives voiced concerns regarding the marginalization of Sunni Muslims under Shi‘i governance. The situation escalated into a Baluchi boycott of the constitutional referendum in December 1979. Armed clashes between Baluchis and Revolutionary Guards in Zahedan, Kurdistan, and Turkmen Sahra persisted into the early 1980s (Ibid: 227) and continue to this day. It was in this bloody context that Farhud’s²⁶⁶ students (who then earned doctorates in anthropology and human genetics) carried blood samples to Britain. They identified research subjects based on their ‘ethnicity’ and religion (Ibid). The results of these ‘scientific’ works led to the production of specific maps of ‘Iran’. The “Ethno Composition” map’s apparent celebration of ethnic difference was contingent on literally containing these groups within the Iranian nation-state, rather than incorporating Iran’s peoples into the broader landscape (Ibid: 227-29).

²⁶⁶ Dariush Daneshvar Farhud; a self-proclaimed ‘father of Iranian genetics’ (Burton, 2021: 1-2).



Figure 19. Anthropological map of Iran prepared by Sahab Geographic & Drafting Institute, included in the thesis of Amirshahi. Adapted from Burton (2021: 228).

The ethnicity question primarily emerged in the 20th century. One of the signs of this emergence was the initiation of mapping various tribes and nomads²⁶⁷ (Figures 20 and 21). Cartographic representations, as a key element of the production of space, have played an essential role in this process of ethnicization. Much like the maps related to frontiers and boundaries, infrastructures, and administrative divisions (see Chapter Four), the earliest ethnic maps were predominantly of British origin. These maps undertook the task of identifying tribes and ethnic groups residing in the territories of the Protected Domains, and later provided a basis for the central state to categorize

²⁶⁷ For instance, see:

Sketch Map of Southern Persia (Showing the main Trade Routes and the relative Positions of the Nomad Tribes) (1900), *Important Clans (Tirehs) of Qashgai Tribes* (1922), *The Khamseh Tribes* (1923), available via the Qatar Digital Library.

And *Tribes of Iran* (1945), and *Languages* (1949) (Compiled by J.I.B. and drawn/photographed by O.S.).

The original maps are housed at the British Library, London, UK, and were photographed by the author in May 2022.

the ethnic 'Iranian' populations. The identification and categorization of people/residents was a fundamental step towards recognizing and establishing a national territory.

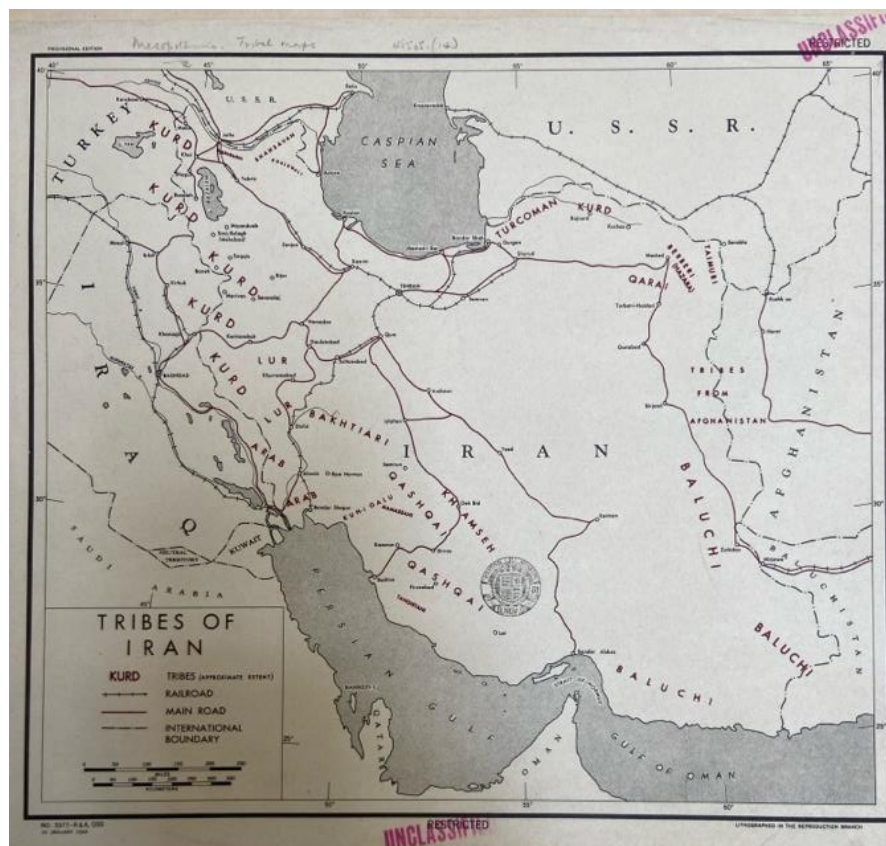


Figure 20. *Tribes of Iran* (1945). Compiled by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Map No. 5977-R&A. The British Library, London, UK. Photograph by the author, May 2022.

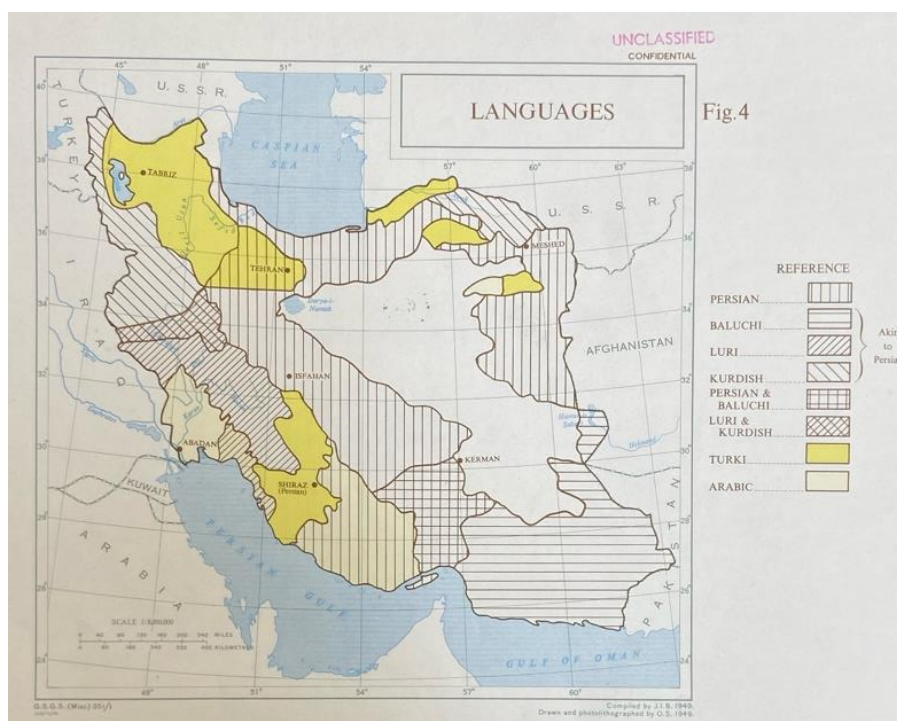


Figure 21. *Languages* (Geographical Section, General Staff, 1949, G.S.G.S. Misc. 351). Drawn and reproduced by O.S., compiled by J.I. Photograph by the author at the British Library, London, May 2022.

In its efforts to extend control over regions that were both physically and conceptually beyond its immediate grasp, the central state needed to identify the locations and, crucially, the migration routes of nomadic populations. This effort aimed to classify these populations as integral parts of a unified Iranian nation, with Farsi as the official language. Producing maps that represented these tribal/nomadic movements was one of the prerequisites for producing a national territory. These maps aim to represent the central state's omnipresence over the diverse and dispersed geographies of Iran's protected domains, implying total control. These cartographic representations and classifications reveal the existing threats to the central state's physical expansion into tribal areas. It should be noted that it was in the latter half of the 20th century, in line with the quantitative revolution in geography, that detailed maps of 'Iranian' tribes and nomads began to be produced.

Mapping was not limited to the British. The map of the tribes in Baluchestan²⁶⁸ (Figure 22), with an unknown date and author, but with the name of Engineer Zolfagari visible in the lower left corner of the map, distinctly marks the territories of each tribe with different colors. The map guide specifies border lines and includes details such as villages, centers, gravel roads, dirt roads, military and armed customs guard stations, gendarmerie posts, airports, schools, etc. Based on this information, this map likely dates to the late Qajar or early Pahlavi era. It mentions tribes on both sides of the border line, showing both national and pre-national divisions simultaneously. This juxtaposition highlights the contrast between two types of spacetime.

²⁶⁸ Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R.IRAN

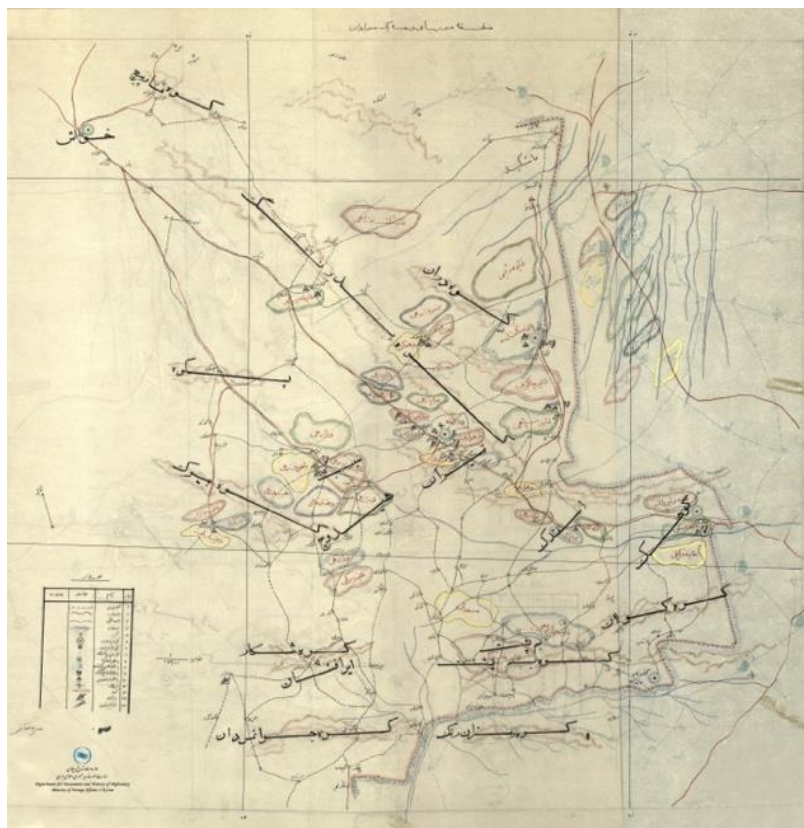


Figure 22. Tribes of Baluchestan. From Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN.

Decades later, the Detailed General Map of Iran, 1956 by Abbas Sahab²⁶⁹ is also specifically notable for presenting the provinces by numbers. What distinguishes this map is that it incorporates several maps on a single page. Most importantly, it includes two maps of historical sites and a classification of tribes and nomads. For instance, it mentions Turkic-speaking tribes, Arab (Semitic) tribes, Baluch tribes, and many others. All these tribes are precisely located on the map for the first time. This is the most detailed map of Iran produced up to that date.

7.2. The Farsization of Time: Production of a Farsist Temporal Regime

Farsist historiography was not confined to the educational textbooks. It was inscribed into the temporal matrix of the emerging nation state through different but interconnected mechanisms. Historiographic practices of the state have culminated in a Farsist time/temporality which has been

²⁶⁹ Shirazian, Reza. (2019).

implemented through the process of Farsization of time and history. The temporal aspect of the colonial production of Iran is evident in the systematic erasure of regional histories which are forcefully replaced or subsumed within a national history. An invented Farsist history was ‘normatively’ imposed on a non-Fars and non-Shi’i culture/environment as part of the process of internal colonization. Independent regions were forcefully pulled into the ‘spatial and temporal matrices’ of the newly formed nation state. As a result, a monotonous linear temporality was imposed on a different spacetime.

Time and history were Farsicized simultaneously. It was only around 1921 that some Iranian offices started to operate in a new way, gradually adopting the astronomical calendar, i.e., the solar year and month as ‘scientifically’ calculated by ‘Iranian’ astronomers, which until then were mostly used in astronomical almanacs and for horoscopes (Taqizadeh, 1937: 2). Prior to this, time calculation was based on Chinese and Turkish methods. This system was common among the Central Asian Turks and is described in Mahmud Kashgari’s *Divan Lughat al-Turk*, compiled in 466 AH (Ibid: 3). *Kaveh*²⁷⁰ published a detailed article on the history of Nowruz on April 10, 1921. This text proposed a change in the calendar system, suggesting that the Solar Hijri calendar should replace the Lunar Hijri calendar. Kaveh’s suggestions were implemented four years later, in 1925 under Reza Shah’s rule. Prior to these changes, government offices used Turkish names for years and Arabic names for astrological signs. Therefore, on April 1, 1925, a law was enacted to replace astrological signs with Persian months. This law abolished the previously used Uighur calendar system²⁷¹ (Razi, 1968: 713-714). This was an initial step towards the Farsization of time.

²⁷⁰ The Persian-speaking exile periodical *Kaveh* was founded in 1916 by the Intelligence Agency for the Orient of the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin. The title refers to an Iranian mythical hero: Kaveh the Blacksmith from Isfahan. The magazine was published by Kaviani Press twice a month between 1916 and 1922 by Hassan Taqizadeh.

²⁷¹ The animal-based calendar, or the twelve-animal cycle, which became popular during the Mongol era, was in use until the early 20th century.

The Farsization of the calendar and the obsolescence of previous calendars signify a shift in the temporal regime. With the establishment of the Pahlavi state, parallel to the renaming of places (cities), the renaming of times (months) was pursued by the central state (Asgharzadeh, 2007)²⁷². The switch from a lunar to a solar calendar, alongside purging Turkish elements from month names, effectively diminished Arabic impacts on the conception 'year'. Even the term زمان (zamān) for time in Persian is relatively recent. There was no word in Persian for the concept of time. In old texts, as Taqizadeh says, the word تاریخ (tārīkh) was used, but since this term in Persian literature had five different meanings, there was a need to avoid confusion (Taqizadeh, 1937: 1). Taqizadeh also presents intriguing insights regarding Nowruz, noting that towards the end of the Qajar era, Nowruz did not hold much significance in the daily lives of people. He says the 'Iranian' tribes of Southwestern Iran likely began their year with the onset of autumn (Ibid: 58). This indicates that different temporal regimes prevailed simultaneously in various regions, and there was not a uniform timekeeping system in place.

The Iranian identity today is closely intertwined with Nowruz, to the extent that Iran without Nowruz (commonly called Persian New Year), i.e., without a specific concept of time and year, is unimaginable. The formalization of Nowruz and, in connection with it, the use of a calendar with Persian names played a key role in the Farsization of time and in creating Iran as a Farsi temporal regime. According to Taqizadeh, the names of the 'Iranian' months during the Sasanian and even Parthian eras were the same as the current names, albeit pronounced in Pahlavi (Taqizadeh, 1937). This reference to a distant past was also a basis for the Farsization of the present, signifying a return to the 'glorious' Sasanian era. This highlights how central states could manipulate and

²⁷² Asgharzadeh has discussed this spatial politics under 'Persianization of the land'. (Asgharzadeh, 2007: 121)

produce time according to their interests, deciding when and how leap years should be calculated and implemented to achieve a desired temporal regime.

Taqizadeh's emphasis on an 'Iranian' understanding of time reflects his and other nationalists' inclination towards Aryan superiority. He states that what is today recorded in calendars as the ancient Persian year or the old year of the Parsis is the calendar that was in use in 'Iran' before Islam, at least during the Sasanian era. This calendar, related to the Zoroastrian religion and prevalent among communities practicing this faith, is often referred to as the Mazdisnian calendar. However, Taqizadeh suggests that a more appropriate term would be the New Avestan Calendar²⁷³ (Ibid: 40).

Taqizadeh also discusses the temporality of the ancient Iran. He says ancient Iranian year was divided into two parts: a ten-month winter and a two-month summer (Ibid: 44). This suggests that the Avestan perception of time/history or Zoroastrian temporal regime was fundamental to the concept of Iran. The dualistic philosophy of Zoroastrian-Manichaeism has served as the foundation to produce Farsi as a language and a body of knowledge. Iran was defined by this Zoroastrian/Avestan temporal regime. Taqizadeh equates being Iranian with being Avestan (Ibid: 122). In this narrative, Iran is where winter lasted ten months, aligning with the concept of *Airyanem Vaejah*²⁷⁴. Iran in this sense is a much smaller region, located in a specific latitude with a nearly uniform climate, which does not correspond with the diverse climatic geographies of Iran. This further indicates that *Airyanem Vaejah* in the *Avesta* is not the same as Iran. According to

²⁷³ Consisting of a year with 365 days divided into twelve 30-day months and an additional five days.

²⁷⁴ *Airyanem Vaejah* is considered in Zoroastrianism to be the homeland of the early Iranians and the place where Zarathustra received the religion from Ahura Mazda. *The Avesta* names it as the first of the 'sixteen perfect lands' that Ahura Mazda created for the Iranians.

Taqizadeh, Khwarezm was one of the centers of the Iranian race and, likely, the Avestan *Airyanem Vaejah* (Ibid: 142).

Taqizadeh's view echoes what I have dubbed the Iran's paradox. He says in ancient history (before the reign of Iran), there were two or three advanced civilization centers in the west of Iran and two in the east (Ibid: 41). On the one hand, he acknowledges ancient history 'before the reign of Iran', and on the other, he states that civilization centers existed in the western and eastern parts of Iran. In other words, from Taqizadeh's ahistorical perspective, Iran existed even before it was formed. He says the 'main Iranian tribe', or perhaps 'the ancient Aryan race' before migrating to India and Iran, resided in the north²⁷⁵ (Ibid: 99-100). So, for him, 'Iranian' and 'Iran' seem to exist independently in an exterior manner. This further shows Taqizadeh's ahistorical view.

Beyond the Farsization of the calendar, there were other state policies and practices aimed at Farsization of time and history. For instance, the publication of yearbooks aimed to organize government and societal activities through the systematization of the calculation of months and days of the year. One of these yearbooks was the "Salnameh-ye Pars," which apparently was published²⁷⁶ from 1926 to 1942 during the reign of Reza Shah, and it seems its publication continued into the era of Mohammad Reza Shah²⁷⁷. Interestingly, the name of the yearbook itself, 'Pars' (an Iranianized and de-Arabized form of Fars), reflects a tendency towards Farsicizing time. Content-wise, these volumes contain fascinating information. Most of these yearbooks begin with discussions of new archaeological discoveries complemented by the history of Persian literature. They also include extensive details about state decisions, budgets, roads, telegraphs, customs, etc. The 1928 edition features a map of Iran. In the 1937 edition there is a focus on the 'dismal' *past*

²⁷⁵ Possibly in the northern steppes and eastern Russia, north of the Caspian Sea, or in Khwarezm according to some theories about Iranians.

²⁷⁶ Mohammad Ali Amirjahed was the publisher of this yearbook.

²⁷⁷ Though my access is limited to the copies from Reza Shah's time

of the Turkmen nomadic tribes, with the aim of demonstrating their improved living conditions under a strong centralized sedentary state. It is said that about 20,000 nomadic and wandering tribespeople were ‘settled with meticulous care by the state’ (197-198)²⁷⁸. This indicates the state’s legitimacy was partly based on the forced sedentarization of nomadic tribes²⁷⁹.

In the same volume, there is a technical map related to the construction of a railway and subsequent pages feature photos of the Veresk Bridge²⁸⁰ and other images related to the expansion of the railway network, illustrating the infrastructural foundation of nationalism. Another notable characteristic of this yearbook is its emphasis on the recurrent theme of Iranian/Farsist nationalism: Aryan superiority. For instance, the astrolabe is mentioned as one of the most important ‘Iranian’ inventions and a symbol of the ‘Aryan’ race’s complete mastery of mathematical sciences. In an advertisement for the ‘Kai Khosrowi’ (145) brand hand sewing machine, the device is intriguingly placed atop a globe. Beyond the implicit reference to the Aryan supremacy, this imagery represents a shift in geographical perception through the geometric depiction of the Earth, a novel approach at the time. These various elements in the yearbook demonstrate how the state simultaneously used different technologies, infrastructures, practices, and narratives to forge a national identity, rooted in a glorified Aryan past.

In the 1939 edition of the *Salnameh-ye Pars*, we encounter a comparison of Tehran’s true noon time with major cities in foreign countries and major cities within Iran. As discussed in the previous section, comparing Tehran with other cities represents a new level of (spatio)temporal awareness and indicates the state’s intervention in creating its own (national) temporal regime. The state now defines itself through its control over time, demonstrating its reach by defining

²⁷⁸ This should also be seen as a significant step towards the production of the ‘province’ as an administrative division.

²⁷⁹ For a historical account of forced sedentarization and tribal politics during Reza Shah’s era, see Cronin (2007).

²⁸⁰ During World War II, it was known as the *Pol-e Piroozi* (The bridge of victory).

national time itself. For example, the exact moment of the New Year's arrival in Tehran and other provinces is mentioned (8). This control and mastery over time was made possible through technologies. Accordingly, the latitude and longitude of cities and provinces are meticulously listed, marking a new phase in the production of abstract spacetime (15-16).

The state's exclusive control over time is evident in this statement: "it is not up for debate that the official calendar of the country is only the Solar Hijri calendar, approved by the National Consultative Assembly in 1925 and published by the assembly's administration". These state practices were foundational in the production and imposition of a new temporal regime. As clearly stated in the *Salnameh-ye Pars*, which represents Reza Shah's administration official stance, the official calendar is 'the one approved by the Ministry of Culture', which is the Solar Hijri calendar. This indicates how the state sought to standardize and control the perception and measurement of time as part of its broader nation-building.

There is yet another aspect to the production of linear temporality of national history. Cartographic technologies have been crucial in this regard. It is only from the 1960s onwards that we witness the expansion and consolidation of cartography in a scientific manner. In this process, the Sahab Geographic & Drafting Institute²⁸¹ has played a significant role. By producing various maps, this institute, as part of the Iranian 'integral state', has been one of the primary agents of representing Iran as a 'unified' national space with defined boundaries, and a linear history, in Persian. Among the most important maps of this institute is the General and Detailed Map of the Country of Iran, which is clearly drawn in line with the Farsization and the assimilation of non-

²⁸¹ The Sahab Geographic and Drafting Institute was founded in Tehran in 1935, the first private geographic and mapmaking enterprise in the Middle East. Founded by Abolghasem Sahab, the firm was later run by his son Abbas Sahab.

Persians under the abstract representation of Iranian territory and linear narrative of Iranian history. General Map of Iran with Complete Details (1960)²⁸² has also Ethnicized Iran.

In parallel with Farsization efforts, the Sahab Institute simultaneously sought to Iranianize ancient dynasties such as the Achaemenids, for example, by publishing a map titled: Iran in the Time of the Achaemenids. This approach was not new and has historical precedents. A similar strategy was employed in *The History of Iran from the Beginning to Islam* (1959), a textbook written by Parviz Natel-Khanlari for the fifth-grade students. There is a map titled Achaemenid Iran Empire at the beginning of the book (Figure 23). In the lower central section of this map, Arabestan is depicted, although during the Achaemenid era, there was no such entity as Arabestan. the title of this map is intriguing because another map (Figure 24) displays the Parthian Empire, but unlike the Achaemenid *Iran*, there is no mention of Parthian *Iran* here, just Parthian Empire. The underlying reason is that the state's intellectuals refrain from defining the Parthian as characteristic of 'Iranian' identity.

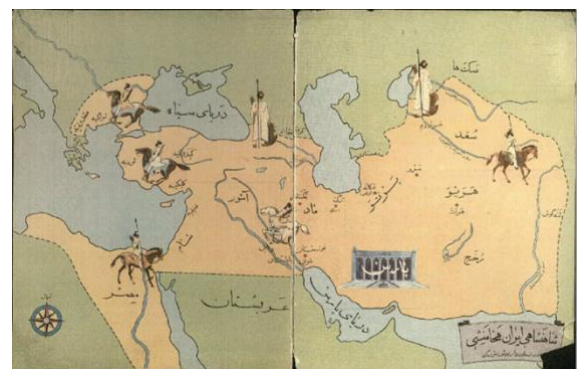


Figure 23 (Right). The Achaemenid Empire from *The History of Iran from the Beginning to Islam* (1959).

Figure 24 (Left). The Parthian Empire from *The History of Iran from the Beginning to Islam* (1959).

²⁸² <https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/59161/general-map-of-iran-with-complete-details-sahab-geographic-drafting-institute> and <https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/62434jc/general-map-of-iran-with-complete-details-sahab-geographic-drafting-institute>

This book concludes with a map titled Sasanian Empire of Iran. Interestingly, here, just like in the Achaemenid map, and in contrast to the Parthian, the term Iran is mentioned in the title. These maps imply that the Parthians, unlike the Achaemenids and the Sasanians, are considered Iranian only reluctantly, or not at all. So far, it is evident that it is only in the year 1959 that some earliest images of ancient maps of 'Iran' have been included in history and geography textbooks. This strategy led to the projection of the name Iran back thousands of years, suggesting that Iran existed at least since the Achaemenid era, even though the name Iran have been used then.

The homogenizing and flattening use of the word 'Persian' for the Farsi language by orientalists is based solely on a fictitious idea of a historical continuity, which denotes the people of 'Iran' and Farsi language have existed since ancient times. Accordingly, the 'Iranian' history is represented as if we are faced with a linear continuity from the Achaemenid era (550 BC) to the present day in which *three* periods can be recognized: the Achaemenid era, associated with Old Persian, the Sassanid era, representing the domination of Middle Persian, and finally, Modern or New Persian (Vaziri, 2013: 235). The invention of 'Iranian' language family (Ancient/Old, Middle, and New Persian) for me marks the first systematic attempt at Farsist classification/periodization (or Farsization) of history. What strategy would better serve to naturalize the continuity of Iran/Persia by producing a linear history according to its 'permanent' and indissoluble language? This linear periodization has been fundamental in the production of Iran.

Time, like space, is not external to the state. Time is not an independent element that the state merely standardizes or organizes; rather, the nationalization of time or the creation of a national temporal regime is a constitutive aspect of a national state itself. National time, like national measurement standards, did not pre-exist the national state (Poulantzas, 1980). By the late

19th century, national time and scale had not yet been developed. The state produces a specific temporality to repress other existing temporal regimes and prevent the emergence of alternative temporalities. Standardization, control, and production of time by the central state served as a key mechanism in creating an abstract entity known as Iranian nation state. Being Iranian cannot be understood as separate from the time and temporal regime of the central state. Without this distinction, we cannot historicize the very concept of Iran.

7.3. The Farsization as Production of Space

Farsist historiography and cartography were not confined to the textbooks and written materials. They were inscribed into the spatial matrix of the emerging nation state. The inscription of Farsi in space has been implemented through the process of Farsization of space and geography. In this section I focus on the Farsization of space (including the Farsization of places names) as an integral part of the ‘normative²⁸³’ production of Iran. I see this process as the key mechanism of internal colonization which is characterized by the elimination of (largely non-Persian), nomadic and non-state spatiotemporalities. Intellectuals have played a foundational role in the naturalization of Farsi as the national language of Iran. A prominent example is Gholamali Vahid Mazandarani who states: “in our esteemed country and in our mother tongue, scientific and technical books that meet the needs of modern life and civilization are very scarce” (Mazandarani, 1937: 3). Writing in Farsi and influenced by Friedrich List’s nationalist theory of political economy, Mazandarani perceives Farsi as the mother tongue of all Iranians, denying the existence of non-Persian Iranians. Farsization of space and time initially began through such texts and the translations, which was

²⁸³ Employing a Gramscian-Lefebvrian perspective, I argue that Farsism as a colonial body of knowledge and language is the ‘normative *monorhythmic* grammar’ of Iran. Accordingly, I suggest understanding the production of Iran as a *normative* process. The whole process of the Farsization of spacetime is a class process of hegemony-building. As an integral part of this process, ‘specialized knowledge’ should be engraved on ordinary peoples’ everyday lives. Normative grammar “does not come from some natural or logical process *outside* society and its tensions. Instead, normative grammars are produced through the organization, codification, and legitimization of specific spontaneous grammars” (Ives, 2004: 96).

complemented by other technologies such as cartography (Chapter Four) and calendar (Chapter Two).

Upon reviewing manuscripts produced in late Qajar era in the previous chapter, it becomes apparent that the Farsization of toponyms had not taken place before the Pahlavi monarchy was established. It was only by that time that the state systematically produced and imposed one (national) modality of space(time) on all other existing and possible ones. And this is despite the fact that the mentality of Qajar intellectuals like the author of *Tahghighat-e Sarhadieh* was Farsist²⁸⁴. However, at that time, Farsization had not yet emerged as a key mechanism in the production of Iran. Despite its tendency, the central power was not able to exercise its authority over the vast, dispersed, and island-like geographies of *Mamâlek-e Mahruse*.

The Farsization of space has been an alienating process. The dissociation of peoples from their (non-Persian) cultures and languages has had an alienating, intergenerational impact in these regions. The alienation of the underprivileged has taken various forms. One can be observed during the implementation of the land reforms. The process of implementing land reforms involved traveling to villages unfamiliar with the program, gathering as many farmers as possible, reading out the five clauses of the reform (often without the use of a translator in non-Persian villages), and insisting on decisions to be made immediately. The final decision was always made by the landowner, and farmers were pressured to sign documents they couldn't even read (Hooglund, 1982: 126). This process shows a clear disregard for the non-Persians. In cases where someone attempted to translate the clauses of the law, the translator was imprisoned or exiled (Ibid: 128).

Throughout the pages of *Tahghighat-e Sarhadieh*, it is evident that many places still retain their Arabic names, and the state representative made no effort to Farsicize them. Another

²⁸⁴ For instance, the author implicitly states that the Turkish language is not the language of the people of Iran (Moshir al-dowla, 1969: 158), even though Turks constitute a significant segment of the Iranian populace.

significant issue is the lack of development of the legal concept of territory at that time. References to mechanisms of land transfer and ownership indicate that in the absence of a national space and defined borders it was entirely common for land to be transferred from a person residing in, for example, Marivan, to someone in one of the Ottoman provinces. This shows that there was no exclusive sovereignty. The subject under discussion was predominantly the land and its ownership as an economic relation with agricultural and pastoral productivity, not as a legal-political relation.

Farsization of space has been carried out through a variety of textual and institutional practices. The publication of *Rasaleh-ye Tahghighāt-e Sarhadieh*²⁸⁵ in 1969, which includes extensive references and footnotes to geographical elements of the state, particularly the administrative divisions as detailed in the ten-volume *Geographical Encyclopedia of Iran* (Razmara, 1949-1953), represents a fundamental mechanism in the production of national space. As evident in the title of the treatise, focus was on frontiers (*sarhadat*), not political borders. Interestingly, in the revised version of *Rasaleh-ye Tahghighāt-e Sarhadieh* published during the Pahlavi era, extensive footnotes were added to the original text. These added footnotes, which comprise a quarter of the book's length, illustrate how the state could establish itself as a national entity by relying on a Farsist representation of geography. These footnotes are derived from entries in a significant dictionary, *Geographical Encyclopedia of Iran*, published in ten volumes.

The purpose of these additions in was to rename/Farsicize²⁸⁶ geographical names and thereby the space itself by the state. For example, it is noted that Mohammerah is now called Khorramshahr, or Jazireh-ye Khazar is now referred to as Abadan Island, an island in the sixth province (Khuzestan) (Moshir al-dowla, 1969: 39). Another footnote states that Chaab (an Arabic

²⁸⁵ This book was originally published in 1856.

²⁸⁶ This practice of renaming underscores another dimension of the politics of translation (See Section 2). Farsization and the politics of translation are deeply interconnected.

name) refers to the Arab Bani Ka'b tribe residing in various parts of Falahiyeh, as well as along the shores of Shatt al-Arab and around Mohammerah and Karun (Ibid: 49-50). A footnote (Ibid: 83) mentions that the former name of Mahabad was Savojbolagh (a Turkic name).

Farsization was not confined to elite circles; it was systematically designed to permeate the everyday lives of ordinary people. Textbooks played a crucial role in this effort. In the textbook *New Geography* (1937) by Mohammad Mohit Tabatabai, both old and new names of geographical locations within the political divisions of Iran are mentioned side by side. It is mentioned that the previous name for Arasbaran in Azerbaijan was Qarah Dagħ (p. 89), or the previous name for Mahabad is identified as Savojbolagh Makri (p. 90). The author, without addressing the violent realities behind these name changes, such as military attacks and forced displacements, naturalizes the process of Farsization of non-Persian spaces. At the end of the book, a two-column table presents both old and new names of certain cities together. It is stated that these names have recently changed, aiming 'to make it easier for readers to memorize them'. It thus presumes that 'the readers' are all Persians. This table however clearly indicates that the primary purpose of the geographical name changes was Farsization (de-*Qajarization*, and *Pahlavization*) of the space.

During the Pahlavi era, a significant number of non-Persian geographical names (cities, lakes, etc.) were mandatorily changed to Farsi's names. The state publications like the *Pars Yearbook* [Salname-ye Pars] also played a key role in disseminating these names and thereby enforcing their assimilation into common usage. In the 1938 edition of the *Pars Yearbook*, a lexicon is included. It explains the new Persian words and their equivalents in languages like French. It is noted that Abadan (آبادان) refers to a city and island at the mouth of the Karun River, known for its oil refineries, and was previously spelled Abb'dan (عبادان) as is used in Arabic (129). Arasbaran is described as a region in northern Azerbaijan, through which branches of the Aras

River flow (135). It states that the ancient name Arasbaran had been forgotten over time, being replaced by Qarajeh Dag, and the Academy of Persian Language and Literature decided to reinstate its original name, Arasbaran. Moreover, Khorramshahr is identified as a new name given to the city formerly known as Mohammerah which is an Arabic name (171). Dasht-e Mishan is noted as the ancient name of a location in Khuzestan, inhabited by the Bani-Taraf tribes, which the Academy chose to replace the name Bani-Taraf' (175)²⁸⁷. Zarrineh River is described as a river originating from the mountains of Kurdistan, flowing into Lake Urmia and was previously known as Jeghtuchay, a Turkish name (180). In the 1939 edition of the *Pars Yearbook* 'Huweizeh' [هویزه] is mentioned as the Persian name for Huweizeh (حویزه)²⁸⁸, a place in Khuzestan near the Karkheh River (194).

Farsization was not limited to merely renaming cities. They highlight several simultaneous standardization policies: Farsization of scientific terminologies, renaming of railway stations, changing personal names and the establishment of family names, altering the name of the country's currency unit, modifying shop signs, renaming streets, squares, alleys, and urban pathways, changing the names of tribes and nomadic regions, and the renaming of months and years (Jalalpour, 2012: 48-50). Persian names for newborns and families are also proposed, along with their meanings, as part of the broader effort to Farsicize the cultural landscape, extending even to the naming of individuals (*Pars Yearbook*, 1939: 182-186). Even Farsi names were introduced for

²⁸⁷ Here, I am referring to the part two of the yearbook, where the page numbering restarts from one.

²⁸⁸ In Farsi, there are two letters for H: ه and ح. The former is absent in Arabic alphabet. Thus, replacing ح with ه is an act of Farsization. The same applies to Ahwaz which is written differently in Arabic and Persian as اهواز and احواز respectively. Today, within Persian-speaking political community, the use of Arabic names, for instance, writing city names with 'ح' instead of 'ه', is perceived by nationalists and proponents of territorial integrity as a symbol of separatism. Similarly, writing 'Turk' as 'تورک' instead of 'ترک' and 'Kurd' as 'کورْد' instead of 'کُرد' is also accused of signifying separatism. Consequently, in this context, the letters of 'ح' ('hā') and 'و' ('Waw') are colloquially known as 'Waw-e Tajziyeh' (Separatist 'Vav') and 'hā-ye Tajziyeh' (Separatist 'hā') in Persian.

the administrative divisions: *Ostan* (province) is used for each of the ten administrative divisions of the country, and *Bakhsh* is defined as a part of a *Shahrestan* (county).

State institutions were also established to systematically implement Farsization. The Academy of Persian Language and Literature (*Farhangestan-e Iran*) played a pivotal role in Farsization of space. The Academy had several commissions, including the Language Commission, which itself was divided into four sections: Administrative Terminology, Judicial Terminology, Scientific Terminology, and Geographical Terminology. The principles guiding this commission for approving new names includes:

1. Revival of old names or Persian names was given priority.
2. Names combined with words like *cha* (tea), *soo* (water), *dagh* (mountain), *bolagh* (meadow) in non-Persian languages should be translated into Persian.
3. Tribal and nomadic force names in Turkish or Arabic should be translated into Persian.
4. Family names to be converted into [already Farsicized] place names.

Iranian intellectuals believed that reliance on the authenticity of the Persian language and rich national culture could prevent the onslaught of foreign terms (Ganji, 1988: 366). This stance by state institutions represents a form of Farsist fetishism that in practice, laid the groundwork for internal colonization and systematic racism by Farsists²⁸⁹ against non-Persians.

The imposition of the Persian language on non-Persian peoples occurred through the central system of state education. Following the first generations of intellectuals of the national state, in the late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods – who wrote and published historical, geographical, legal, and literary books in Persian that represented Iranians as a unified nation – the national state

²⁸⁹ In my dissertation, references are made to both Farsi and Farsism, highlighting the necessity for a clear distinction between Farses and Farsists. On this occasion, the term ‘Farsists’ is preferred over ‘Farses’ to account for those non-Farses (who have been assimilated to the dominant Fars culture), thus meriting characterization as Farsist. Farsism is a social structure.

gradually extended its physical presence into non-Persian spaces. This extension of the central state made the central education possible. The centrally imposed, alienating education in schools conducted in Persian, beginning during the era of Reza Shah (1925–1941), was crucial to the colonization of (largely) non-Persian spaces and the production of Iran. This was facilitated by the expansion of infrastructure projects such as railways and road construction.

However, the process of Farsization extended beyond textual practices. In tandem with the educational interventions, the physical suppression and the violent displacement of non-Persian peoples by the central state's military force were systematically in place. This physical presence was made possible only through the suppression of local autonomies. Consequently, infrastructure projects provided the necessary groundwork for the military suppression of independent political powers in the protected domains. Over time, with the expansion of communication infrastructures, the possibility of state-centric education in Persian became feasible across the scattered geographies of the protected domains. Just as an example, in 1929, following its occupation by the forces of Reza Khan Pahlavi, Fahraj or Pahreh was changed to its current name, Iranshahr, representing one of the most significant symbols of Farsization of space (Jalalpour, 2012).

To explain the interconnection of the physical and cultural repression, I find Gramsci's concept of subalternity particularly useful: "subalternity and domination are not only *physical* domination ... They are constituted by the inability to develop a coherent *worldview* ... that relates to your own life ... it is a key factor that prevents subaltern groups from being able to effectively resist *physical* domination" (Ives, 2004: 79).²⁹⁰ This dialectical interrelation of social reality's physical and cultural aspects is reflective of a standpoint of totality, which also underpins

²⁹⁰ Ives continues that because these groups often do not have effective *intellectuals* of their own, they are subordinated and *passively* adopt conceptions which are not their own. Thus, they "do not *actively* participate in creating or critically assessing the philosophies that guide their lives. They just accept them but suffer the consequences of continual incoherence and contradiction between their actions and their thoughts" (Ives, 2004: 79-80).

Lefebvre's theory on the production of space. Cultural, and physical removal of differences are inherently linked. I see these eliminative processes as the central features of Iranian national state. The state oppressions and eliminations of the non-Persian languages and spatiotemporal regimes form an essential aspect of the repressing, displacing, and purging non-Persian bodies, or more generally, internal colonization.

The internally/nationally colonial production of Iran has been underway since at least the late Qajar era. As demonstrated, this colonial process has been intertwined with Farsist racism. For instance, the Qajar view of Baluchestan is revealing. In a *Jahannamay-e Mozaffari* the author describes the Baluchi people as “savage and barbaric” (Figure 25). All these territories are inhabited chiefly by non-Persian-speaking populations. The production of Iran as a national state space has been intertwined with the (often violent) imposition of Persian/Farsi as a national language.

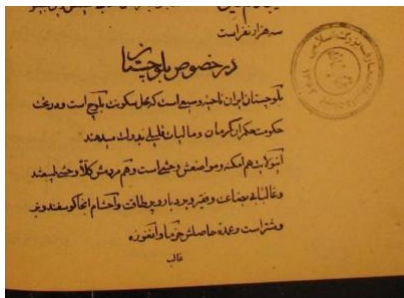


Figure 25. Passage from *Mozaffari Atlas* (1898) characterizing the Baluchi as savage and wild.

Internal colonization is implemented through the forced Farsization of space. As I said, this colonial Farsization has been linked with material practices such as expropriation of non-Persian lands. Land confiscation in non-Persian regions like Turkmen Sahra during the Pahlavi period epitomizes a major colonial process that has effectively contributed to the production of Iran. state. As Mansoor Gorgani has documented, it was shortly after the 1953 Iranian coup d'état that the sisters and brothers of the Shah forcefully captured a large part of the lands and pastures of

Turkmen Sahra²⁹¹. Until 1933 lands and the natural environment of Turkmen Sahra were in the communal possession of the Turkmen people. It was only by the imposition of a capitalist nation-state form during the reign of Reza Shah (1925-41) that the Turkmens and their lands became the object of internal colonization.

Such colonial processes were not limited to Turkmen Sahra. Moreover, the state-led process of internal colonization extended beyond land confiscation. Simultaneously, the Farsization (and Shiization) of space were actively implemented through the legalization of space. The entirety of Turkmen Sahra was *legally* disintegrated by the state to normatively assimilate its Sunni non-Persian people into the surrounding Persian and Shii regions. This forced assimilation was achieved through the Farsization (and Shiization) of space, or what I call the *Farshiization*²⁹².

Internal colonization through Farsization of space has been intensified and worsened under the Islamic Republic. As Mohammadpour and Soleimani show, “The Islamic Republic’s policies are centred around the transformation of Kurdistan’s distinct ethno-religious profile and Perso-Shi’ification of its people and space” (Mohammadpour and Soleimani, 2020: 58). The 2019–20 Iranian protests experienced a mass killing of protesters, in the Mahshahr massacre²⁹³. Mahshahr is an Arab city in Khuzestan province. The name, Mahshahr (ماهشهر), is a Farsi name for the indigenous (Arabic) Mashoor (معشور). The state politics of naming, which has been systematically in place at least since 1925 can be considered one of the most prevalent mechanisms of Farsization of space. On September 30, 2022 the Islamic regime brutally killed more than 90 individuals in

²⁹¹ A similar process occurred around 25 years later when the 1979 revolution was in the initial stages of its consolidation.

²⁹² In some places like Khuzestan, the primary process has been Farsization. In other places like in Kurdistan, Baluchistan, and Turkmen Sahra, where indigenous peoples are not Shi’i muslim, a simultaneous Farsization and Shiization of space has been in place. Farsization, one can argue, is the central process by which Shiization has been internalized.

²⁹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahshahr_massacre

Zahedan, Balouchestan (the Zahedan massacre²⁹⁴). Baluchestan as the most *colonized* region in Iran exists in an entirely different spacetime than urban centers like Tehran. During Jina Amini protests, more than 300 people have been killed during the 50 consecutive days of protests against the Islamic regime. It is, unfortunately, unsurprising that more than one-third of the total number originates from Baluchestan.

Nationally colonial Farsization of space has been conducted through the introduction and expansion of infrastructural projects. These infrastructural projects have been inseparable from the process of urbanization. Trans-Iranian Railway clearly represents the intertwined connection of Farsism, infrastructures, and urbanization. The case of the Arak Division, which extended from Qom Station to Dorud Station in Lorestan via Arak Station “illustrates how the IRO expanded its educational programs and recreational facilities in the postwar period” (Koyagi, 2021: 146). Arak at the time was an emerging industrial city and its population was primarily rural. The Arak Division developed adult Persian literacy courses for employees, training over two hundred workers in early 1948 (Ibid: 147). Unlike the pre-capitalist States, the modern State “does not retain a monopoly of writing: it spreads it (in schools) in response to the highly concrete necessity of training labour-power” (Poulantzas, 1980: 59).

The Arak Division, therefore, exemplifies an early case of statist urbanization and proletarianization. To provide the required workforce for both new industries in Arak city and the railway construction sites, wage labour should have been produced. The majority of people at the time were rural and nomadic populations who were not literate in Persian. Their language was not Persian. So, the production of wage labour necessitated a separation of the people from both land/nature *and* language as the means of production. Urbanization, as a result, entailed the

²⁹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/14/world/middleeast/iran-zahedan-crackdown.html>

Farsization of the labour force. The state implemented education in Farsi (and Farsi education²⁹⁵) as part of the urbanization. The production of Iran has been dependent upon this urbanization which is associated with a particular form of Farsization of space.

Conclusion:

This chapter asked what has been the role of Farsi in the production of Iran? What has been the historical relationship between the Iranian nation-state, its spacetime, and Farsi? I investigated crucial practices through which Farsi was produced as the *national* language, the language of the emerging nation-state. I demonstrated that the Farsist practices of the state over more than a century has resulted in Farsi as a form of ‘specialized knowledge’ and a colonial relation. In this way, I spatiotemporalized Farsi. I also indicated that the production of Iran as a national state spacetime has been historically dependent upon the production of a Farsist spacetime. By analyzing the politics of translation as a Farsist practice of the state I showed how translation systematically contributed to the production of Iran through the Farsist production of knowledge.

I then argued that Farsi was produced as a racial-colonial-class relation. To do so, I studied the space of Farsi social thought and indicated that the space of Farsi is a dualist pre-given space, associated with linear monorhythmic time. I then investigated the historical link between Aryan racism and Farsi. I demonstrated how Farsism, as a form of Persian racism, operates through a dualistic language that imposes linear time and bounded space, effectively negating the subaltern non-Persian geohistories.

²⁹⁵ It is important to distinguish between Farsi education and education in Farsi. The former refers to the naturalization of Farsi as a culture, ideology, and worldview, while the latter pertains solely to the use of the Farsi language as the medium of instruction, in contrast to other languages such as Turkish or Arabic. What is of most importance here is Farsi education.

I also analyzed the underlying assumptions of the *Iranshahr* ideology as the condensation of Farsi's spacetime and the culmination of Farsist Irancentrism. By analyzing territorial concepts in Farsi, I emphasized that a conceptual history of territory in Farsi reveals the historically contingent and contradictory production of Iran as a national state space. By comparing spaces of Iran in specific historical texts – *Shahnameh*, and *Safarnameh* – in the next section I indicated how a selective focus on specific historical texts and ignoring others, as a colonial-class strategy of the production of knowledge, contributed to the Farsization of *Iran* or production of Iran as a unified nation. I further showed that the state intellectuals have produced Farsi as a dualistic urbanist ideology.

Finally, I argued how Farsi has played a crucial role in internal colonization. First, I analyzed how the more recent discourse of ethnicities in Farsi has 'scientifically' neutralized the racist dimension of the production of Farsi. Then, I demonstrated that Farsization of time has been a the key mechanism of the internal colonization. Exploring the calendar reform as a Farsist practice of the state I showed how this mechanism has suppressed non-Persian temporal regimes. The Farsist temporality of Iran is evident in the systematic erasure of non-Persian histories which are forcefully subsumed within a national history. I demonstrated this by focusing on the Farsization of space as an associated mechanism of the internal colonization, showing that Farsization goes beyond the discursive level and is inscribed into the spatial matrix of the state.

My research highlights the fractured and contradictory character of Iranian ruling class hegemony. I conclude that in late Qajar and the whole Pahlavi periods, Farsi was an insufficiently organic and therefore too weakly hegemonic, and too overtly repressive force in the process of national unification of Iran. Even today, after a century of systematic historiographic and cartographic practices by the state, Farsi cannot be considered hegemonic. Majority of non-Persian

‘Iranians’ are suffering from the cultural alienation caused by the colonial imposition of Farsi over the past century. The continued colonization of the national/internal colonies like Baluchestan through land expropriation was not made possible without the forced Farsization of these peripheralized regions.

By examining Farsism I demonstrated how each new state “introduces its own way of partitioning space” (Lefebvre, 1991: 281). I characterize Farsism as a particular form of partitioning space by Iranian state. More specifically, as I illustrated, language, and here, Farsi, is an essential part of the space. Accordingly, I proposed that the expropriation of language should be seen as an integral part of the class struggle. As discussed, the expropriation of the non-Persians’ lands have been historically associated with the simultaneous appropriation of non-Persian languages and cultures. National state space thus should be considered in its totality. Based on the findings of this chapter, I contend that the concept of Farsization of spacetime enables us to rethink expropriation, extending it beyond seizing labour and land. At a more fundamental level, expropriation involves the appropriation of space and time. Thus, I characterize Farsization as a nationally colonial mechanism of the nation state to *expropriate* non-Persian spacetimes. Subaltern classes, in addition to fighting for control over their own labour power must possess the capacity to challenge the ruling class from a culturally equal position. The production of docile bodies operationalized through Farsist practices of the state²⁹⁶ is an essential part of the reproduction of class relations of production. The alienation of lower classes is implemented through the expropriation of their physical *and* intellectual energy. The ruling class can more easily suppress

²⁹⁶ Other mechanisms of repression – that are beyond the scope of this research – have played a crucial role in the creation of docile bodies. Notably, sexual oppression and gender apartheid under the Islamic Republic have been particularly significant.

a docile body than one that is sexually, culturally, and linguistically self-aware – such a body, equipped with self-confidence, has the potential to dismantle the Farsist ideological constructs.

In the next chapter, I will examine the cartographic practices of the state and their role in the production of Iran to illuminate a crucial yet underexplored mechanism through which Farsi has been inscribed in spacetime. To achieve this, I will also explore the broader context of the cartographic practices of the state, including urbanization and land reform, and their interrelationship with cartographic practices.

Chapter Four

Iran's Space: Cartographic Production of Iran as a National Territory

Introduction:

How has Iran been produced through the cartographic practices of the state? What is the relationship between the cartographic production of Iran and the infrastructural projects, land reforms, and urbanization? To answer these questions, I systematically examine a wide range of historical maps from the pre-Qajar period up until the Islamic Republic (1979-). Drawing on Lefebvre's notion of the production of space, I view knowledge production as essentially intertwined with and dependent upon representation of space(time). Mapping and cartography are therefore essential mechanisms of the production of space. Cartographic practices of the state exemplify how hegemony is a spatial process (Kipfer, 2008). As a result of the state production of space the social practice becomes "a space that *classifies* in the service of a class" (Lefebvre, 1991: 375). By keeping various classes *territorially* separated, this strategy prohibits all contacts and replaces them by the sign/image of contact (Lefebvre, 1991). This image plays a crucial role in the production of Iran. The image of a unified nation is cartographically produced as a form of 'specialized knowledge' to legitimize this very spatial strategy of the state.

Building on the analysis from the previous chapter, I explore how the national state space produces a fictitious Farsist unity under the image/*map* of Iran. All contacts are restrained with reference to an abstract national unity (commonly understood as 'territorial integrity') which is cartographically produced as an 'objective' reality. This map/image has made the internal

colonization of non-Persian regions of Iran possible. I show that Farsi as a colonial language-knowledge and its associated Irancentric ontology that was initially manifested in textual formats gradually gained a ‘objective’ appearance through cartography during the Pahlavi period. I explore the trajectory of cartographic representations of Iran in different historical sources²⁹⁷. I will examine whether Iran has been represented as a unified entity in the maps and if so, since when and in what manner.

More specifically, I aim to explore the absence/presence of Iran as a national territory in late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods. To achieve this, I investigate the key cartographic practices of the state through border formation, infrastructural projects, expropriation of land (nature), and urbanization. I analyze these elements as essential mechanisms in the production of a national spatiotemporal regime. More specifically, I argue that cartographic practices and maps are not merely representations but are embedded within the material practices of production. Focusing on the cartographic practices of the state since late 19th century, I examine the role these practices have played in the materialization of Iranian nationalism within the context of imperialism. It seems that this cartographic lens enables us to rethink critical theories of nationalism and address their neglect of space and spatial practices. The production of space, and more specifically, the production of nature, offers an alternative to the dualistic foundation of the current class relationship of forces. Through this lens, I put emphasis on the material foundation of internal colonization and its central role in the production of Iran.

By comparing maps produced in various decades, one can study the evolutionary trajectory and intricacies of the cartographic practices of the state, as well as the increasing abstraction of

²⁹⁷ Two broad categories of historical maps are recognizable: those embedded within textual documents and those that exist independently. Maps were designed for distinct audiences: the elite and the general populace. Additionally, I conduct a thorough investigation of independently produced historical maps, spanning from the earliest instances to those from the late Pahlavi period.

space and its role in the production of Iran. Therefore, by comparing maps produced in the late Qajar era with those produced in the first three decades of the Pahlavi regime, followed by the subsequent decades until the Islamic Revolution, at least three periods of cartographic abstraction can be identified.

Through an examination of cartographic representations of infrastructural developments, land reforms, and urbanization, the study aims to dissect the material production of Iran. I examine the infrastructural production of Iran by focusing on the colonial formation of *communication infrastructures* and their role in interweaving the island-like geographies of ‘Iran’ to create a national territory in and through the cartographic representations of space. In many historical maps predating the first Pahlavi era, there is no evidence of administrative divisions. I analyze historical maps to examine the regional markets and their implications for the absence of a unified national market. The way the scattered geographies of the guarded domains are connected to their neighboring geographies, rather than Tehran, suggests that the political organization of space in pre-Pahlavi periods was non-national and heterogeneous.

Then, drawing on the notion of the production of nature, the *urbanization* of Iran and the associated process of the extractive production of Iranian nature will be explored as they are unfolded in cartographic representations. Urbanization is crucial because, “not only has capitalism laid hold of pre-existing space ... but it also tends to produce a space of its own” through urbanization (Lefebvre, 1991: 325-26). I accordingly examine if urbanization in this sense represents a new form of colonial production of center-periphery relations. At the end, this chapter delves into White Revolution, emphasizing its pivotal role not only in showcasing various facets of land reform, oil-driven urbanization, and the subsequent production of nature-space but also in marking a transformative phase in cartographic practices of the state. Expropriation (of nature)

refers to those processes that “identify, secure, and channel unpaid work outside the commodity system into the circuit of capital.” Scientific, cartographic revolutions are major examples of these processes (Moore, 2015: 27). I will explore the connection between land reforms, urbanization, and cartographic revolution in the context of imperialism.

1. Cartographic ‘Objectivity’

Geography, as a discipline built on Western philosophies, is structured by a set of ontological ruptures, including the Cartesian split between mind and body (Sundberg, 2009: 642). Geography, and more specifically, cartography, that are built upon such a dualism, can be considered a particular form of Eurocentric ontology with false claims to objectivity. The fundamental assumption is that there is a “rational gaze that is stripped of and separated from the body, material social relations, and geographical location” (Ibid). I claim that the Irancentric Farsist perspective has a fundamental family resemblance with this cartographic vision. This ‘rational gaze’ is ideologically justified by the production of specialized (Farsist) knowledge. It is a result of such entrenched ontology that subalterns like non-Persians in Iran have been constituted as incapable of rationality and knowledge production. This partially explains the dominant view that regards non-Persian languages, such as Baluchi, Turkish, and Kurdish, as inferior to Persian. This perception is based on the Farsist belief that these languages lack the literary capacity to generate creative and critical knowledge.

The absence of a dialectical materialist view in analyses of Iran, as well as in broader theories of nationalism, has made them to a large extent abstract and neglectful of the material dimensions, including the cartographic aspects, of the production of space. Lefebvre’s triad offers an alternative framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of the production of Iran, and specifically, the role of maps and cartographic practices in that process. Since the 1980s, critical cartography

has “questioned assumptions about the objectivity of maps, as well as approaches that evaluate them primarily in terms of scientific progress and accuracy” (Antrim, 2018: 11-12). Critical cartography sees maps as part of the lived experience, influenced by and influencing the perceived and conceived spaces. Critical cartography aims to de-naturalize the process by which maps that appears to be factual and self-evident and showing that cartographic representations are constructed and inseparable from power relations (Ibid: 13). Maps are both a product of state practices and a means by which states are produced.

Cartography has historically been a colonial mechanism, and its role must be understood within the discourse on technology. Technology is frequently regarded as inherently progressive, as the marker of advancement. This assumption, however, overlooks the ways in which specialized knowledge and technologies such as cartography, have made colonial projects possible. Different technologies, including cartography, have been utilized to whitewash the colonial projects.

A ‘Britain-centered global economy’ shapes the broader context of my research (Goswami, 2004: 66). I take the depression of 1873–94 as a turning point where Britain’s hegemony started to falter, and a global restructuring occurred which led to the creation of the Middle East by partitioning the imperial spaces into national territories. In this way, I put Iran in the context of the dialectical relationship between colonialism, anticolonial nationalism, and global restructuring. I formulate this process as the transformation of an imperial space to an embryonic phase of a national state space. It would be wrong to encapsulate the materialist conception of geohistory into a *single* generalization. Phenomena can be analyzed through multiple distinct lenses, each highlighting different facets based on the chosen viewpoint. In this light, I consider different

cartographic representations as different vantage points²⁹⁸. When it comes to ‘Iran’, or the ways ‘Iran’ was represented cartographically, at least four vantage points are recognizable: first, a self-reflective standpoint. This vantage point refers to the way the Safavid, the Qajar, and later, Pahlavi rulers see themselves and the domains they ruled. The other primary vantage points are those of the Ottoman, the British, and the Russian empires, three powerful neighbors of ‘Iran’. It is impossible to discuss all these vantage points, or even one of them comprehensively, in this research. I only aim to examine several typical examples to underline the contradictory and multilayered production of Iran.

It should be noted that national mapping is a twenty-century product. Prior to that, three traditions are recognized: the Islamic tradition which is focused on the ‘realm of Islam’ as mapped between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries; the Ottoman mapping traditions that emerged in the sixteenth century; and the nineteenth-century tradition of European colonial mapping (Antrim, 2018: 14-15). It is only by the rise of national mapping that ‘territory’ became the object of representation. The cartographic production of territory and producing a homogeneous national population were two interlinked objectives of national mapping. This process always has had devastating effects on those excluded or dispossessed (Ibid). Prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a region which is “loosely corresponding to today’s Middle East has been mapped from within for a thousand years.” National/colonial mapping and its ‘godlike’ gaze however have obscured this differentiated past. This past could help us transcend the taken-for-granted divisions of our world (Ibid: 15).

²⁹⁸ I use vantage point in a Marxian sense. The force of abstraction is Marx’s way of putting dialectics to work (Ollman, 2003: 111). The process of abstraction, as a mental act, has three main interrelated modes: *extension*, *level of generality*, and *vantage point* (Ibid: 74).

Turning our gaze to the East, contemporaneous with the Ottomans and Safavids, stood the Mughal Empire. A parallel cartographic pattern is also recognizable there. Mughal maps (Indian tradition) did not display ‘scalar fidelity in a geometric sense’. There are no atlases of the entire territory of the Mughal dominion, no maps that depict it as a singular, spatially bounded whole (Goswami, 2004: 195). Goswami shows that imperial rule was exercised over particular peoples (Afghans, Iranis, Rajputs, Marathas, and the like) not over territory (Ibid: 196). A work from 1870, written by Ishwar Prasad, explicitly justifies its use of the term Bharat – India’s Iranshahr – by stating that “Hindus are the oldest inhabitants of this nation” (Ibid: 197-198). These insights provide a broad historical context in which I will analyze the maps in the following section.

2. Absence of Iran as a National Territory and Economy

2.1. Independent Kingdoms/States

Safavid shahs consciously saw themselves as heirs to the Turko-Mongol tradition and fashioned themselves in the tradition of the fourteenth-century warlord Timur Lang. If Safavid rulers and the Persophone urban elites who supported them had a self-consciously articulated identity, it was religiously based. They saw themselves as the inheritors of the legacy of the Shi’i imams (Matthee, 2021: 85). The Safavid political realms therefore were constituted by an ‘archipelago of urban centres’ that were not just economically autonomous but also largely self-sufficient in cultural and political terms (Ibid: 91). Thus, during the Safavid era, Iran was mostly an idea, a cultural construct that was not used frequently even in the historical writings let alone by the ordinary peoples.

Before the nationalist era, independent kingdoms and states have existed across various frontiers and throughout different historical periods. The analysis of early modern maps further emphasizes the absence of Iran’ as a distinct, unified entity. In a 1606 map by Mercator²⁹⁹ (Figure

²⁹⁹ *The Atlas* by Mercator and Hondius (1606).

26), no defined borders or boundaries are present; instead, it primarily features natural landmarks and regional names. Another map³⁰⁰ from the same year, titled *PERSIÆ*, similarly omits any reference to ‘Iran’, instead highlighting regions such as Media, Persia, and Farsi in various sections. Notably, this source contains a separate map of Ormus³⁰¹, indicating the independent status of Hormuz in the 17th century, suggesting that frontier regions like Hormuz maintained autonomy from the central state for centuries. This autonomy is reinforced by a dedicated 1616 map³⁰² titled *Descriptio Regni Ormuzii* (Description of the Kingdom of Ormus), which labels the area as *Ormus Regnum* (Figure 27), further underscoring Hormuz’s independent status.



Figure 26. *Persici vel Sophorum Regni Typus* from *The Atlas* (Mercator & Hondius, 1606, p. 496). Utrecht University Library.

³⁰⁰ Petrus Bertius, *Tabularum Geographicorum Contractarum Libri Quinque* (3rd ed., 1606), p. 172, British Library, London, UK. Photograph by the author, May 2022.

³⁰¹ Petrus Bertius, *Descriptio Regni Ormvzii*, in *Tabularum Geographicorum Contractarum Libri Quinque* (3rd ed., 1606), p. 178, British Library, London, UK. Photograph by the author, May 2022.

³⁰² *Descriptio Regni Ormvzii* (1616), SOAS Special Maps of Persia Collection, University of London, accessed via <https://digital.soas.ac.uk/LOAC000208/00001>.



Figure 27. *Descriptio Regni Ormuzii* from *Tabularum Geographicorum Contractarum Libri Quinque* (3rd ed., Bertius, 1606, p. 178). Photograph by the author at the British Library, London, May 2022.

Two centuries later, the structure of independent states remained intact. The coast of the gulph was lined for ages with petty sovereignties of Arab sheiks, who, yielded a very uncertain obedience to the monarch of the interior ‘Persia’ (Morier, 1816: 26-27). Nader Shah³⁰³ and Karim Khan³⁰⁴ in vain endeavored to reduce these Arab chiefs to more complete obedience: but in many districts their authority was scarcely acknowledged. Among these chiefs, sheik Nasr, of Bushire, long retained a real independence (Ibid). Whenever his little domain was threatened Sheik Nasr flew to arms. The territory of Bushire, and the neighboring district, remained under the rule of the Arabs (Ibid: 29).

³⁰³ Nader Shah Afshar (1688-1747) was the founder of the Afsharid dynasty, ruling from 1736 to 1747.

³⁰⁴ Mohammad Karim Khan Zand (1705-1779) was the founder of the Zand Dynasty, ruling from 1751 to 1779.

In a map titled The State of Iran, Turan, Khwarezm, Transoxiana, and some of the provinces of Russia, China, India, Afghanistan, Turkestan, Arabia, Ottoman, Baluchistan, and Sistan dated 1850 AD³⁰⁵ (Figure 28), the ‘Iranian’ Gulf and the Kingdom of Sistan are observed. The map explicitly shows that neither Sistan nor Baluchistan were parts of Iran. Moreover, the names of places remain indigenous and non-Persian suggesting the absence of a national territory unified by a national language. Colors are used to differentiate the Protected Domains from neighboring regions, but there are no separating lines. The Kingdom of Sistan is depicted as entirely separate. Some tribes like the Bakhtiari, Fili, and the Lur Eylats are visible, but not all tribes and Eylats. This suggests that the concept of national population (associated with modern administrative divisions), and consequently ethnicities, had not yet emerged, and cartography did not systematically address them.

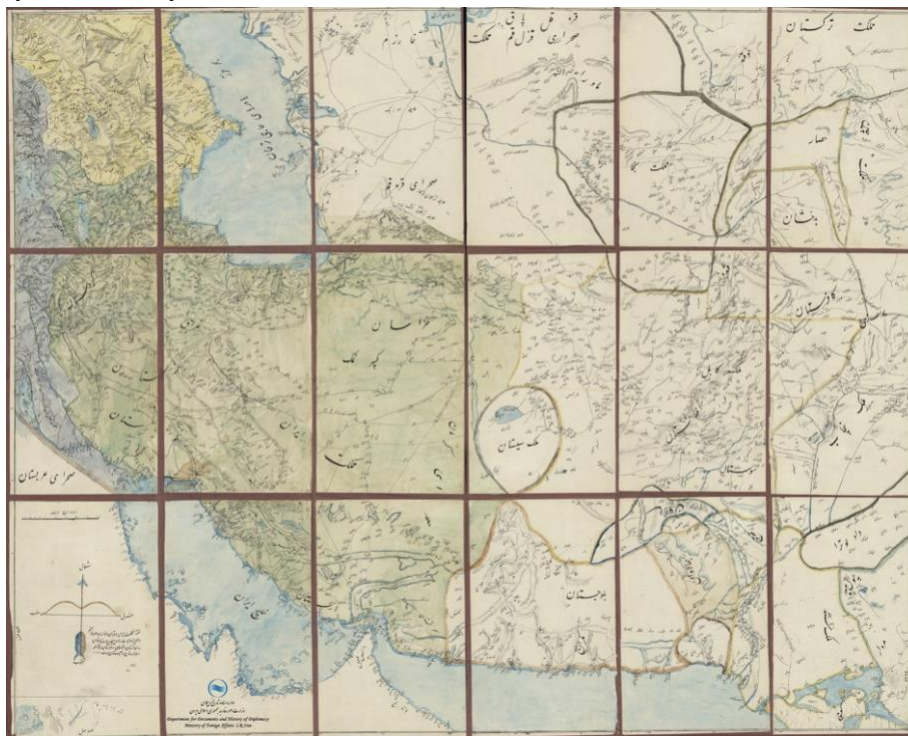


Figure 28. The State of Iran, Turan, Khwarezm, Transoxiana, and some of the provinces of Russia, China, India, Afghanistan, Turkestan, Arabia, Ottoman, Baluchistan, and Sistan (1850). From Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN.

³⁰⁵ Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN.

A separate map (1877) is dedicated to the territories of Khan Kalat³⁰⁶, indicating the independence of Balochestan from the central state of Iran. Distracted and overstretched by Russian penetration in the north and Turcoman incursions in the northeast, the Iranian state was able to do little in response to a strengthening Omani presence in most of the southern territories. Indeed, throughout much of the nineteenth century, this region was under the control of the Omani sultanate. Acting autonomously, Oman imposed heavy taxes and engaged in the slave trade (Mirzai, 2017: 41). The Omani sultanate's representatives managed the Makran coast's port towns of Chabahar and Gwadar for almost a hundred years from the mid-18th century, though their sovereignty was somewhat tenuous. Only in 1864 did the Iranian state consolidate its hold over the area, including Baluchestan and recognizing Makran as an essential segment of Kerman province and the broader Iranian lands (Ibid: 43-44). Despite Iran's official control, the region was predominantly unregulated, with significant British and Omani influence persisting. By 1924, as Baluchestan's population reached approximately four hundred thousand, the region was eventually placed under central state control, marking the end of Mir Dost Mohammad Khan Baranzahi's (Barakzai) autonomous rule from 1919 to 1928 in Bampur and Saravan (Ibid: 85).

The independence of 'Iranian' states has been documented in different historical sources. As is explained in *Jahannamay-e Mozaffari (Mozaffari Atlas)* (1898) Larestan was a fully independent kingdom with its own coin named Lari. It was only under the rule of Abbas the Great (1588-1629) that Larestan was 'conquered' and "became part of the Safavid Iran" (Figure 29). According to Beatrice Manz, in the fifteenth century, "cities and regions had the political ability to decide their own fates and to separate from the center, and if a ruler was to stay in control he required the active consent of local forces ... Localities and regions were the building blocks of any imperium, and in

³⁰⁶ The Territories of His Highness the Khan of Kelat

times of imperial dissolution, they were autonomous entities.” (cited in Kia, 2020: 41). Creating a unified political entity (Iran as a territory, i.e., a bounded space defined by borders) required proper material (including technological-infrastructure) conditions which were absent at that period. It was a pre-border, or more specifically, a *frontier* era.

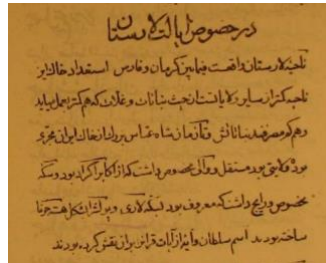


Figure 29. Passage from *Mozaffari Atlas* (1898) that testifies to the independence of Larestan from the land of Iran prior to the reign of Shah Abbas the Great (1588-1629). It has also been stated that during that time, Larestan minted its own coin, which was known as the Lari coin.

The regions of the protected domains of Iran have a long and deep history of independence. For example, for five years, from 1921 to 1926, the ‘homeland’ resisted unity. From Mazandaran to Khuzestan, autonomy movements nearly succeeded in splitting Iranian territory permanently apart (Kashani-Sabet, 1999: 183). Cronin also documents the widespread existence of autonomous tribes. By 1921 much of the geographical area of the country was under tribal control which included not just vast swathes of rural areas but also some towns and cities (Cronin, 2007: 17-22; see also: Salzman 2000: 360). Even after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, autonomist tendencies in Turkmen Sahra, Baluchestan, and Kurdistan were alive but were brutally suppressed by the central state. This inclination towards independence has a very long history and cannot be solely attributed to the geopolitics of imperialist capitalism and the global spread of the nation-state form. The independence of regions within the diverse geographies of Iran was not an anomaly but rather a consistent pattern across various historical periods. Even Ebrahim Pourdavoud, one of the founding fathers of Iranian nationalism, has spoken of Sistan as distinct from Iran (Pourdavoud, 1934: 65). Taqlizadeh also states that the calendar of the Sogdians, Khwarezmians, and Sistanis in the east, and the Cappadocians and Armenians in the west of Iran is the same as the Iranian calendar

without any addition or subtraction but with different names (Taqizadeh, 1937: 7). It becomes evident here that Sistan was separate and distinct from Iran.

The book *Tahghighat-e Sarhadieh*³⁰⁷ also demonstrates that in the 19th century, Iran had not yet formed as a national territory. For example, in explaining the relationship between Arabestan [Khuzestan] and the tribes residing there with the Iranian and Ottoman states, the author explicitly describes that at the time there was a kind of reciprocal relationship between the central state and the frontiers, not limited to one state and varying over time (Moshir al-dowla, 1969: 59-60). For instance, certain tribes at different times would choose to follow different authorities for allegiance. There were periods, which were not short and exceptional, when areas like Arabestan did not pay taxes to the center and were essentially autonomous (Ibid: 88-89). In such circumstances, if the central state could not meet the demands of the inhabitants of the frontier regions, they could change their allegiance, as they also had independent military power in addition to political independence.

Recent critical research on Iranian nationalism has also confirmed that Iran has not been a unified territory throughout history (Matin-Asgari, 2009b: 137; Matin-Asgari, 2024: 312; Matin, 2013: 71; Matthee, 2013, 2021; Fragner, 2020: 230). Tahmak & Towfigh (2015) have shown that Iran has not always been a powerful central state. By focusing on the local history of Fars, particularly the Gallehdari region, during Qajar and Pahlavi periods, they demonstrate that the central state lacked the capacity to control the vast expanse of the dispersed geographies of that time. Essentially, the central state had no presence in the Gallehdari area. Moreover, the Gallehdari Khans were able to take control of some coastal areas, including Asaluyeh, from the forces supported by the British and the central state for about seven years, and defeat them in several

³⁰⁷ A report by Mirza Sayyed Ja'far Khan Moshir al-dowla, regarding the process of determining the frontier lines between Mamalek-e Mahruse-ye Iran and the Ottoman Empire, which took place between 1849 and 1855.

battles. Such instances, which are by no means limited to Fars, essentially indicate that the degree of local autonomy was so high that speaking of Iran as a national territory before the Pahlavi era becomes meaningless. The fact that people were armed meant that subordinated groups also had coercive power, and the means of exerting force were not monopolized by the central state or regional rulers. Even until the early Pahlavi period, many local tribes were still armed and not under the dominion of the central state. The central state as a territorial entity only becomes possible decades later, mainly after land reforms (1963-1979).

During the years of conflict between the Qashqai tribes in the south and Reza Khan's forces, local rulers like Ali Akbar Khan of the Gallehdari region did not hesitate to aid the Qashqais. These regional alliances, manifested in the unity of local Khans against Reza Khan, were a fundamental obstacle to the formation of Iran as a national territory. The central state, even decades after Reza Khan's rise to power, still lacked the necessary infrastructure³⁰⁸ to exert control over dispersed geographies. There is no evidence of land confiscation or expropriation of the Gallehdari Khans by the central state. Even during the three decades of the Gallehdari Khans' challenges against the central state, the lands remained in the possession of the locals, and there was no expropriation by the central state. Notably, even the properties of Mohammad Taher Khan, who fought against the central state and was executed by it, were inherited by his heirs.

Iran remained an 'archipelago of self-sufficient peasant and tribal communities' under the Qajar period: "as late as 1951 tribesmen and peasants, living in largely self-sufficient and disconnected communities, comprised 80 percent of the total population" (Matin, 2013: 70). This partly shows that Iran as a national state spacetime did not exist under Qajar rule. Even during the

³⁰⁸ As Schayegh argues, the state's socio-cultural reform policies required an "infrastructuralization of state power and its expansion beyond the traditional areas of taxation, levying soldiers, and preventing anarchy" (Schayegh, 2002: 343) Schayegh characterizes Iranian state under Reza Shah as the autocratic, *infrastructurally* strong and mixed patrimonial/bureaucratic (Ibid: 345).

time of Mosaddeq under the Pahlavi dynasty “the overwhelming majority of Iranians still understood and defined their identity in the concrete terms of their relatively self-contained tribal, rural, religious, sectarian, or even urban neighborhood communities” (Ibid: 71). As Matin explains “the objective formation of the ‘general will’ of the ‘Iranian nation’, to which Mosaddeq³⁰⁹ ... made constant appeal, required the reconstitution of the relatively autonomous components of the Iranian social formation into an organic whole through the web of a capitalist national economy” (Ibid: 93).

The production of Iran as a national space is only possible when the independence of pre-national regions is effectively weakened or eradicated. This independence was largely based on the Khans’ ownership of lands, their military capability to defend this ownership, and the lack of physical presence of the central state in these areas. To produce a national territory, it was necessary to extensively expropriate the lands from local authorities. It was only with the aid of communication infrastructures and military technologies that the central state was able to implement this project. The expropriation of land and nature occurred in several stages began during Reza Khan’s era and systematically implemented during Mohammad Reza Shah with the advancement of technologies such as land registration and modern cartography. Even in the 1960s and early 1970s, due to the lack of appropriate communication infrastructure, the sale of farmers’ grains could not extend beyond the local level (Hooglund, 1982: 203). This demonstrates how lack of infrastructure hindered the formation of a national territory-market.

2.2. Borderless Spaces of Frontiers

To further demonstrate the imagined and historically contingent character of Iranian territory, in this section I highlight the absence of Iran as a unified national territory with defined borders on

³⁰⁹ Prime Minister of Iran, holding office from 1951 until 1953.

historical maps. The unprecedented character of national territory means that it has ‘nothing to do with the natural features of the land’ (Poulantzas, 1978). The modern nation is therefore a product of the state, since its constitutive elements (economic unity, territory, tradition) are formed through the state’s direct activity in the organization of space and time. Iran is the product of a highly conflictual and long history. One of the most important mechanisms of the production of Iran is related to the practices of border formation. To develop a cartographic history of these border formation practices, I have undertaken a comprehensive survey and analysis of an extensive collection of maps to historically cover as many maps as possible, spanning from ancient times to the present. This approach enabled me to obtain a relatively comprehensive overview of the maps prepared for the area of my study³¹⁰.

An examination of ancient maps reveals the absence of any reference to ‘Iran’. For instance, maps such as World Map by Strabo³¹¹ (63 BC - 23 AD), the world according to Eratosthenes (Ariana)³¹² (220 BC), and the world according to Herodotus³¹³ make no mention of ‘Iran’. This trend persists in later periods as well. Al-Biruni’s map (Al-Tafhim li Awa’il Sana’at al-Tanjim, 1029) and Sketch map of the Distribution of Land and Sea (1238)³¹⁴ similarly exclude Iran, as does Mahmud al-Kashgari’s World Map³¹⁵ (1072). Instead, regions such as Kerman, Fars, Khuzestan, Qom, and Al-Iraqain appear as separate entities, without being unified under the names Iran, Persia, or Ajam. From the Muslim conquest up to the Safavid rise, the lands³¹⁶ of the so-

³¹⁰ I delved into numerous archives, many of which are accessible online. I reviewed over 5,000 unique maps, and the findings presented in this chapter are derived from this archival research.

³¹¹ <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-cartography-world-maps-world-map-by-strabon-circa-63-bc-23-ad-coloured-19799346.html>

³¹² <https://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/10400/10489/10489.htm>

³¹³ <https://www.alamy.com/herodotus1897-p2387-the-world-according-to-herodotus-image154623090.html> and <https://www.myoldmaps.com/maps-from-antiquity-6200-bc/109-herodotus/109-herodotus.pdf>

³¹⁴ <https://www.myoldmaps.com/early-medieval-monographs/2143-al-biruni-world-map/2143-al-biruni.pdf> and <https://www.historytoday.com/miscellanies/invention-world-history>

³¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmud_al-Kashgari

³¹⁶ See the previous footnote.

called ‘Iran’ were part of the Umayyad (661-750) and Abbasid (750-1258) caliphates, and later divided among various dynasties. This means that for at least 800 years the fragmentation was a norm. This fragmentation indicates that the name Iran was not a determining factor in the legitimacy of the ruling dynasties.

This trend persists into the early modern period, as seen in a 1477 map³¹⁷ where Iran is absent, with regions like Media, Hyrcania, Parthia, Carmania, and Persidis depicted independently. Similarly, the Caverio Map³¹⁸ (1505), the Ruysch World Map (1507)³¹⁹, the Waldseemüller Wall Map³²⁰ (1507), and Mercator’s Edition of the Ptolemy (1577)³²¹ ‘Iran’ is absent. Even a 1540 map titled ‘Map Number Five of Asia’ [Taula Asiae]³²² and a 1596 map (Arabiae, Ormi, Persiae) (Figure 30) continue this pattern, featuring labels like ASIÆ and FARSI PERSIA, with ‘Iran’ remaining absent. This indicates that in the cartography of the 15th and 16th centuries, ‘Iran’ as a unified geographical or political entity had not yet been formed.

³¹⁷ Qatar Digital Library.

³¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caverio_map

³¹⁹ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ruysch_map.jpg

³²⁰ <https://www.loc.gov/collections/discovery-and-exploration/articles-and-essays/recognizing-and-naming-america/>

³²¹ Vivid maps

³²² David Rumsey Map Collection



Figure 30. *Arabiae, Ormi, Persiae, &c. descriptio* (1596). From *Histoire de la navigation* by Jan Huygen van Linschoten. Retrieved from:

<https://www.martayanlan.com/pages/books/4146/jean-hugues-linschoten/histoire-de-la-navigation>

Another significant map from this period is the 1647 work by Sadiq Isfahani³²³, part of an atlas titled “Inhabited Quarter,” an important surviving Indo-Islamic map (Schwartzberg: 390). This map only depicts the name Belad-e Iran (Iran’s States), with no visible borders, showing merely the relative geographical position of Iran in terms of longitude and latitude (Figure 31).

³²³ Sadiq Isfahani was a prominent author and official in India during the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. He lived in Bengal in the 1630s, where he interacted with local celebrities and literary figures. See: <https://www.peterharrington.co.uk/the-geographical-works-of-sadik-isfahani-together-with-a-critical-essay-on-various-manuscript-works-168376.html#:~:text=Although%20he%20traced%20his%20origins,local%20celebrities%20and%20literary%20figures,res.>

exist across different copies of *Cihannüma* in both content and formal aspects, further underscoring the fluid and evolving nature of territorial perceptions.

These observations further underscore the lack of emphasis on territorial sovereignty in cartographic traditions of the period, reinforcing the notion that the concept of a unified 'Iran' was not yet fully established. In Katib Celebi's *Cihannüma* (Worldview), sovereignty does not occupy a central role in the printed edition: "the only legend in the entire work that indicates Ottoman sovereignty appears on the map of the Aegean" (Antrim, 2018: 103-105) and "the only other map in the entire work that highlights sovereignty in its legend is that of Safavid Iran" (Ibid: 105). The 1732 edition of *Cihannüma* further illustrates this point, as color was added by hand after printing, leading to variations in emphasis across different copies (Ibid). This approach puts more emphasis on natural features, such as coasts and rivers, over political boundaries, suggesting that the idea of territory as a political concept remained underdeveloped. As shown in (Figure 32), coasts and rivers are emphasized in darker red and internal boundaries are traced in lighter red, reflecting the relatively low importance of sovereignty. As Antrim emphasizes, "colour is not used on this map to trace a boundary between Safavid and Ottoman territory, nor does any inscription mark this geopolitical division" (Ibid). This absence of clear political demarcation is not limited to the map of Iran but also extends to the maps of Anatolia and Arabia, which similarly lack markers of political jurisdiction.

Muteferrika's maps from the 1732 *Cihannüma* are thus characterized by a distinctly regionalist perspective, underscoring the fact that the concept of national space was still non-existent at that time. As noted, “the cartographic contents of the 1732 *Cihannüma* do not produce territory in political terms” (Antrim, 2018: 106-107). While several European atlases from this period, such as the Mercator-Hondius and Blaeu atlases, included maps titled ‘Turkish Empire,’ Muteferrika's edition of *Cihannüma* deliberately avoided such representations, reflecting an alternative approach to mapping. This contrast highlights the impact of a Eurocentric vantage point, which imposed political boundaries and national identities that were not yet present or prioritized in Ottoman cartographic traditions.



Figure 32. Map of Iran from the Muteferrika edition of Katib Celebi's *Cihannüma*, printed in Istanbul in 1732. Adapted from Antrim (2018: 104).



Figure 33. Map of Iran from the Muteferrika edition of Katib Celebi's *Cihannüma*, printed in Istanbul in 1732. Stanford collection. View in high resolution here:

<https://exhibits.stanford.edu/islamicworld/catalog/sp242bz8546>

To see a differently colored version, see:

<https://www.csusb.edu/csmaw/outreach/ottoman-exhibition>

I found two other versions of the Muteferrika's map. One in the Yale map collection³²⁴ dated 1729 to which Kashani-Sabet has referred and the other one which is accessible in a Turkish archive. According to "a rare map of Iran attributed to the famed printer Ibrahim Muteferrika gave pride of place to land by setting precise boundaries between two imperial adversaries" (Kashani-Sabet, 1999: 17). This perspective stands in stark contrast to Kashani-Sabet's analysis of Muteferrika's map. She argues "Muteferrika's design clearly marked the frontiers of Iran and the Ottoman Empire in 1729" (Ibid). Kashani-Sabet believes that the publication of this map is related to the

³²⁴ <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/15509666>

border wars between the two powers that had come to a resolution in 1727. She says “Müteferrika’s decision to print a map of this significant yet fleeting victory ... revealed his desire to assert unequivocal Ottoman control of disputed borderlands” (Ibid: 18). The publication of this map should then be seen as capturing ‘a moment of Ottoman glory’.

Such interpretation however is misleading. Given the historical context of cartography in that period, as Antrim discussed, it is clear that the primary intention of Müteferrika’s map had nothing to do with the ‘precise boundaries’. Moreover, comparing the version that Kashani-Sabet refers to and the one that is accessible in a Turkish archive³²⁵ (Figure 34), an important discrepancy is recognizable between the two copies. In the Yale version which Kashani-Sabet has used (Figure 35), a dashed line is visible, which is absent in the other copy (Figure 34). Next to this dashed line, in the upper left corner of the map, a phrase can be seen which reads as *hodud-e mamalek-e osmani* (limits of the Ottoman domains). But if we compare the handwriting with which this phrase has been written with the form and style of the other written words on the map, it turns out that the phrase has been added later by hand to the printed map. The main question is, who drew this dashed line and when? Moreover, the Yale copy has a smaller box within the description box in the lower left corner. This smaller box which includes Müteferrika’s name is again absent in the Turkish archive version. These discrepancies undermine Kashani-Sabet’s argument.

Furthermore, if, as Kashani-Sabet claims, Müteferrika intended to show the ‘unequivocal Ottoman control of disputed borderlands’, one would expect the map to include the title of the Ottoman Empire. However, the map does not feature any reference to ‘Ottoman’; instead, it uses the title of *Mamalek-e Anatoli* (Anatolian domains). This further casts doubt on Kashani-Sabet’s interpretation, suggesting that her reading of the map may be problematic. Implicitly responding

³²⁵ <http://muteferrika.mtak.hu/hu/nyomda.htm>

to Vaziri's argument, she concludes that 'Iran and its corresponding territory' "were not nineteenth-century innovations ... Nor did these ideas originate with the work of Orientalists, as one writer³²⁶ has suggested" (Ibid: 18). Despite its critical stance, Kashani-Sabet's work reinforces the traditional view that Iran and its territory has existed throughout history. As she says, "the impulse to set apart things Iranian ... had old roots and simply found a new application and context in nationalism" (Ibid).

Clear boundaries that separated continents, let alone the national states, were relatively new when the *Cihannüma* was printed in 1732. The self-evident and empirically provable divisions of the world were only naturalized later in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Influenced by the European racial cartographic tradition during the nineteenth century, "the idea that continents were fundamentally, and naturally separate geographical entities gained traction" (Antrim, 2018: 107-109). This new racial and civilizational cartography was in sharp contrast with the Ottoman mapping traditions that "stressed belonging in meaningful regions in which boundaries between political jurisdictions, cultures and even land and sea were often blurred" (Ibid: 109).

³²⁶ As we can expect, this author is none other than Mostafa Vaziri.



Figure 34. Irán térképe from Müteferrikának a nyomdaalapítást megelőző kiadványa (1729), printed by İbrâhîm Müteferrika, Kostantiniye: Dâr ül-Tibâcat ül-Macmûre, H11 24. Retrieved from <http://mutferrika.mtak.hu/hu/nyomda.htm>



Figure 35. *Mamalek-e Iran* from the Muteferrika edition of Katib Çelebi's *Cihannüma*, printed in Istanbul in 1732. Yale University Library, Map Collection.

Another version of the same map is also available, which is more popular. In this color version, which has its own variations³²⁷ (Figure 36), the same dashed line has been converted to a solid line. A similar line has also been added on the left side of the map, with the explicit aim of dividing and distinguishing the Iranian lands/domains from the Eastern domains. However, these added lines should be seen as political manipulations. Drawing sharp boundaries between imperial spaces was not a central issue at that time. These added lines conflict with both Mütferrika's own

³²⁷ See for example:

<https://howiyat.blogsky.com/1390/03/22/post-25/>

<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/chelebi-6/29069972.html>

<https://cheshmandaz.org/2013/09/24/%D8%AF%D9%88-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B4%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%81%D8%AF%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%B9%D8%AB%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86/>

intentions and the nature of Ottoman cartography tradition. This cartographic politics seeks to demonstrate the existence of Iran as a territorial space with clear boundaries in the past as an inviolable scientific fact. The deliberate alteration of maps is systematically utilized to produce ‘objective’ representations of ‘Iran’.



Figure 36. *Mamalek-e Iran*. Reproduced in Alai (2010: 276) from *General Maps of Persia: 1477-1925*. © Brill.

The evolution of cartographic representations of Iran from the late 18th to the early 20th century reveals a gradual shift toward the defined borders and national territory. In maps from 1817 and 1827, there are no visible borders, while a map from 1890 uniquely depicts Persia with clearly defined boundaries, essentially representing Iran as it exists today. Interestingly, this map is titled Persia, with no mention of Iran³²⁸. Earlier, maps such as those published in Robert Wilkinson's 1797³²⁹ atlas used titles like *Orientis Tabula* and *Imperium Parthicum* instead of Iran or Persia.

³²⁸ All the mentioned maps in this paragraph are from:
Alai, Cyrus. (2010): *Special Maps of Persia 1477-1925*, Brill.

³²⁹ David Rumsey Map Collection

Moving into the 19th century, Iran remains absent; a map from 1835³³⁰ depicting the Earth, for example, refers to *Bilad al-Ajam* between *Bilad al-Hind* and *Bilad al-Arab*, without any mention of Iran or Persia. In yet another Ottoman map³³¹ titled: “دولت علیہنک آسیا طرفندہ اولان ممالکی” [The Countries of Asia under the Rule of the Sublime Empire], *Ajamestan* is depicted, encompassing Iraq-e Ajam and Lorestan, while other regions like Iraq Arab, Kurdistan, Armenia, and Georgia are distinctly marked. The 1803 *Cedid Atlas* also uses Ajamestan rather than Iran or Persia, and in another 1835 map of the Earth’s hemispheres, *Belad Ajam* is indicated. The term *Mamalek-e Ajam* is used in the map titled *Iklim-i Asya (The Continent of Asia)*³³². Furthermore, the 1803³³³ World Map from an Ottoman perspective, sourced from the Ottoman Imperial Archives, mentions Ajamestan instead of Iran or Persia, with no political borders visible. This non-Eurocentric map has the Pacific Ocean (*Bahr-e Mohit-e Mo’tadel*) at its center, with Anatolia depicted instead of the Ottoman Empire or Turkey. It wasn’t until World War I³³⁴ that ‘Iran’ began to appear on Ottoman maps.

In the maps in *The Atlas of Ancient and Classical Geography* by Samuel Butler (1851)³³⁵, edited by Ernest Rhys (1907), the term *Oriens* is used instead of Iran or Persia. An intriguing map titled *Iran and Turan*, drawn in 1843³³⁶, features both Persien and Iran, but Iran refers only to a specific northeastern region, distinct from Turan, indicating that ‘Iran’ had a localized meaning. Similarly, in another map drawn in 1853 in Italian in Milan, titled *States of Iran*, both Iran and Persia are simultaneously observable, with Iran corresponding to today’s Khorasan and Persia

³³⁰ Atlas, ay majmu kharitat rasm al-ard by Brocktorff, F de (Malta, 1835) arab atlas from Zachary Foster’s Personal Collection. <https://palestinexus.com/>

³³¹ Ra’if Mahmud, Efendi. William Faden, *Cedid atlas tercemesi* [Istanbul- Tab’hane-i Humayun, (1803-1804)]

³³² <https://www.csusb.edu/csmaw/outreach/ottoman-exhibition>

³³³ <https://www.facebook.com/ottomanpictures/photos/a.1458235151088111/2530105127234436/>

³³⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/ottomanpictures/photos/a.1458235151088111/1954288988149389/>

³³⁵ https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/butler_1851/index.html

³³⁶ David Rumsey Map Collection

representing the broader territory. A shift is noticeable in a map titled Persia and Afghanistan, drawn in 1861 by Keith Johnston F.R.S.E, where both Iran and Persia refer to the whole territorial extent, with Iran no longer restricted to a specific region.

The formation of Iranian territory is a much more recent development. As the examined maps show, the transformation of non-Persian frontiers and the formation of borders, and consequently the production of Iran as a national territory, was realized only in the second half of the twentieth century, as evidenced by works like *Borders of Iran* by Mohammad Ali Mokhber (1945) who was a member of boundary commissions and involved in the installation of border signs. This book is the first source that explicitly discuss the borders (*marzha-ye*) of Iran, rather than its frontiers (Ganji, 1988: 213). In this regard, the book can be seen as indicative of the inception of the national territory. The introduction reflects a tendency towards a property-centric and gendered conception of territory, saying that just as everyone should know the boundaries of their personal home, ‘Iranians’ should study this book, which represents the boundaries of their common home (Mokhber, 1945: III)³³⁷.

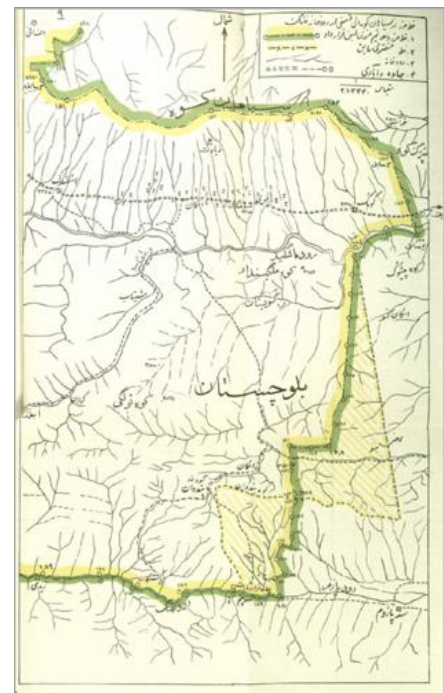
Approximately ten years after Mokhber’s book, two other important books were published: *Borders of Iran and the Soviet Union* (1957) and *The Fate of Baluchestan and Its Borders* (1959), both written by Amanullah Jahanbani³³⁸, the great grandson of Fath Ali Shah. The type of maps included in Jahān-bāni’s books marks a new development in cartography. *Borders of Iran and the Soviet Union* shows that it was only in 1956 when the Iran-Soviet Union border ‘line’ was

³³⁷ This view lends support to my argument that defines the familial space as the cell form of national territory. This property-centric view of territory and borders, which considers Iran as the *home* of Iranians that must be protected, reveals the gender aspect of the national spacetime and heralds the first implicit appearance of the concept of territorial integrity.

³³⁸ Amanollah Jahanbani (1891-1974) was the great grandson of Fath Ali Shah. At the age of 10, Jahānbāni was sent to St. Petersburg for schooling, where he attended the Mihailovsky Artillery College and the Nikolaevsky War Academy. He furthermore served in the Persian Cossack Brigade and was a pivotal figure in the 1921 Persian coup d'état.

established. In that year, the border was *physically* produced using stakes, wooden and concrete columns/poles, and barbed wire. *The Fate of Baluchestan and Its Borders* (Jahanbani: 1959) “holds special significance in terms of the author’s direct involvement in border demarcation and assuming the leadership of the Border Commission” (Ganji, 1988: 214). The motivation for writing the book was the determination and establishment of Iran’s borders with Pakistan. The book contains a map illustrating the political divisions of Eastern Balochestan during the British period. One distinctive aspect of the maps is the use of color to highlight Iran’s borders distinguishing Baluchestan as part of Iran (Figure 37).

Figure 37. Baluchestan Border Line from *The Fate of Baluchestan and Its Borders* (1959).



The 1960s and 1970s can be considered an important stage in the expansion of territorial representation of Iran in and through Farsi. During this period, for the first time, we encounter the expansion of Farsist geographical knowledge, depicting Iran as a unified national space with defined boundaries. The book *Geography of Iran* by Mohammad Hassan Ganji and Hossein Khalilifar (1970) starts with a map of the country’s economic activities, giving priority for the first time to maps over text. It only shows Iran and does not include any of its neighbors. Iran’s borders

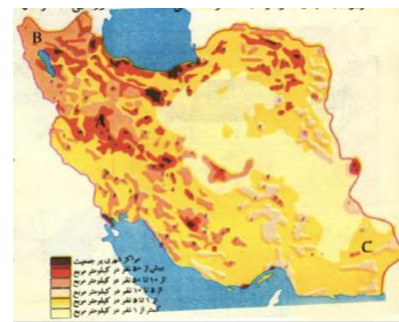
are delineated with bold black lines, separating it from the gray background. This is the most abstract depiction of Iran in textbooks until then (Figure 38).

The technological advancement led to the production of the map of Iran as we know it today. The Geographical Organization of the Armed Forces, or *National* Geographical Organization of Iran; a state agency affiliated with the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, was established in 1921 to gather geographic information quickly and accurately for the country and other areas needed by the armed forces. This organization became the first in the Middle East to perform analog aerial photography of the entire country in 1955. Using conversion devices and surveying, they managed to produce topographic maps from these aerial photographs. The resulted maps appeared in the textbooks as well. In the book *Geography* for third year of junior high school by Hossein Khalilifar (1977), it is stated that in our era, the availability of aerial photographs has greatly enhanced the speed and accuracy of map drawing. In this book, for the first time we encounter maps like population distribution (Figure 39) that represent a new level of cartographic technology.



Figure 38 (Left). Map of Iran from *Geography of Iran* (1970).

Figure 39 (Right). Population density from *Geography* (1977).



2.3. Frontier Economies

During the Qajar period, when the national territory was absent, the independent and semi-independent spaces were not yet unified. In the absence of internal market, various frontier economies were dominant. It was in the process of the production of Iran and its national spatiotemporal matrices that, borrowing Poulantzas's terminology, the state installed/created a

unified national market “by marking out the frontiers of what thereby becomes the inside of an outside” (Poulantzas, 1980: 105-106). The state did not unify a pre-existing ‘internal’ market. It instead formed it from the very outset. Poulantzas here considers ‘national social formations’ as ‘the principal roots and focal points of the uneven development of capitalism’ (Ibid). Specific to this emergent spatiotemporal matrix is its tendency to be endlessly extended/reproduced: “there is no way of advancing in this spatial matrix except along the road of homogenization, assimilation and unification” or “except through demarcation of an interior that is always capable of being extended *ad infinitum*” (Ibid: 106). The spatiotemporal matrix of capitalist mode of production is embodied in the national territory which “has nothing to do with the natural features of the land” (Ibid: 104). Poulantzas treats the capitalist social formation and nation-State as equivalent (Ibid: 112). Territory thus becomes national and, “by means of the State, constitutes an element of the modern nation” (Poulantzas, 1980: 104-105)³³⁹.

Absence of Iran as a national territory has been associated with the absence of a national economy/market. Well into the twentieth century, the ‘Iranian’ economy was a series of regional economies, each consisting of a major commercial center with its own hinterland (Matthee, Floor & Clawson, 2013: 208). The absence or at least the limited presence of exchange value relations and its associated abstract space-time can be inferred from the fact that money had not yet fully emerged as a national medium of exchange. This situation is evidenced by the varied forms of currency and the lack of a uniform monetary system during the late Qajar and early Pahlavi eras. In 1802, a significant number of the coins circulating in what was referred to as ‘Persia’ were not even minted within the empire itself. In northwest ‘Iran’ Russian coins were of major importance,

³³⁹ According to Poulantzas, “The State marks out the frontiers of this serial space in the very process of unifying and homogenizing what these frontiers enclose. It is in this way that the territory becomes national, tending to merge with the nation-State. It is in this way too that the nation tends to encapsulate the State” (Poulantzas, 1980: 105).

while in southeast Iran, Indian currency prevailed. In 1846 there is more Russian money in circulation at Khoy³⁴⁰ than Persian. Moreover, the value of the foreign coins varied from region to region. Yazd, in 1849–50 had a currency of its own, ‘different from that of other places. In the 1880s, ‘At Bandar ‘Abbas the current coin was the rupee (Ibid: 203-208). The high costs of transportation and the absence of suitable communication infrastructure and technology also impeded the formation of a unified monetary market.

With the establishment of the Imperial Bank of Persia in 1889, paper money started to be used on a systematic basis. However, in 1900 IBP lost its de facto monopoly in response to Russian pressure (Matthee, Floor & Clawson, 2013: 227, 228). So, even after the establishment of the Imperial Bank, one cannot speak of the existence of a *national* economy. There was no unified authority capable of imposing (in practice) a standard currency across the scattered geographies of the Protected Domains. The absence of a standard for currency essentially signifies a lack of standard for calculating labour time. The issue extended beyond currency alone. Essentially, the system of measurement itself³⁴¹ was qualitative³⁴² and reflected the diversity and plurality present in the scattered geographies of the protected domains³⁴³ and the heterogeneous nature of space.

³⁴⁰ Khoy is a city in the Central District of Khoy County, West Azerbaijan province, Iran.

³⁴¹ For distance measurement, ‘Farsang’ is commonly used, fundamentally equal to 6,000 ‘Zar-e Shahi’ or 6.72 kilometers, but in some areas, it is shorter. ‘Farsang’ is divided into four ‘Meydan’. For measuring surfaces and lands, different units are used but generally ‘Jareeb’ is common, comprising 1,066 ‘Zar-e Shahi’ squared, though in Isfahan and Abadeh, it is only 1,000 ‘Zar-e Shahi’ squared. ‘Jareeb’ is usually divided into 10 ‘Qafeez’, each ‘Qafeez’ into 4 ‘Chark’, and each ‘Chark’ into 10 ‘Ney’ or ‘Neizeh’. The measurement of surface area varies widely across provinces and even within different parts of each province (Jamalzadeh, 1916: 169). These indicate that space had not yet become abstract and remains highly localized.

³⁴² In late Qajar era, or the early 20th century in Iran, the unit of weight was the ‘Mithqal’, divided into 24 ‘Nokhod’ (chickpeas), and each Nokhod into four ‘Gandom’ (wheat grains). Sixteen Mithqals made one ‘Seer’, and forty Seers one ‘Tabriz Mann’ (eight ‘Abbasi’), with each ‘Abbasi’ being five Seers. Two Tabriz Manns were known as one ‘Shah Mann’, and four Tabriz Manns as one ‘Ray Mann’ (Kamal Al-Dowla, 1898: 160, 161). Measurement was entirely qualitative and based on grains. The exchange value had not yet become the basis of social relations. The unit of length in Iran is the ‘Zar’ that is not consistent throughout different regions (Ibid: 161). The same applied to measuring the weight of coins (Jamalzadeh, 1916: 171-172).

³⁴³ The measurement of distance, time, and weight are interrelated, and each requires its specific technology: Length measurement, clock, and scale.

The absence of Iran as a national market is reflected in the movement of labour forces in frontier regions. In 1858 a total of 4,852 passports were issued to those crossing the Russian–Iranian frontier in search of work in Tbilisi, Elizabetpol, Shusha, Shamakhi, Yerevan and the other southern Caucasian cities. As Atabaki says, the number of illegal migrants would have exceeded the number of legal migrant labourers. The free exploitation of the oil deposits in the Apsheron peninsula on the Caspian coast in 1872 caused the mass migration of ‘Iranian’ labourers to the Caucasus and Central Asia. The construction of roads and railways such as the Trans-Caspian network increased labour migration. Within ten years the number of ‘Iranians’³⁴⁴ in Central Asia rose from 23,191 in 1897 to 55,000 in 1907, and they became the main immigrant community in the region. On the eve of the Russian Revolution of 1905 the Baku oilfields employed some 10,000 ‘Iranian’ workers, and in the copper mines and industrial plants of Alaverdi in the north of Yerevan there were 2,500 ‘Iranian’ workers, who accounted for 70 per cent of the total workforce there (Atabaki, 2007: 37-42). Issawi also confirms these figures. As he explains, in 1915, about 30% of the workers in the Russian Azerbaijan oil industry were ‘Iranian’ immigrants. Consequently, the Caspian provinces attracted impoverished people even from distant areas including Sistan. Besides migration to ‘Russia’, there were migrations from northeastern regions to Herat, from southeastern regions to Karachi, Muscat, and even the Zanzibar Islands. There were also migrations to India and Turkey (Issawi, 1983: 75, 76).

So, the central state of the Qajar Empire was not capable of facilitating migration from rural areas to urban centers through industrial expansion. As a result, it was the Russian central state that pursued frontier-based industrialization. This illustrates why Iranian wage labour and national market developed later than Russian ones. The Russian state took the initiative and acted pre-

³⁴⁴ To see my critique of Atabaki’s methodological nationalism see Section 1 in Literature Review chapter.

emptively. Russian capitalists and landowners persuaded the central state of Russia not to obstruct the influx of labour from frontier regions (Atabaki, 2007: 39-40). This clearly shows that *frontiers* and *national territory* “do not exist prior to the unification of that which they structure: there is no original something-inside that has later to be unified. It is by means of the State that the territory becomes national (Poulantzas, 1978: 105). The same line of reasoning applies to the national market; the State does not exist independently or prior to it. National market is not something that the state has to unify externally; it is formed in tandem with the state formation. A dualism is also recognizable in the economistic conception of the State where “the links between the State and the economic sphere are relations of exteriority” (Ibid: 16). Poulantzas criticizes this dualistic and ‘topological’ representation of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’: “namely, the conception of the State as a mere appendage or reflection of the economic sphere, devoid of its own space and reducible to the economy” (Ibid: 15). Reminding me of a dialectical perspective of totality, he argues that “the position of the State vis-a-vis the economy is never anything but the modality of the State’s presence in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production” (Ibid: 17).³⁴⁵

He explains that “the capitalist separation of State and economy was never anything other than the specifically capitalist form of the State’s presence in the relations of production” (Ibid: 167). By virtue of changes in the relations of production, “a number of previously ‘marginal’ fields (training of labour-power, town-planning, transport, health, the environment, etc.) are directly integrated, in an expanded and modified form, into the very space-process of the reproduction and

³⁴⁵ Here’s a compact explanation:

“In short, a mode of production does not arise out of the combination of various instances, all of which possess an inalterable structure before they come into relation with one another. It is rather the mode of production itself - that totality of economic, political and ideological determinations - which fixes the boundaries of these spaces, sketching out their fields and defining their respective elements. They are *from the very beginning* constituted by their mutual relation and articulation - a process that is effected in each mode of production through the determining role of the relations of production. But that determination always takes place within the unity of the mode of production” (Poulantzas, 1980: 17-18).

valorization of capital” (Ibid: 167-168). Now, the space of the State expands to the extent that whole areas of the valorization of capital and reproduction of labour power are directly inserted in the State (Ibid).

This dualism is not merely spatial. National borders and national territory did not exist *prior to* the unification of the national market. As Hadjimichalis explains, borders are established *simultaneously* with industrialization, which ‘was always internationalized’: “‘National’ markets in Europe were internationalized at the same time of their creation. National borders, writes Poulantzas, are established when capital and trade are in a position to get rid of them ... Thus, there was never a linear transition from the national to the international market” (Hadjimichalis, 2016: 142).

It is in the context of the transformation of frontier markets to a unified national market that Poulantzas says, for the first time, the State ‘exhibits the *historical tendency* to encompass a single, constant nation’ (Ibid: 95). The state has now entered the reproduction of the relations of the production. The capitalist State has the peculiarity of reserving social space and time for itself: it intervenes in the erection of spatiotemporal matrices (Poulantzas, 1980: 99). That’s why the nation is a product of the State, “since its constitutive elements (economic unity, territory, tradition) are modified through the State’s direct activity in the material organization of space and time” (Ibid). By producing a particular spatiotemporal matrix, “the State establishes the peculiar relationship between *history* and *territory* ... the capitalist State marks out the frontiers when it constitutes what is within (the people-nation) by homogenizing the before and the after of the content of this enclosure” (Ibid: 114). Although the relations of production delimit the given field of the state, it simultaneously forms these relations (Ibid: 25). The state materializes politico-ideological relations. Territory and history crystallized by the state “ratify the dominance of the bourgeois

variant of the spatio-temporal matrix over its working-class variant” (Poulantzas, 1976: 119). The State in this spatiotemporal sense is the *material* condensation of a relationship of forces (Ibid: 152). Therefore, the modern nation state is not the creation of the bourgeoisie, but the outcome of a *relationship* of forces between the social classes (Poulantzas, 1980: 115).

It was not until the late 19th and early 20th centuries that frontiers gradually became a fundamental issue for the emerging capitalist order, and national borders started to take shape. There is a map from 1913 titled Perso-Iraqi Frontier³⁴⁶, which specifically demarcates the fixed border between Persia and Iraq. On this map, the name Persia is visible, as well as the title Iran, which is placed in parentheses. Decades later, in 1941, a map titled Iran and Iraq was drawn, clearly showing the borders of the two countries. The detailed map of the country of Iran with defined frontiers from 1913³⁴⁷ (Figure 40) represents a new level of cartographic technology and the emergence of a national territory. The borders on this map are largely determined. For the first time, the legend explains that this map was translated with utmost precision by experts skilled in the science of cartography, based on several English, German, and Russian maps. This shows the initial stages of cartography were a form of translation process, historically intertwined with Orientalism. The names remain non-Persian, having not yet Farsicized. Pre-national names like Solduz³⁴⁸ and Ardalan³⁴⁹ are seen on the map. Some tribes such as the Kalhor Kurds, the Ka’b Arabs, and the Ismail Zehi and Yarahmadzehi, appear sporadically. Iraq is shown, now simply as

³⁴⁶ Perso-Iraqi Frontier as Fixed in 1913-14 and amended in 1937 (1945).

³⁴⁷ Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN. The version that I used is the second edition, published in 1924 in Istanbul.

³⁴⁸ Soldooz is the name of a region in northwestern Iran that, through a decree in 1967, was renamed to Naqadeh.

³⁴⁹ Ardalan was a hereditary Kurdish vassaldom from around the 14th century until 1865 or 1868 with Sanandaj as capital.

Iraq, not Arab Iraq or Ajam Iraq, showing one step toward homogenization of space. Baluchestan however is still outside the borders of Iran.



Figure 40. *Detailed map of the country of Iran*. Second edition, originally published in 1913 and reissued in Istanbul in 1924. From the Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran.

In the early years of the Pahlavi era, geography gained greater importance for the central state, leading to the incorporation of cartographic representations into educational and official publications. Masoud Keyhan, a geographer and statesman, who is considered the father of modern geography in Iran (Ganji, 1988: 312), published a three-volume set titled *Detailed Geography of Iran* during the formative years of the Pahlavi state. The first, second, and third volumes of this book respectively explore the natural, political, and economic geography of Iran. According to Keyhan, “political geography has a complete connection with race science (*nejadshenasi*)” (Keyhan, 1932a: 2-3). In the third volume, Economic Geography, notable maps include Iranian Forests, Discovered Mines in Iran, Iranian Roads (Figure 41), Iran’s Postal and Telegraph Lines (Figure 42), and Iran’s Telephone Centers and Lines highlighting the initial stage of the production of Iranian nature.

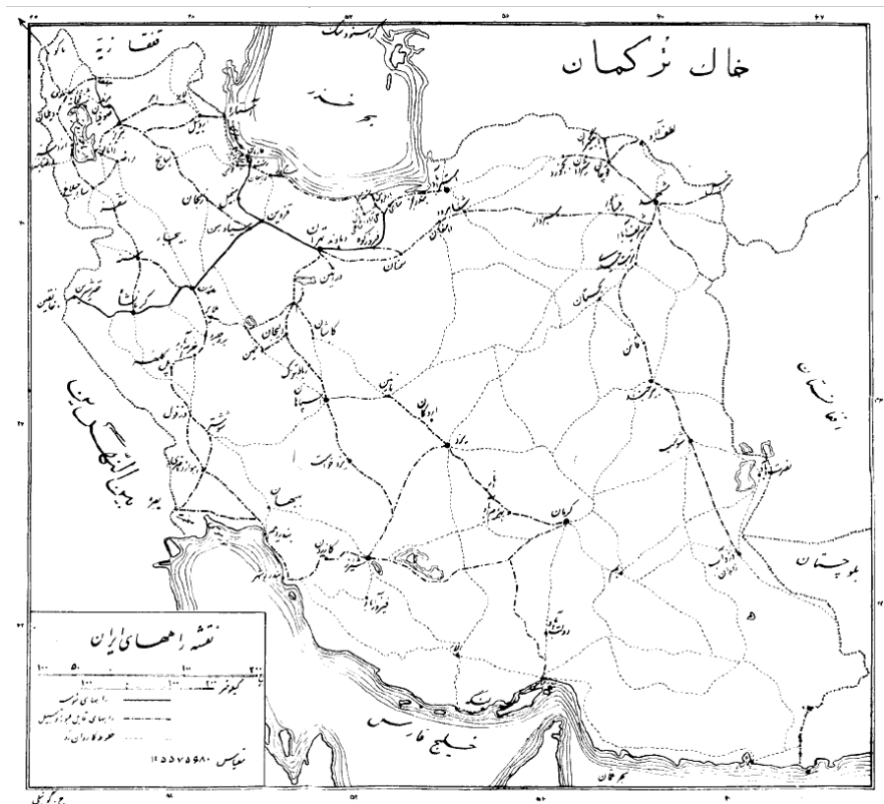


Figure 41. Iranian Roads from *Detailed Geography of Iran* vol. 3 (1932a).

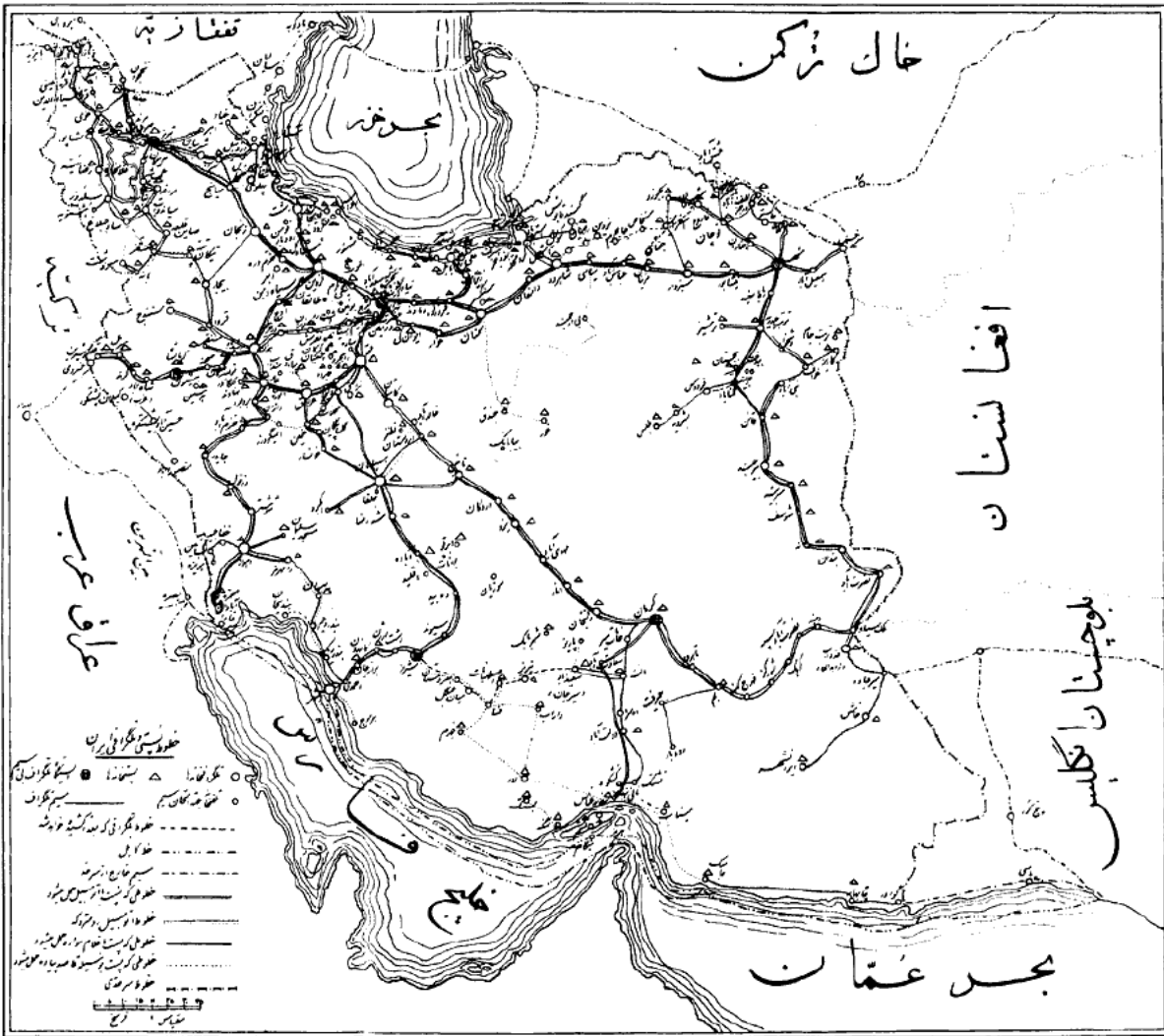


Figure 42. Iran's Postal and Telegraph Lines from *Detailed Geography of Iran* vol. 3 (1932a).

These maps are essentially the first of their kind. In these initial steps towards representing national space, 'Iran' is differentiated and separated from adjacent spaces by dotted lines. However, the adjacent spaces still do not represent national spaces. As seen in the map on the left (Figure 42), in the right and bottom corner, an area titled English Baluchestan (بلوچستان انگلیس) is included, indicating the continued presence of imperial space. Similarly, the phrase Turkmen soil (خاک) is used in the top right corner, illustrating that the space was not yet understood as national *territory* (قلمرو). Moreover, there are inconsistencies between the maps. For example, in the map on the left,

the western neighbor of Iran is referred to as Mesopotamia (*Beyn al-nahrein*) while in the other map, it is labeled as Arab Iraq. This indicates that first, space had not yet taken shape in the abstract sense, and secondly, the naming of spaces was not yet standardized and consistent even within a single book. Nevertheless, the extensive use of maps in geographical books of this kind clearly shows a fundamental transformation towards the production of Iran.

3. Imperialism and the Rise of National Economies

Imperialism is consubstantial with the modern nation in the sense that it cannot be other than *internationalization* of the processes of labour and capital (Poulantzas, 1980: 106). That is why Poulantzas argues even in the current phase characterized by internationalization of capital, the modern nation “remains for the bourgeoisie the focal point of its own reproduction” which takes the form of inter-nationalization of capital (Ibid: 116-117). By grounding the nation state on the relations of production, Poulantzas shows that “the State possesses a materiality of its own and, thus, a specific class nature. It is precisely a national State that is a bourgeois State” (Ibid: 117). As he explains, “it is this national State which organizes the bourgeoisie as the dominant class” (Ibid).

The gradual formation and consolidation of national economies should be seen in the context of imperialism. During the 1930s to the late 1960s, textile production was the dominant form of industrial production in ‘Iran’ (Ardakani, 1989). This is significant as it indicates Iran’s *late* development/production. According to the tripartite capitalist periodization³⁵⁰ (Albritton, 1991),

³⁵⁰ Capitalism developed because of its suitability to produce light, relatively simple use values (Bell, 2009: 9). In the mercantilist period the key use value was woolen goods. In the liberal era, it was cotton goods, produced by small, entrepreneurial capitalists in atomistic competition. In the imperialist period, it was heavy iron and steel goods, produced on a large scale by oligopolistic joint-stock corporations (Ibid: 13). Imperialism in this sense began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when countries such as Germany, the United States and France became developed capitalist powers and began to challenge Britain’s economic hegemony. The long depression of the 1870s, which followed the Franco-Prussian War, put an end to free trade. These countries could not follow the leisurely path taken by Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when it had no rivals. Instead, they imported a fully mechanized cotton industry from Britain and quickly created a class of property-less workers (Ibid: 192).

during these decades, the most important industrial consumer goods were no longer wool and linen, but steel. However, in Iran, the most significant industries in the 1930s and 1940s were textile manufacturing (Ibid: 178-179). The factories primarily produced for the state, which was their main buyer. Therefore, a consumer market was not effectively established.

By the time of imperialism, individually owned firms were no longer competitive with ‘capitalist-social’ joint-stock enterprises in heavy industry. It was no longer possible to finance these industries by the method of loan capital. Idle funds could not be left in the hands of rentiers and the middle classes if the accumulation of capital in heavy industry were to continue (Bell, 2009: 193, 194). By the rise of imperialism, the joint-stock company enabled its large shareholders, with a relatively small original investment, to acquire enormous amounts of socially available funds. This ongoing expropriation of rentier savings through the securities market made possible the reinvestment of a large amount of surplus value which would otherwise have remained idle (Ibid). So, the activity of bank capital extended from the mediation of the buying and selling of funds as commodities to the selling of capital as a commodity (Ibid: 197). The investment of capital abroad had already begun to play an important role in Britain in the heyday of liberal capitalism. This was against the development of a capital market that would focus on domestic industrial finance (Ibid). That is why Goswami (2004) attributes the lack of a national space in India to the absence of realization of surplus value *within* India. She argues that a disjuncture between the scale of the production of value and the scale of its realization characterizes an absence of a national state space³⁵¹. These shifts required the development of a national economy, in contrast to the non-national economy of Britain.

³⁵¹ Goswami’s focus, however, is not the absence of a national market.

However, Iran's industrial development, which occurred three decades later in the 1950s and 1960s, was largely driven by borrowing and loan capital³⁵². Consequently, it was unsurprising that Iran was unable to compete with countries like Germany in steel production. Even in the textile industry, the capacity to compete was lacking. The 1950s and 1960s are crucial periods to examine when analyzing the development of Iranian capitalism³⁵³. It was in the context of imperialism that Friedrich List's work marked a radical departure from the assumptions of classical economic paradigms. Classical political economy conceived the division of labour and markets as abstract configurations with no specific spatial extension. In contrast, the central organizing category of List's framework was the self-enclosed nation, signaling a shift to a place-bound focus. The place-bound nation was regarded as the territorial unit or container of economic development. Classical economic theory, in List's view, ignored the fact that between each individual and entire humanity stands the nation. List's reformulation of classical political economy was rooted in the problematic of German national unification in the context of Britain's world hegemony (Goswami, 2004: 215-216).

Mazandarani acknowledges the absence of national states, noting, "during the first half of the 19th century, Germany was considered an agricultural country lacking political and economic unity, with a feudal system prevailing *in its smaller states*. However, from around 1830, the German *states* [*keshvarhay-e Alman*] gradually extricated themselves from this situation, adopting a unified economic policy" (Mazandarani, 1937: 11). This reference to Germany not being a single state but rather a collection of independent states illustrates the non-existence of Germany as a

³⁵² Up until 1888, there was no bank in Iran. In that year, the New Oriental Bank, an English institution, opened branches in Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, Rasht, Shiraz, Bushehr, and Tabriz (Keyhan, 1932b: 398). The Imperial Bank of Iran was also established in the same year. In subsequent years, two other neighbors, Ottoman, and Russia, also established banks on Iranian soil. It was not until 1927 that the National Bank of Iran was established (Ibid: 407).

³⁵³ Bijan Hekmat identifies the growth of capitalism in Iran as starting after the August 1953 coup, essentially in the 1960s (in Etemad, 2010: 231). Etemad's book is essentially a Persian translation containing two articles by Perry Anderson and one by Ralph Miliband, supplemented with an article contributed by Bijan Hekmat.

national territory in the early 19th century. During this period, when the smaller states had their own customs barriers due to the absence of a central state and a unified economic policy, neighbors and the industrial nations of Europe easily penetrated the ‘German’ markets with their cheap products (Ibid: 12). The same process, in a more intensified way, occurred when it comes to Iran.

The concept of *Mamalek-e Mahruseh* essentially referred to the independence of various states within the country. This independence is particularly evident in the economic relations between these states. For instance, it is known that until 1903, customs barriers existed between these states, with numerous toll stations in place. For the transportation of goods from one state to another, customs duties had to be paid (Jamalzadeh, 1916: 8). Up until 1904, there were no organized customs institutions in the country, and the ‘borders’ were open to foreign goods (Mazandarani, 1937: 48-49). This implies that at least until 1903, a national economy and Iran as a unified economic entity was nonexistent. The beginning of a national economy can only be discussed around 1931, marked by the inception of the Law of Trade Monopoly³⁵⁴. Until that year, capital and money were continuously flowing out of the country (Ibid: 57).

Drawing from List’s perspective, Mazandarani introduces the first nationalist interpretation of economy (اقتصاد ملی) in Farsi, thereby portraying Iran as a national economy (Ibid: 16). Prefiguring a stagist understanding of social change, List envisages several historical *stages* for achieving such economic power, believing that nations must pass through these phases for success, which include the stages of savagery, pastoralism, agriculture, industrial agriculture, and ultimately the combined stage of agriculture, industry, and commerce. A nation thus can be deemed complete only after traversing these five stages. Every nation, in Mazandarani’s view, must not hesitate to make *any sacrifices* and *efforts* necessary to reach the final stage of

³⁵⁴ The Ministry of National Economy was only established at the beginning of 1930 (Mazandarani, 1937: 61).

development (Ibid: 17). Every nation, to achieve the highest level of development, must not shy away from ‘any necessary action’ (Ibid: 32). Following List, Mazandarani argues that as the state should support the political and social unity of the nation, it is imperative to facilitate economic progress and advancement through establishing railways, highways, canals, a central bank, and formulating comprehensive commercial laws (Ibid: 41-42)³⁵⁵. This clearly shows how a progressive narrative of nation and nationalism is formulated to legitimize the internal colonization of non-Persian regions.

In 1937, when Mazandarani’s book was written, even the concept of ‘border’ [*marz*] was not yet prevalent; instead the term frontier [*sarhad*] was used. In this pre-national space, defined by frontiers and independent geographies, the predominant lifestyle was still nomadic, and the central state essentially had no material means to intervene in this way of life. Customs policies alone could not create the necessary conditions for such interventions, as these policies were dependent on the expansion of communication (and later, transportation) infrastructures, such as railways. In October 1935, the period for all customs agreements with foreign countries ended, and the associated treaties were annulled (Mazandarani, 1937: 52). It is mentioned that due to the favorable geographical position, the land of Iran has *always* had an important role in global trade (Ibid: 54). This notion of perpetuity forms the basis of the understanding of Iran: “The country of Iran, with its current area of 1,645,000 square kilometers, is an agricultural land that, from the era of the Achaemenid dynasty to the present day, has always been the focus of attention” (Ibid: 113).

Mazandarani, deeply immersed in nationalist thoughts, overtly defends Nazism³⁵⁶. In his view, the proud sentiments and confidence in the nation’s activities and attention to national

³⁵⁵ This perspective emphasizes the critical role of communication routes in achieving economic success. For a detailed discussion on the infrastructural production of Iran, refer to the next section.

³⁵⁶ This was not limited to him. Prominent Iranian intellectuals like Mohammad-Taqi Bahar and Morteza Moshfegh Kazemi were also proponents of Italian fascism. Mohammad-Taqi Bahar, widely known as Malek osh-Sho’arā and

economic power are fully reflected in the public opinion of Germany, especially in the economic policies of the Nazi state which he considers a continuation and fulfillment of List's ideas (Ibid: 42). It is important to note that Mazandarani's book was written two years before the outbreak of World War II, in 1937, thus indirectly alluding to the connection between national economics and fascism. Mazandarani's book can essentially be seen as the manifesto of elite-Farsist nationalism in the context of imperialism.

Highlighting the late nature of the formation of Iranian nationalism, Matin argues that the establishment of the governing organs of a nation-state in the absence of a modern nation caused Iranian nationalism remained an elite phenomenon ('a nationless nationalism') (Matin, 2013: 69-70). The nationalist elites like Mosaddeq wanted to establish a capitalist *national economy* without any structural change in their own pre-capitalist advantages. The nationalist elites thought the oil industry can perform this task. Oil, Matin says, was supposed to replace primitive accumulation in Iran. He contends that "much Mosaddeq spoke as if he represented the nation, what he really represented was merely the *idea* of a nation" (Ibid: 94). This lack of nation as a social (and not merely *ideational*) reality and national spaces as a national *economy* has been connected to the simultaneous absence (or embryonic) existence of a national *territory* in Mosaddeq period. Iran as an abstract space had not yet been produced at that time. The absence of an Iranian nation is acknowledged to have persisted at least until after World War I. As Matin-Asgari argues "the Qajar system of decentralized and fractured sovereignties (*moluk al-tawā'efi*) persisted until after World

Malek osh-Sho'arā Bahār (literally: the king of poets), was a renowned Iranian poet, scholar, politician, journalist, historian and Professor of Literature. Morteza's father, was a religious man who worked at the Ministry of Finance. His grandfather, Mirza Sayyed Mehdi, was an accountant at the Qajar court. Initially taught by private tutors at home, Mortazā continued his education in several renowned schools in Tehran, including Dār-al-fonun and Alliance Française. See: <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/moshfeq-kazemi>

War I, when leading nationalist thinkers ... argued that an Iranian nation needed to be forged.” (Matin-Asgari, 2024: 312; 2009b: 137)

As Matin demonstrates, “at the time of Mosaddeq, national consciousness, let alone nationalism, was still an elite phenomenon” (Matin, 2013: 71)³⁵⁷. He highlights the paradox of Mosaddeq’s nationalist discourse appealing to a nation that did not yet exist. During that period the peasantry still ‘lived a secluded self-sufficient life in thousands of isolated villages’ (Ibid: 112-13). It is then plausible to ask how could it be possible to produce a national bloc in these hugely dispersed and disconnected geographies? Oil nationalization does not seem to be a sufficient measure to build a unified national space. Other physical communication infrastructures and technical advancements like cartography were necessary. I accordingly argue Iran as a national state of which a national consciousness is an essential element is absent at least up until 1953³⁵⁸. Further supported by my historical research, I argue that a national consciousness was not formed yet, as its physical basis was absent. The formation of Iran as a nation required its inscription into physical space of national territory.

The absence of national consciousness and nationalism – that is tied intrinsically to the lack of a national economy – cannot be understood solely through the lens of internal dynamics. Rather, it must be contextualized within the broader international landscape and the late nature of the Iranian state formation. The emergence of Iranian nationalism unfolded within a fragmented and uneven political structure, heavily shaped by international geopolitical pressures. In contrast to the Prussian state, Tsarist Russia, and Meiji Japan, in polities such as Iran, “the nationalist state

³⁵⁷ As Matin says: “At the time of Mosaddeq the overwhelming majority of Iranians still understood and defined their identity in the concrete terms of their relatively self-contained tribal, rural, religious, sectarian, or even urban neighbourhood communities.” (Matin, 2013: 71)

³⁵⁸ When Mosaddeq was overthrown through 1953 Iranian coup d'état. Fragner also implicitly echoes this point by emphasizing the role of nationalism as a tool of integration within ‘the strangely scattered and uneven political and cultural society’ of Iran from the mid-1960s onward (Fragner, 2020: 230).

formation became the precondition for industrialization rather than its consequent or parallel project” (Matin, 2013: 75). Defensive modernization under Reza Shah aimed to consolidate state power and preserve territorial integrity but did so without any effective attempt in building a national economy. Political elites, landowners, and bazaar merchants remained entrenched in non-capitalist economic activities, reinforcing precapitalist relations that impeded the formation of a unified national consciousness (Ibid: 82–83). As Matin says, “wealth and power of the landed aristocracy, bazaar bourgeoisie, and senior Shi’a ulama, the dominant forces within the parliament, flowed from predominantly non-capitalist economic activities.” (Ibid: 82) This structural disjunction resulted in the emergence of a nationalist rhetoric without a corresponding material basis for collective national identity (Ibid: 93). These internal fractures were compounded by international pressures that forced Iran into defensive modernization. The geopolitical imperatives profoundly shaped Iran’s political and economic landscape, ranging from the Anglo-Russian, and for a time Ottoman, military occupations during World War I to the October Revolution in Russia to the imposition of the 1919 Treaty, which rendered Iran a British protectorate in all but name, to the Great Depression (Ibid: 83, 84).

Building on the conditions inherited from Reza Shah’s defensive modernization, Mossadeq’s nationalist project sought to consolidate Iranian sovereignty through the nationalization of the oil industry (p. 91). However, Mossadeq’s vision of nationalism faced significant structural and geopolitical barriers – largely international in nature – that exposed the fragility of his project. Unlike the defensive modernization efforts of Reza Shah, which were authoritarian, Mossadeq’s strategy relied on parliamentary politics. This reliance proved insufficient in a spatially fragmented polity lacking a national economy and entrenched in precapitalist relations. His project failed to secure broad-based support among the rural peasantry, who remained politically isolated and

economically tied to landowner's hostile to his reforms (Ibid: 94). Mossadeq's nationalist discourse struggled to materialize into a concrete nation-building project, largely because the social and economic conditions for a unified national consciousness were absent. This situation culminated in the 1953 Anglo-American coup that ended his premiership.

Consequently, Iran's nationalist state-building project occurred by relying on coercive and top-down state mechanisms and external political pressures (Ibid: 88). This largely international process, or as Matin puts it, "defensive modernization under the whip of external necessity" (Ibid: 85) not only isolated the fragmented Iranian polity but also cemented its dependence on imperial geopolitical strategies, resulting in a nation state without a national economy and a national consciousness: "the tragedy of nationless nationalism" (Ibid: 88–89).

This structural – uneven and combined – disjunction between nationalist state-building and capitalist modernization in Iran mirrors a broader pattern observed in late-developing nation-states. As Goswami argues, national developmental paradigms assumed that the concentration of capital within a country would resolve the inherent disharmonies of capitalism (Goswami, 2004: 219). In the Iranian context, the absence of a unified national economy and the reliance on defensive modernization under international pressure meant that internal colonization functioned as a substitute for external expansion. Much like colonial territories served as a 'spatial fix' for mid-nineteenth-century British political economy, non-Persian regions within Iran became internal sites for consolidating state power and resource extraction.

4. Infrastructures of Imperialism, Technologies of Nationalism

The infrastructural and technological prerequisites for the formation of Iran as a unified political and economic territory were not fully established until the late Qajar period. In the early twentieth century Iran modern modes of travel were just making their debut – paved roads and railways

totaled fewer than 340 kilometers. Under favorable conditions, travelers needed at least 17 days to cross the 350 miles from Tehran to Tabriz, 14 days, the 558 miles to Mashhad, and 37 days, the 700 miles to Bushehr. Physical disconnection was a characterizing feature of the vast geographies of Qajar. The distance between Tehran and Fars was 933 km (Keyhan, 1932a: 219). By the end of World War I, only a few short line railways existed in Iran, built mainly for military purposes³⁵⁹. Proposed imperial railways did not envision a Tehran-centered national economy, rather, sought to attach markets of Tabriz, Mashhad, Mohammareh, or Sistan to frontier markets of the Caucasus, Trans-Caspia, the Persian Gulf, and India (Koyagi, 2021: 37). The infrastructural production of imperial space led to the emergence of national space and intellectuals of Iranian state played a crucial role in the process. The intellectual advocacy for building the railway was in fact seeking to produce a national economy (Koyagi, 2021: 61-62). Mokhber al-Saltaneh, for example introduced a railway act to the Majles in 1927 claiming that the proposed route would open up ‘the *unexploited* wealth of interior Iran to global markets’ (Ibid).

Given the absence of material infrastructures and technologies for communication in the late nineteenth century, the British or the Ottoman forces were more influential in Fars than Tehran. The British and Ottoman forces were able to be physically present in Fars and Bushehr. Thus, Tehran as the center did not exist and Iran as a national territory was absent a fortiori. Railways played a crucial role in breaking down spatial barriers, facilitating the flow of raw materials and British goods (Goswami, 2004: 48). The period of the depression of 1873–94 saw a global economic shift, with the United States and Germany adopting protectionist policies and compete

³⁵⁹ The Russian-built Jolfa–Tabriz Railway, the British-built Bushehr–Borazjan Railway and Nushki Railway not to Sistan but to Dozdab (present-day Zahedan) (Koyagi, 2021: 38).

with British hegemony, leading to significant state investments in infrastructure (Ibid: 66-67). The introduction of telegraphic communication and the railway made a new spacetime possible:

the British embarked on a program of developing the communication infrastructure in southern Iran from their base in Kalat (after 1854) through the construction of railroads, roads, and telegraph stations ... Such development projects were typical for nineteenth-century European *colonialists* (Mirzai, 2017: 46)³⁶⁰.

Among the first steps was the construction of the Bakhtiari road, which fundamentally enabled the connection of the then-independent Bakhtiari territory to the city of Isfahan. Ahvaz was also linked to the interior city of Isfahan only after the 1899 opening of the Bakhtiyari Road (also known as the Lynch Road) through the Bakhtiyari territory (Koyagi, 2021: 22). It is known that about 10 years prior to the construction of the Bakhtiari road, the Karun River had also been opened for *international* navigation. This necessity was a key force in the production of Iran because it physically connected the frontiers to the central regions. British companies acquired concessions such as the 1888 opening of the Karun River to international navigation up to Ahvaz, which contributed to the gradual rise of Mohammareh as a port city at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was a direct result of the infrastructural expansion that the inhabitants of Isfahan had access to clothing from both Manchester and Bombay. Other port cities such as Bandar Abbas and Bushehr were also tied to inland urban centers, Kerman and Shiraz respectively (Ibid: 22-23) indicating the initial stages in the physical formation of a unified national market.

³⁶⁰ This however indicates the conventional view on 'Iran's misery that puts the entire blame on the British (and Russian) colonial projects. This perspective ignores the multiscalar nature of colonialism and class alliances. This view confines colonization to the roles of Britain and Russia (Mirzai, 2017: 49) while neglecting the issue of internal-national colonization.

4.1. Energy of the Nation's Body: Discovery of Iranian Nature

The production of 'Iranian' nation required an immense amount of energy, which was secured through the extraction of nature. The production of Iran was closely linked with the discovery of oil and the commencement of its extraction by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. In 1901, William Knox D'Arcy negotiated an oil concession with Mozaffar al-Din Shah. Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) was created on 1909 short after the discovery of an oil field located in Masjed Soleyman. In February 1921, Reza Khan, commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade, staged a coup d'état (1921 Persian coup d'état), becoming the effective ruler of Iran. The Pahlavi dynasty was established by eliminating autonomist movements in different regions. The reign of Reza Shah is marked by the first moments of the nationally colonial production of Iran. Essential to this process was the state's potential ability to extract oil. Between 1910 and 1916, oil went from supplying only 5 percent of world commercial energy supplies to over 50 percent (Shafiee, 2018: 5). In such circumstances, the labour force was primarily needed to be produced to meet the demands of the emerging oil industry and infrastructural projects. It was the colonial necessities of the extraction of nature that formed and conditioned the extent of commodification of labour. As Ehsani (2017: 432) demonstrates, the social history of pipelines is one of local dispossession, marking the coercive incorporation of [indigenous] communities into broader national and global political economies.

This highlights the imperialist roots and aspects of the production of national spaces. Prior to the discovery of oil, the central state paid little attention to Khuzestan³⁶¹, being more concerned with the loss of northwestern territories and their fertile lands. Before the necessity of oil usage became apparent, major ports in 'Iran' remained underdeveloped well into the 19th century. None

³⁶¹ Khuzestan is the major oil-producing region of Iran, and one of the wealthiest provinces.

of the ports experienced significant growth in the 19th century, which was in stark contrast to other 'Middle Eastern' countries. Neither Rasht nor Bushehr, the major ports of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf respectively, exceeded a population of 20,000 until 1870. It was only with the development of the oil industry that the largest port, Abadan was created (Issawi, 1983: 39). The development of ports indicates the simultaneous and intertwined nature of the production of Iran and its formal subsumption into the international economy, primarily through energy extraction. This dynamic between infrastructural extraction of nature and nation-building is a key aspect of the production of Iran.

The expansion of communication and energy infrastructures was specifically crucial to the consolidation of Iranian state during the 1950s and 1960s. This period coincides with the time when oil and gas, among other resources, were being transported from the frontier regions (later, internal/national colonies) to the center, Tehran. The central state facilitated this colonial concentration in the center by establishing oil and gas infrastructures, as well as accompanying utilities like water, electricity, and telegraph systems. It is important to note that the 1950s marked a gradual shift from mazut and coal to diesel and electricity (Ardakani, 1979: 389). Energy, as the constitutive element of spacetime, is not only consumed in the act of moving; it is also materialized in objects and infrastructures (Sheller, 2018).

The natural resources had not yet been integrated into the sphere of reproducing relations of production, which can be attributed to the absence of a defined national territory during that period. Central powers in the region often defined their borders when oil companies required maps delineating their concessions (Shafiee, 2018: 15). So, extraction of energy (specifically oil) was crucial in the cartographic production of national state space. I argue that the cartographic practices of the state were hugely expanded to meet the necessary requirements of the oil extraction.

Moreover, the extraction of oil entailed attaching “property rights to a subsoil material owned by a foreign government in a region where local forms of property ownership already existed” (Ibid: 16). This highlights the imposition of the spatiotemporal matrix of the capitalist nation state on the non-Persian spatiotemporal regimes.

Infrastructure maps are predominantly date from the late 19th century, with a significant concentration in the early 20th century. The production of these maps should be analyzed in the context of the expanding needs of British imperialist capitalism, and the subsequent imperial rivalries which led to the emergence of other imperialist powers such as Germany, and later formal subsumption of Iran into the emerging *international* economy. Britain’s presence in the west and east of Persia had led to the infrastructural linking of these two regions to facilitate and expedite the imperial network for the transfer of goods and capital. For this purpose, a set of infrastructures including networks of carriage and wagon roads, railway lines, terrestrial and submarine telegraph lines, postal networks, and wireless communication lines were to be constructed across the southern belt of Persia. The construction of these communication infrastructures necessitated the surveying (above and below ground), mapping, and production of necessary maps for implementation. Consequently, most of the infrastructure maps of Persia were essentially those prepared by Britain (and to a lesser extent, Russia).

A review of the history of the production of infrastructural maps³⁶², especially those of proposed and implemented railway lines, clearly reveals that the expansion of infrastructural

³⁶² A few of these maps are listed below:

Existing State Railways of Iran in Tursinsky (1947), and *Existing State Railways* in Malek Aslani (1938).

A wide range of the infrastructural maps can be found in Qatar Digital Library:

Route through Persia on Horse Back (1887), *Skeleton Map of Telegraph Lines in Persia* (1899), *Submarine Cables* (1903), *Caravan Routes in S.E. Persia* (1905), *Skeleton Map of Bakhtiari country Showing Routes and Chief Rivers* (1909), *Heliograph Posts between Chabahar and Geh* (1922), and *Diagram of Wireless Communications* (1940).

I found a different set of infrastructural maps at the British Library:

networks in Persia was primarily aligned with securing the imperial interests of Britain in the south, east, and west (and to a much lesser extent, Russia in the north). The first railway lines within Iranian lands were located at the frontiers. One in the northwest near Jolfa close to Tabriz, and another in the southeast near Zahedan. The former connected the Azerbaijan region to Tsarist Russia, and the latter linked Baluchestan to British India. Apart from these, the entire territorial expanse was devoid of railways (except for some short lines like the one connecting Tehran to Shah Abdol-Azim). The Trans-Iranian Railway, which was later constructed during the era of Reza Shah, served more to facilitate the transport of goods, and later during World War II, military equipment, between the south and north (Britain and Russia), rather than integrating the regions and connecting the major and minor cities of the dispersed geographies of the Protected Kingdoms.

The imperialist expansion of infrastructural projects and their role in the production of Iran are reflected in historical maps. The map titled Post Offices and All Cities of the Protected Kingdoms, 1878³⁶³ (Figure 43) includes a frontier line, but the territorial boundaries are very imprecise and vague. This map provides a general layout of the urban network and communication structure of the territories, clearly revealing the island-like condition of the kingdoms and cities. The empty spaces on the map are clearly indicative in this regard. Another map (rough sketch), signed by Harry Pearson, in both Persian and English shows the route from Bushehr to Karachi and the submarine telegraph cable. The terrestrial and submarine telegraph cables are connected from Karachi to Gwadar. From Gwadar to Bushehr, there is only a submarine telegraph line and no terrestrial line. Interestingly, none of these lines pass through 'Iranian' lands.

Persia (1943) and *Iran* (1960) showing railways and pipelines, *Roads & Communications in Southwest Iran* (1940), *Shatt-al-Arab & Bahmanshir* (1909), *Map of Karun and Part of Fallahiyeh District* (1910), *Map of Fallahiyah and Part of Jarrahi R* (1910), *Map of Persia Showing Routes* (1880), *Telegraph Map Persia and Afghanistan* (1892 or 1893), *Water Supply* (1949), *Persia: Oil* (1949), *Climatic Regions* (1949), *Water* (1949), *Main Communications* (1949), *Cross-Country Movement* (1949), *Telecommunications* (1949).

³⁶³ Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN.



Figure 43. *Post offices and all cities of the Protected Kingdoms* (1878). From the Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran.



Figure 44. *Two docks on either side of the Ahwaz Dam* (1889). From the Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran.

In 1889, the map of two docks on either side of the Ahwaz Dam and the road connecting them was drawn by Abdul Ghaffar (Figure 44). Such maps exemplify how the land of the indigenous non-Persian peoples has been seized by state officials for infrastructural purposes like road construction and dam building. This process involves the expropriation of nature to produce national space. The map indicates that the land between the two docks has been allocated to the Haji Malek Company. Most of the prestigious land in Ahwaz is this section that the company has acquired. The maps were drawn to ‘objectively’ justify the forced expropriation of non-Persian lands. This process was not limited to that period and continued and consolidated to the 1990s and today. As Ehsani notes, following the ‘Islamic’ Revolution, multipurpose dams and water transfer projects were undertaken in the name of national development. Dams like Gotvand, Karun 3, and Karkheh led to the displacement of large numbers of remaining pastoralists and villagers in the highlands of Bakhtiari, Khuzestan, and Lurestan. (Ehsani, 2017: 437-438)

Three decades later, in map number 32 of the *Pocket Atlas of Iran* (Eghbal, 1926), which focuses on commercial ports and major routes (Figure 45), there is no complete railway line inside Iran. The only point of connection between ‘Iran’ and a railway line is in the northwestern region, where Tabriz is connected to the Russian railway line in The Tsardom of Russia. This map illustrates the lack of physical connectivity between different regions of Iran and their limited access to major commercial centers in the broader region. This also implies a lack of national territory in an infrastructural sense which has caused the absence of Iran as a national economy.



Figure 45. Commercial Ports and Major Roads from *Pocket Atlas of Iran* (1926).

A particular category of sources, directly produced by the Pahlavi state, serves as a report on the concomitant processes of the infrastructural projects and the formation of the national state. The book *Twenty Years of Iran's State Railway* (1947), by a Russian engineer who was the technical advisor of the Ministry of Roads, was released on the occasion of the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the railway's inauguration. The cover image depicts an iron bridge built over a deep valley, with a train passing over it, effectively representing the infrastructural materialization of the state. The book is enriched with these kinds of images, and maps. A map (Figure 46) encompasses all proposed railway lines in early 20th century Iran and neighboring countries. The book also includes several additional maps such as the Tabriz-Jolfa railway map, the Maku railway map, the narrow-gauge Pirbazari railway map, and the Zahedan railway map (Figure 47). The book features technical maps including longitudinal profile maps of certain valleys as well.

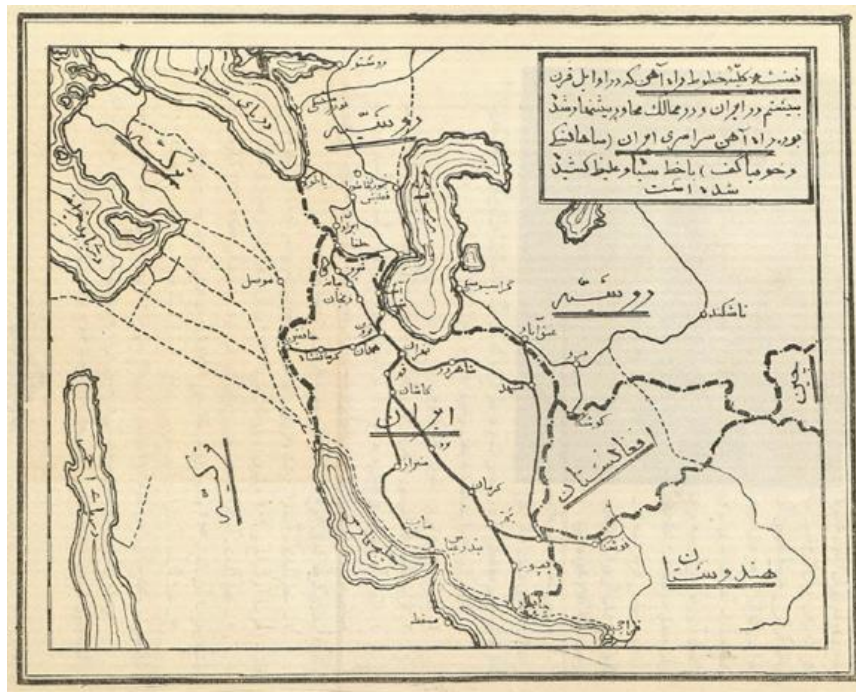


Figure 46. Proposed railway lines from *Twenty Years of Iran's State Railway* (1947).



Figure 47. Zahedan Railway Map from *Twenty Years of Iran's State Railway* (1947).

Mapping serves as the initial step in constructing railways and roads. At the same time, the communication infrastructure has made a cartographic representation of Iran as a unified entity

possible. The mapping of the distant and remote areas of the guarded domains became feasible only through infrastructural expansion of the state. *Trans-Iranian Railway* was published in 1938 by the Ministry of Roads to commemorate the completion of the construction of Trans-Iranian Railway. The book opens with a map of Iran in which the trans-Iranian railway is prominently highlighted and its borders are clearly delineated (Figure 48). Framed by the primary colors of the Iranian flag – green and red – this map symbolizes the Iranian national identity and its link to the infrastructural materiality of the state. effectively exemplifies the interconnected nature of infrastructural practices, the production of national territory, and nationalism.

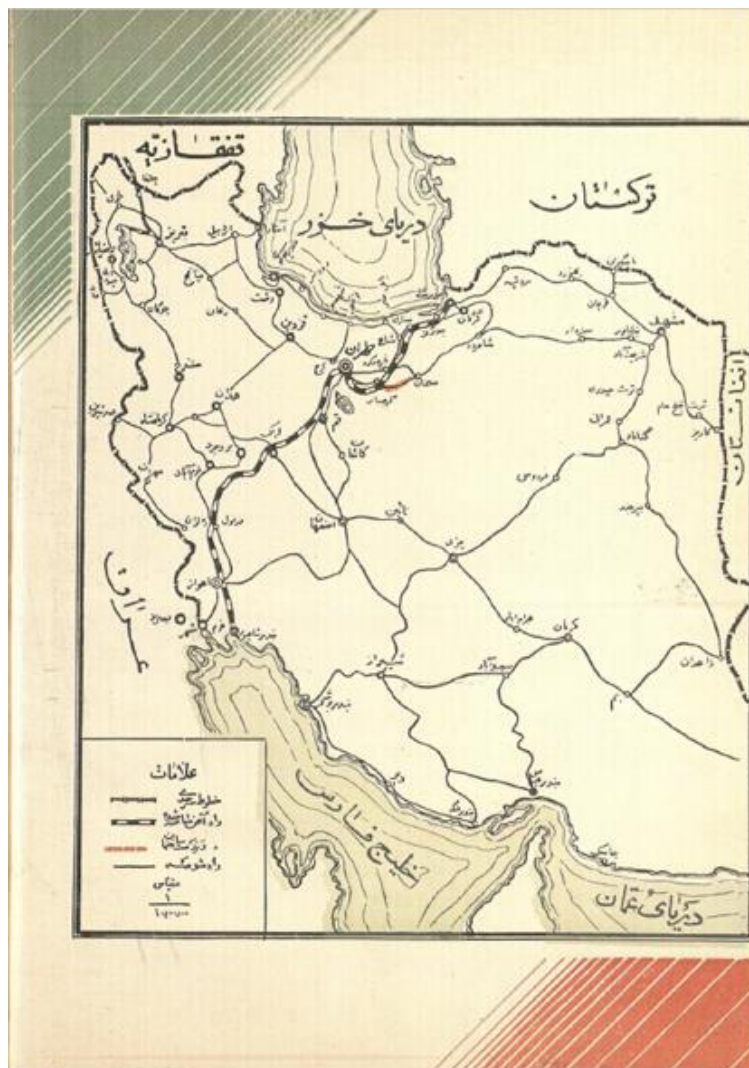


Figure 48. Map of Iran from *Trans-Iranian Railway* (1938).

Around two decades later, the cartographic representation of infrastructural materiality of the state underwent a shift. The transformation, along with the new level of spatial abstraction enabled by the infrastructural practices of the state, is distinctly reflected in the General Map of Iran³⁶⁴, 1953 (Figure 49) created by the General Directorate of Technical Cooperation for Iran, Engineering and Construction Section, in English. This map is a significant document in which distances between cities are given in kilometers. All distances are measured from Tehran, separately. One can argue that the infrastructural production of Tehran as a center, functions as a foundation to produce national territory. These qualitative changes were associated with other technological advancements. Only in 1956 was a contract signed between the Iranian customs and a British radio and wireless company, committing the British firm to equip Iranian customs with the latest radiotelephone devices, install telecommunication station equipment, and train Iranian engineers. This enabled the Tehran customs to be simultaneously informed of border situations and customs branches along the Persian Gulf (Ardakani, 1979: 320). Without these technologies, the central state was not feasible, as the necessary infrastructural conditions were yet to be established.

³⁶⁴ Shirazian, Reza. (2019): *Atlas of Old Iran*, Dastan Publishing.

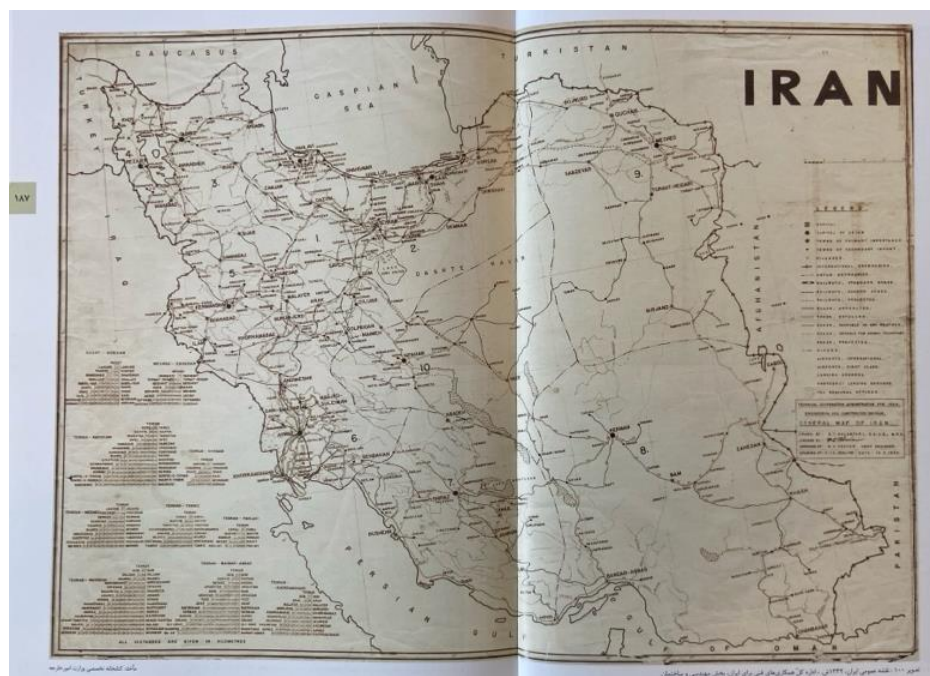


Figure 49. General Map of Iran from *Atlas of Old Iran* (2019).

The unification of dispersed geographies of *Mamalek-e Mahruseh* and, thereby, production of Iran was not solely reliant on the development of roads and railways. The expansion of telegraph and telephone networks, postal services, microwave and carrier networks, radio and television networks, electricity transmission lines, and oil pipelines all played a fundamental role in the production of Iran as a unified physical territory. As documented in *Iran's White Revolution* (1972) a wide range of maps illustrates these technologies and infrastructures. The book concludes with a map of tourist infrastructures, indicating a new level of expropriating nature through urbanization. In the 1970s, the production of Iran extended beyond the formation of administrative divisions, development of communication infrastructures, and nature extraction. Since the 1970s, the production of space in its entirety has become a key factor in the reproduction of class relations through urbanization.

The first section of the book titled *Geography* for the fifth grade in mathematics, authored by Ali Akbar Jalaei Far and Reza Khazael (1973) focuses on the economic geography of Iran. The

infrastructures built by the central state are depicted on separate maps. The book begins with a natural map of Iran, emphasizing that Iran is “a significant part of the vast Iranian plateau.” This is the first map that uses the phrase “Iranian plateau” written on the map itself. Other maps available in this book include the map of Iran’s climate, the Watersheds of Iranian Rivers, Cotton and Sugar Beet Plantations, Tobacco Plantations, Iron and Coal Centers (Figure 50), Distribution of Sugar Factories in Iran, Iran’s Oil Mines (Figure 51), Road Maps, Iran’s Railway Map, and Iranian Ports. These maps indicate that in the 1970s, the processes of natural resource expropriation and exploitation came under the surveillance and concern of the central state.



Figure 50 (Left). Iron and Coal Centers from *Geography* (1973).

Figure 51 (Right). Iran’s Oil Mines from *Geography* (1973).

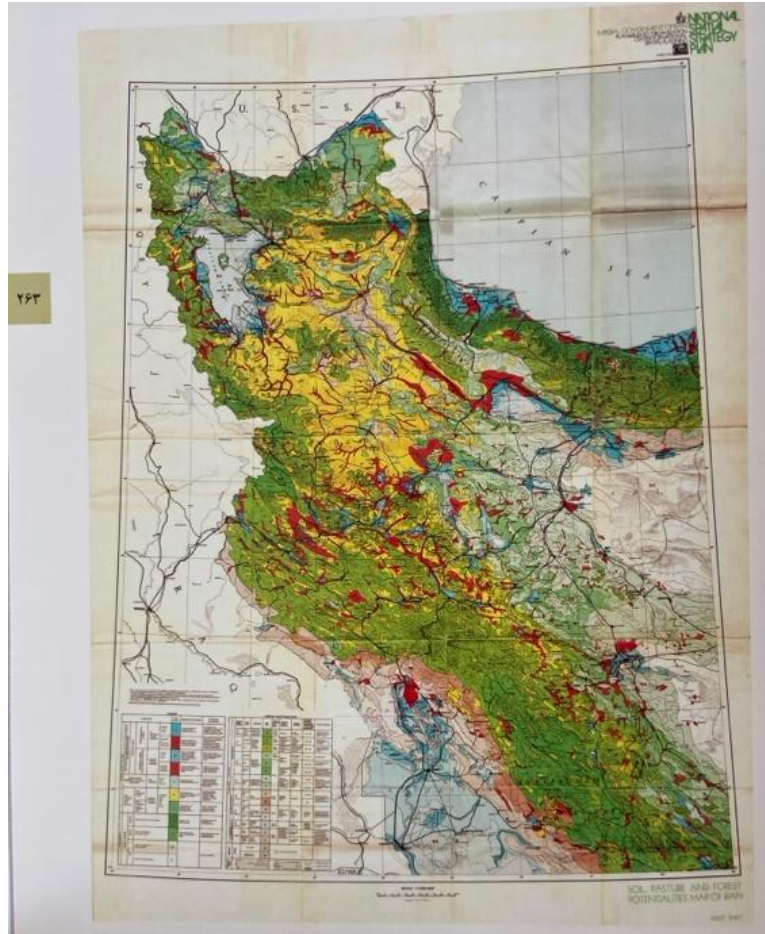


Over the decades, the discovery and production of ‘Iranian nature’ have continued, becoming increasingly abstract. *Iran’s White Revolution* (1972) represents the culmination of this colonial process (See Section 5.2. further below). The book/atlas includes a collection of distribution maps: the distribution of agricultural production. Alongside the previously mentioned ones (forest park maps, protected areas, approximate locations of Iranian forests, natural resources, river catchment areas, annual rainfall, meteorological stations, and oil fields), these maps depict the first step of the systematic expropriation and extraction of nature as a national phenomenon that did not exist at this scale before.

The *Map of Soil, Vegetation, and Forest Capacities of Iran* (1976)³⁶⁵, produced by the National Center for Spatial Planning under the Plan and Budget Organization in collaboration with Scetiran/Setiran Consulting Engineers, represents a significant milestone in the production of Iranian nature. This map (Figure 52) marks the first instance in which planning and consulting firms such as Scetiran became directly involved in the production of Iranian nature. Its unprecedented accuracy and quantification mark the advent of a new era in state cartographic practices. A process that began in the early 1930s with the state's administration of forests (Keyhan, 1932b: 15) reached its peak. This map exemplifies the transformation of the entire geographical space into an object of state knowledge and intervention, signaling a profound shift wherein no space – be it surface, aerial, or subterranean – remains beyond the state's comprehension, control, and reach.

³⁶⁵ Shirazian, Reza. (2019): *Atlas of Old Iran*, Dastan Publishing.

Figure 52. Map of Soil, Vegetation, and Forest Capacities of Iran from *Atlas of Old Iran* (2019).



It is through the systematic expropriation of nature and the subsequent production of national economy that ‘Iranian’ ruling classes are formed. The late production of Iran as a unified economic entity, due to its position in international division of labour, has been entangled with a high level of destruction and production of nature from the very outset. Therefore, representing Iran as a unified body through multiple maps that depict nature in its various layers serves as a prerequisite to produce Iran as a national market. It is only at this time that the state managed to incorporate ‘Iranian’ nature into the extended reproduction orbit at the international scale.

5. Urbanization of Space

One can argue that the historical-political transformation in the land has laid the foundational groundwork for the emergence of the Iranian modern state. As Matin has shown, the first state

intervention in the social relations of land has formed during the Safavi period (1501-1722). He analyzes Iranian state formation as a product of the synergetic relationship between tribal nomadism and Iran's primarily agrarian society which is mediated by the military-administrative institution of the *uymaq* as a distinctly nomadic political-administrative unit. Matin ties Iranian state formation to a particular class (Shi'a ulama) relationship with land under Safavids. The socio-political power emerging from Shi'a ulama's religio-administrative positions "was augmented by the conversion of vast areas of land by the later Safavi kings ... into *waqf* (non-taxable charitable) land" (Matin, 2013: 31, 41-42)³⁶⁶. With the rise of imperialism, the relationship between the state and land underwent further transformation following the Safavid period, particularly during the late Qajar and Pahlavi periods. Nature increasingly became a primary target of the state's infrastructural and cartographic practices.

Ehsani's urban history of oil capitalism in Abadan is of crucial relevance here. Using archival materials including historical photographs of Abadan, Masjed Soleyman, and Ahvaz, he has developed a local history of oil capitalism which narrates the contested and multiscalar process of forced imposition of capitalist market economy and wage labor on Khuzestan. Ehsani's work is specifically rich in addressing the shifting processes of property relations, land ownership, and land transfer contracts in the Bakhtiari highlands, and also the registration of all tribal territory as *Khaleseh* or state land after the invasion of the central state. As Ehsani shows, "the accumulation of capital in oil was predicated on the production of a new built environment on the ruins of the dispossessed Bakhtiari society." (Ehsani, 2014: 202). This built environment includes an assemblage of oil towns (Aghajari, Gachsaran, Naft-e Sefid, Haftgel), ports

³⁶⁶ These transformations strengthen the legal/judicial authority of Shi'a ulama which then was completed by their political authority that found its first explicit creedal statement in the re-articulation of the doctrine of *velayat-I faqih* (the guardianship of the jurisconsult) in the Qajar period (Matin, 2013: 42).

(Khorramshahr/Mohammareh, Mahshahr), administrative cities (Ahvaz), railroad towns (Andimeshk, Doroud) with all their physical urban infrastructures (telephone and telegraph lines and pylons, roads and railroads, and pipelines). Ehsani in this way indicates that the first round of capitalist industrial relations was introduced to Iran through a kind of oil-based capitalist urbanization.

From the early 20th century, coinciding with the expansion of British imperialist interventions cartography and map-making were prerequisites for the extraction of these natural resources. Identifying the precise location of natural resources and establishing communication routes for their exploitation would not have been possible without surveying and producing relevant maps³⁶⁷. Alongside producing maps that displayed the geographic distribution of natural resources like minerals, Britain also created maps of key cities, including port and frontier cities. Although, these maps primarily served British imperial interests, they laid a foundational base for the Pahlavi state to later expand its influence over the diverse and largely unknown geographies of Iran; a process that is a prerequisite to produce a national territory. Thus, urban centers and their physical and social structures were identified, and, alongside the mapping of natural resource locations such as oil, the most economically viable routes for the exploitation and transfer of these resources to local and global centers were identified and constructed.

If before this, especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, urban centers like Tehran, Isfahan, and Tabriz (which were more like vast fortresses with towers and battlements) were predominantly considered from a merely political perspective, the expansion of global imperialist

³⁶⁷ See for example maps in Qatar Digital Library:

Recorded Mineral Localities in Persia, Armenia, and Mesopotamia (1918), Bandar Abbas (1922), Kerman and Environs (1922), Meteorological Stations in Iran and Arabia (1935), Oilfields & Concession Areas in the Middle Eastern Countries (1945)

economies caused urbanization and the production of space to become key mechanisms in the reproduction of capitalist production relations. Urban centers became hubs of colonial production of peripheries and natural resources. It was now the *relationship* between urban centers and their peripheries that came into the focus of the central state's cartographic gaze. Space/environment began to emerge as a valuable economic and strategic resource. Prior to that time, areas outside the city walls were largely considered insignificant and therefore were not systematically mapped. With the formation of the nation state, *urban peripheries* started to take shape. This transformation can be clearly seen, for example, in the comparison of two maps of Tehran produced in 1857 and 1910³⁶⁸ (Figures 53 and 54).



Figure 53. Dar al-Khilafa of Tehran from *Special Maps of Persia* (2010).

³⁶⁸ Special Maps of Persia: Tehran 1857, Tehran 1910, دار السلطنه اصفهان 1923, David Rumsey Map Collection: Plan de la Ville Téhéran 1930, Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN: The city of Borujerd, date unspecified, Map of the surroundings of Tehran, 1302 Hijri (lunar calendar), 1885.



Figure 54. Tehran and its Surroundings from *Special Maps of Persia* (2010).

The map of Urmia, depicted as a circular fortress with seven gates, portrays the city of Urmia as a fort-city. This representation could be compared with earlier maps to observe the transformation from a fortress city to a more urbanized one. The date of the map is unspecified. Other fortresses are also marked on the map. The map of Bushehr³⁶⁹ (1860) (Figure 55) is more of an illustration than a map. Key locations in the city are numbered and explained in the legend. The map is filled with various annotations written in different directions, offering detailed descriptions of the city. The approximate map of Lorestan³⁷⁰ (Figure 56) shows Pishkoh and Poshtkoh, names of settlements (indicative of field surveying), and the land of Mesopotamia. Tribes and nomads are marked on the map, not with the intention of ethnic mapping. The map is filled with text, suggesting the state's intent to identify areas previously outside its radar.

³⁶⁹ Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN.

³⁷⁰ The year of drawing unspecified (though the year 1958 is mentioned in a different script at the top of the map).



Figure 55. *The map of Bushehr* (1860). From the Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN.



Figure 56. *Approximate map of Lorestan*. From the Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran.

The map of the city of Zahedan/Dozdab, 1932³⁷¹ (Figure 57), was surveyed on the ground. It was drawn by Engineer Kazem Zolfaghari and approved by Abdul Razzaq Engineer Baghairi. The map includes a section depicting trigonometric operations on the upper left corner, indicating the introduction of scientific/quantitative approaches to Farsi cartography. On the left side of the map, the road to Sistan and Khorasan is visible. Another distinction of this map is the depiction of urban blocks, possibly for the first time in Zahedan's mapping history. These blocks signify the formation of urban fabric and a qualitative transformation in space. Previously, space was mainly represented by natural features, and human-made features were mostly shown as points and lines. Now, however, a bounded territorial space is gradually taking shape.

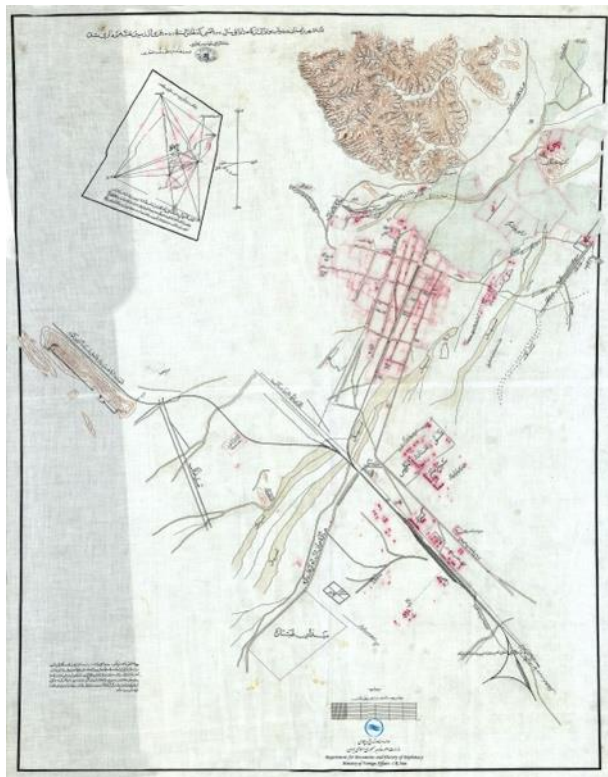


Figure 57. City of Zahedan/Dozdab (1932). From Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN.

Among a wide range of maps housed at the British Library, I examined a series of topographic maps of various cities dating back to the 1940s and 1950s, produced by the Army's Geographic

³⁷¹ Department of Documents and History of Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. IRAN.

Department³⁷². The 1950s maps, primarily focused on road networks, underscore the crucial relationship between communication infrastructure and urbanization. These maps appear to be based on earlier topographic maps in English from the 1940s, which are also available in the collection. Additionally, there are maps from 1946 depicting city road networks and parcel divisions³⁷³. The collection also includes detailed topographic maps of Tehran's neighborhoods and surrounding areas from the 1940s³⁷⁴, which feature various infrastructural elements such as qanats, water pipelines, electric power lines, oil pipelines, roads, and rivers.

Furthermore, these maps contain the first tourist maps of Tehran and several other cities, initially prepared in 1948 and more extensively in the 1960s by Sahab Geographical & Drafting Institute in both Persian and English³⁷⁵. Notably, several maps from the 1960s were commissioned by the Planning and Budget Organization and produced by the National Cartographic Center³⁷⁶ indicating the intertwined nature of urbanization and statist planning. Collectively, these maps reflect the urbanization of cartography and how urbanization has been recorded and produced in and through cartographic practices. It is also evident that many of these Persian maps were adaptations of original maps created by British cartographers, further highlighting the imperialist

³⁷² Geographical Office of Army's Press. For example: *Map of Qom*, *Map of Cholin*, *Map of Dezful*, *Map of Semnan*, *Map of Tehran*, *Map of Kabutar Ahang*, *Map of Mandalij*, all dated 1959, produced by the Army Geographic Printing Press. These are just a few examples; the author has photographed the rest of the maps for all cities of Iran that were available in this collection at the British Library, May 2022.

³⁷³ For example: 512 Field Survey Coy., Royal Engineers. (1946). *City plans of Senna, Meshed, Sultanabad, Dorud, Kazvin, Pahlevi, Chalus, Ahwaz, and Tabriz* [Map]. British War Office. Photograph taken by the author at the British Library, May 2022.

³⁷⁴ These maps were produced by the Geographical Department of the Iranian Army and published by the Geographical Printing Office of the Army. I photographed them at the British Library in May 2022.

³⁷⁵ For example: *Guide Map of Tehran and Suburbs* (1941), *Detailed Map of Saveh County* (1950), *New Map of Shemiran and North Tehran* (1959), *Guide Map of the City of Mashhad* (1960), *Guide Map of the City of Kerman* (1960), *Detailed Map of Tehran with Government Office Telephone Numbers* (1960), *Tourist Map of Tehran* (1961), *Tehran and Suburbs: Second edition* (1962). These are part of a vast collection of maps photographed at the British Library by the researcher in May 2022.

³⁷⁶ For example: *Kazeroon* (1963), *Sarab* (1964), *Shahrud* (1964), *Shahpur* (Azarbaijan) (1965), *Saqquez* (1965), *Kangavar* (1965), *Sarakhs* (1967), all produced by the Plan Organisation, National Cartographic Centre, at a scale of 1:2500. These maps are among a significant number photographed by the researcher at the British Library, May 2022.

influences in the development of cartographic practices and urbanization of nature. These maps laid the groundwork for subsequent land reforms, illustrating the intersection of cartography and urban planning.

It is no coincidence that the emergence of these maps in the 1970s aligns with the global rise of neoliberalism as the new form of the production of space-nature. The Tourist Map of Iran, 1972³⁷⁷, produced by the Iranian Tourist Organization, features images of ancient monuments such as Persepolis alongside natural attractions. Similarly, the *Road Map of Iran* (1973), produced by the Ministry of Roads, exemplifies the increasing trend of state ministries independently producing their own maps. This map is also accompanied by images of historical landmarks, including Persepolis and the Tomb of Cyrus.

5.1. Expropriation of non-Persian Lands through Legalization

Despite a few critical efforts such as Matin (2013) and Ehsani (2014, 2017), the history of land in Iran remains largely unwritten. The production of Iran has fundamentally emerged from the transformation of the relationship between the central state and the land, and later, nature in its entirety. I consider defining the relationship of individuals with land, the manner of land grants by the king to local rulers³⁷⁸, forms of land ownership, and later, land survey and registration all under the state's cartographic practices. Until the establishment of the judiciary and the enactment of the Civil Code (during Reza Shah's period), the preparation of documents related to transactions was in the hands of the Sharia judges, i.e., religious scholars who often personally wrote or had their scribes write and seal transaction documents. The more cautious ones would briefly note the

³⁷⁷ Shirazian, Reza. (2019): *Atlas of Old Iran*, Dastan Publishing.

³⁷⁸ Qazvini in 1868 differentiates three types of lands: Khālīṣa (Crown lands), Amālak-e Tuyūl-dādeh-shodeh (Feudal estates), and Amālak-e Waqf (Endowment lands) (Qazvini, 1991: 65). According to Jamalzadeh, Khalisjat or Diwani lands refer to properties that belong to the government, with their revenues accruing directly to the state. The origin of this system can be traced back to the era of Nader Shah (1736-1747) (Jamalzadeh, 1916: 138).

transactions in a ledger for their records, but this practice was not uniform (Ardakani, 1992: 168, 407).

The production of national territory signifies the formation of land as a legal relation, distinct from land as a property relation (Elden, 2013). But at least until the formation of the judiciary in 1911, there was no systematic legal connection between the Iranian state and land. The issue of land was considered a local matter. The first effort to place land transactions under state supervision occurred in 1881 and 1882. This was initiated by an Austrian baron, who governed Saveh, part of the dominion of Kamran Mirza. The Austrian baron presented a proposal to the Shah, seeking the registration and establishment of councils for the validation and correction of land documents (Ardakani, 1992: 170). In 1886, the first regulation for document registration was formulated during the Naseri era (Ibid: 391). At this stage, the focus was still on the economic value of land, and the state aimed to increase its revenue through the registration of properties and related processes such as taxation. This initiative was more about generating revenue than producing a national territory. It took nearly forty years for this issue to effectively become a concern of the central state.

The process of land confiscation and producing company towns goes back to the early twentieth century when the first major oil field in the Middle East was discovered in the Bakhtiari Mountains 1908. In order to create a permanent labor force, Anglo Persian Oil Company (APOC) imposed greater spatial control: “It created company towns and exclusive enclaves to house and train workers and control their spatial movements and extensive family ties and criminalized alternative forms of tribal economy in the territories under its control”. (Ehsani, 2017: 433-435) The discovery of the oil field in the Bakhtiari Mountains in 1908 initiated the violent process of expropriation and legalization of land. As Ehsani shows, APOC’s refusal to recognize collective

pastoral land rights – and its insistence on contractual relations with tribal chieftains was based exclusively on ... clearly demarcated and private property – led to violent upheavals and the eventual dispossession of local communities (Ehsani, 2017: 435-436). In 1923, the Law of Registration of Deeds and Properties was passed by the parliament, amended in 1925, and finally ratified in 1927 (Ardakani, 1992: 170). The concept of official property deed was first introduced in 1927. According to the 1927 law, all properties, including agricultural lands and buildings, had to be registered in the state ledgers (Ibid). The state then started to see/produce land as a legal relation. These measures were in the legal realm and there was still a considerable gap before these practices be inscribed in space and time.

The next steps were taken about a decade later. In 1936, a training school for survey engineers, intended for the General Office of Deed and Property Registration, was established within the Registration Office. Those who completed the one-year educational program and successfully obtained a formal certificate were employed as survey engineers in the Registration Office. The new class of specialized registration opened 25 years later in 1961, along with the opening of a surveying class that same year (Ardakani, 1992: 173). The standardization of land measurement, a fundamental prerequisite for central control over properties, was still absent even in the 1960s. Until at least 1966, the ‘village’ remained the unit of land measurement, not square meters, or hectares³⁷⁹. In the 1960s, abstract measurement and, consequently, space as an abstract and bounded territory still did not exist.

In fact, the land reforms can be considered the first systematic techno-political step towards the legalization of land. Land reforms, as a class project, were a key mechanism in imposing and

³⁷⁹ See: (Hooglund, 1982: 21-22). My reference here is to the pages of the Persian translation by Firouzeh Mohajer and published by Shirazeh Publishing in 2013.

normalizing private property relations in land, nature, and space. Through land reforms, we witness the legalization of private and/or central ownership of land, intertwined with the inorganic introduction of rental relationships into the social relations of production. These reforms were a fundamental prerequisite for the monetization of exchanges in land and agriculture. The monetary rent compelled farmers to produce for the market. Prior to this, farmers paid their rent in non-monetary forms, but after the land reforms, they were obliged to pay rents in cash. However, the monetization of production relations could not be widely implemented without the communication infrastructure. The distance from markets along with the need to move and quickly sell produce, hindered the transformation of barter transactions into monetary transactions.

This stage of land expropriation and commodification in the mid-1960s did not utilize technologies such as cadastral mapping. Due to the absence of communication infrastructure, the scope of land reforms was very limited. Furthermore, a significant portion of the lands were not agricultural but gardens and pastures, which even after the land reforms remained in the ownership of absentee landlords or non-farmers. Therefore, we cannot yet speak of nature in its entirety entering the production cycle, as the state had no control over pastures.

This legalization was a crucial aspect of the internal colonization of non-Persian lands serving to legitimize the violent expropriation of land. Land expropriation has been a key mechanism in the production of Iran. Expropriation of Turkmen lands by the central state is a notable example. Turkmen Sahra were ruthlessly invaded by agents of the authoritarian regime, led by the deposed Shah's siblings, following the coup of August 19, 1953. Over 75% of the agricultural lands and pastures of the area were seized from the Turkmen. The issue was not confined to *land* alone. The waters of the Gorgan River were also allocated to the royal guard's

farm and the like, forcing the Turkmen to resort to drinking rainwater or the residual waters from the riverbed pits (Gorgani, 1979: 6).

It is important to note that until 1933, the Turkmen Sahra was under the collective ownership of the Turkmen people, who held communal rights over all the lands. Each Turkmen tribe had specific territories known as *Yurts*, whose boundaries were well-known and respected among different tribal members. In this system, tribes could cultivate or graze their livestock on another tribe's *Yurt* during droughts or natural difficulties without needing permission or being obliged to pay grazing fees or land rent. If outsiders from beyond the plains sought to use the pastures, they were required to pay a levy, as the Turkmen's ownership of the plain was recognized by the central state and neighboring Persians (Ibid: 12-13). This non-capitalist mode of production³⁸⁰ was highly advanced, in stark contrast to the backward and oppressive nature of capitalism.

Reza Shah's land expropriation, especially of Turkmen territories, began with the 1933 law on state land sales and agricultural/industrial loans, allowing him to buy state lands, often through coerced sales or direct seizure. This process, often enforced by threats or force, resulted in over 44,000 properties being registered to the Shah, facilitated by the Office of Special Properties (Gorgani, 1979: 21-22). Post-September 1941, there was a public outcry for the return of lands taken by Reza Khan and the invalidation of related deeds. Mohammad Ali Foroughi and his colleagues aimed to uphold the monarchy by legitimizing the Shah's land ownership, leveraging Foroughi's legal expertise. This underscores how capitalist property rights were initially molded to bolster the state's power and validate its land expropriation.

³⁸⁰ This account of the Turkmen Sahra brings another important point to light. Accepting that this region practiced a unique non-capitalist mode of production, it can be argued that in the vast and diverse geographical, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic landscapes of Iran, each area could potentially have had its mode of production. Thus, discussing a single mode of production for 'Iran' or labeling its economy as capitalist, feudal, or otherwise becomes problematic. The scale of study for modes of production cannot be the abstract conception of Iran. By integrating space and nature into historiography, dominant Iran-centric methodologies can be challenged.

The 1942 property claims law, ratified by Iran's National Consultative Assembly, failed to address the unlawful nature of the Shah's acquisitions, or restore lands to original owners, setting a tight six-month claim window. Hindered by language barriers, illiteracy, unawareness, and logistical challenges, many rightful owners lost their claims, further entrenching state ownership through legal and spatial barriers. The function of this law was essentially to usurp lands within a specific timeframe and to allocate it to the central state. This era, led by constitutional advocate Mohammad Ali Foroughi, witnessed the state's consolidation as the primary landowner, shaping its territory and time. Foroughi's role contrasts his progressive image in Farsist history of Iran.

Expropriation of Turkmen Sahara's land extended to coercing Turkmen tribes into unpaid labour (*biqar*) for agricultural production and infrastructure development, under the guise of the 1935 Cotton Monopoly Law. This exploitation was part of a broader scheme of physical and cultural domination, including forced settlement and land cultivation without compensation. The regime's oppressive tactics intensified in 1949, coinciding with the start of the *Geographical Encyclopedia of Iran*, representing the conceptual aspect of the occupation of land. In those years, William Douglas, a U.S. Supreme Court Justice, stated that land should be given to the peasants to prevent the spread of communism. The Shah then issued the 1950 decree on the division of royal lands. Following this decree, the Pahlavi Estates and Properties Administration immediately began *mapping* the villages of the Turkmen Sahara (Ibid: 45). Thus, we witness the beginning of mapping for the national occupation of lands in the Turkmen Sahara. This colonial invasion and occupation of non-Persian lands and territories was neither confined to the Turkmen Sahra nor limited to this historical period. Focusing on the Sarhad region, Salzman illustrates how Baluchestan was occupied by Persian forces in the 1930s. As he demonstrates, "the tribal independence, military strength, and economic self-sufficiency of the Baluchi period were lost

with the Iranian conquest of the Sarhad during the mid- 1930s.” (Salzman, 2000: 346) The legal aspect of land seizure was intertwined with a cartographic aspect. It was these cartographic practices of the central state that inscribed legal representations onto spacetime. Gorgani also demonstrates how geopolitical imperialist disputes are directly linked to land and the extraction of natural resources. The 1953 coup, in a sense, was primarily aimed at facilitating the appropriation of lands.

Expropriation of non-Persian lands was implemented through different spatial strategies. The practices of administrative division were employed to alienate, destroy, and nationally colonize the Turkmen. In a process of settler colonization, the Turkmen Sahra’s lands were transferred to influential politicians, aiming either to depopulate the region of Turkmen people or at least to assimilate their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural traits among Persian populations settling in the area. In the administrative divisions, the Turkmen Sahra was fragmented/separated, each part annexed to adjacent Persian areas, to marginalize the Turkmen. This policy aimed to shatter the geographical unity of the Turkmen Sahra, making it easier for the state to suppress the Turkmen. As Gorgani says, the strategy of disintegrating the Turkmen Sahra was implemented by Asadollah Alam³⁸¹ who particularly insisted on selling Turkmen lands to non-natives, believing that a landless Turkmen would be forced to migrate to other cities in Iran for work (Gorgani, 1979: 54, 55).

It can be argued that land expropriation, displacement, administrative divisions, and cultural genocide were all part of a strategy for colonizing non-Persian peripheralized regions, thereby producing Iran as a national spatiotemporal matrix. Under the 1050 decree, 2,000 villages claimed

³⁸¹ Asadollah Alam (1919-1978) was prime minister during the Shah’s regime from 1962 to 1964. He was also minister of Royal Court, president of Pahlavi University and governor of Sistan and Baluchestan Province.

by the Shah were to be distributed among farmers, with the surplus villages being sold to non-natives (Ibid: 59). This sale to non-natives, as I mentioned, indicates a form of settler colonialism³⁸² in the Turkmen Sahra³⁸³. Here again, the state's cartographic practices were pivotal. If a village had 700 hectares of land, the Pahlavi Foundation would issue a transaction deed for up to 1,000 hectares. This meant that 300 hectares of land, which didn't physically exist, were being paid for (Ibid: 69). These actions took place around the early 1960s, indicating that it was only at this time that the use of surveying and cartographic technologies like cadastre and the legalization of individual land ownership effectively began, playing a crucial role in the production of Iran.

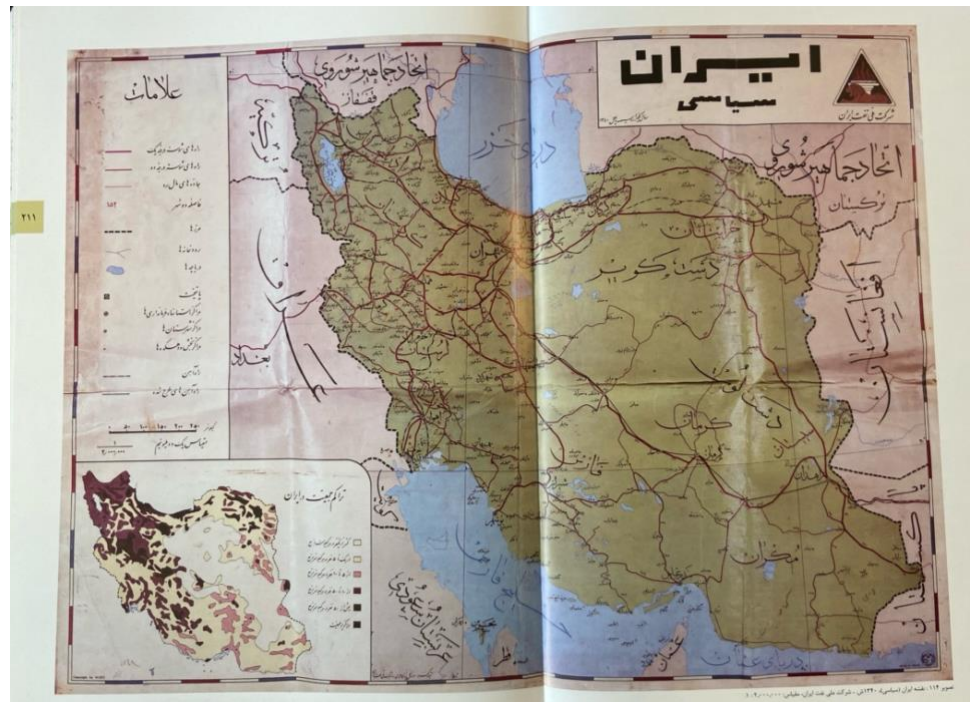
This colonial expropriation of land and nature is traceable in the cartographic representations. The (political) map of Iran, 1961 (Figure 58), created by the National Iranian Oil Company, is the first map prepared by the company. Notably, Baluchestan is absent, replaced instead by Makran. The state's conflict with Baluchestan is more pronounced than in other non-Persian regions. This conflict is even evident in the naming conventions used on the map. The economic map of Iran, 1961, produced again by the National Iranian Oil Company, signifies the company's direct involvement in creating a representation of nature and urbanization, further contributing to the production of Iran as a national economy. This map highlights the extraction of natural resources and the necessity of cartography in the process. It displays agricultural and

³⁸² Patrick Wolfe (2006) defines settler colonialism as a system rather than a historical event, that perpetuates the erasure and destruction of native people as a precondition for expropriation of lands and resources.

³⁸³ Another form of settler – and/or inter-subaltern – colonialism can be identified in Baluchestan, where the Kurds, or “Kurdish Hakoms,” attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to transform local tribes into *riyati*, or political dependents. More specifically, the Kurdish rulers established a *rayat* taxation system through which they regularly collected a substantial portion of agricultural produce in kind from subordinate farming communities labeled *rayati*. Notably, the Kurds remained loyal to the Iranian crown, governed as its agents, and received varying degrees of support and encouragement from the Iranian state (for more details see Salzman 2000: 285, 312-313). The construction of new towns for Persian settlers represents another manifestation of settler colonialism. As Salzman shows, in the fall of 1967, “Zahedan was a raw, newly built, monochromatic, Persian administrative town, occupied by Persian bureaucrats, technicians, and military.” (Ibid: 146)

livestock products in various regions. Refineries, oil rigs, and oil-rich areas are also clearly marked on the map, making it a pioneering effort in its category.

Figure 58. Political Map of Iran from *Atlas of Old Iran* (2019).



Land reforms were an effective step towards the production of abstract space, as distinct from non-capitalist spaces. The distribution of small agricultural land parcels to farmers during the land reforms was an initial step in the parcelization of space. Previously, agricultural practices were often based around some form of collective work and institutes like Boneh³⁸⁴, but this distribution of land to farmers systematically individualized everything, representing the entrance of individualistic, capitalist logic of production into land relations. Additionally, the land reforms laid a fundamental groundwork for the emergence of a new class primarily engaged in real estate. from

³⁸⁴ At a time when capitalist relations had not yet become dominant, a rural landowner, often known as a 'nasaq' owner, typically did not work alone on a piece of land. The arable land was divided into units, and the work on it was carried out collectively. Each group of farmers sharing a 'nasaq' was called a 'bonneh', and the duties of the individuals in the bonneh were clear (Hooglund, 1982: 51). Usually, a *bonneh* was not formed from contiguous plots of land. At the beginning of each agricultural year, the heads of the *bonnehs* would make decisions regarding the division of fields among the *bonnehs* and the scheduling for water distribution. The heads of the *bonnehs* and other farmers would decide which *nasaq* owner would be a member of which *bonneh* during the current season (Ibid: 54).

the mid-1970s, a specific type of absentee smallholders emerged. These land speculators bought agricultural lands within a 30 to 50-kilometer radius of cities, hoping to profit from their resale for industrial development or housing. They bought these lands cheaply from indebted farmers planning to look for work in the cities. Previously, such farmers would lease their lands to relatives or neighbors when unable to cultivate themselves, keeping the land under cultivation. However, when urban landowners bought these lands, they did not consider their agricultural potential (Hooglund, 1982: 152). Confirming Lefebvre's emphasis on the trinity formula and the production of space, this shows that, parallel to the introduction of private property regime, the significance of land and space even further intensified. Instead of cultivating them, the emerging real estate class fenced off the lands/properties and left them idle. This reflects the intensified role of land rent, where the land value was derived not from its use value but from its potential as a speculative investment.

5.2. Land Reforms as Cartographic Revolution

As discussed, it was not until the second half of the 1970s, particularly during the final years of the Pahlavi regime, that the use of maps became both widespread and integral to school curricula. This development aligns with the broader cartographic advancements of the period, making it pertinent to discuss the book *Iran's White Revolution*. Published by the Ministry of Interior in 1972, this book indicates a significant achievement in cartographic practices of the state. A map of Iran was prominently featured on the front and back covers (Figures 59 and 60) symbolically marking what can be described as a cartographic revolution. This revolution not only mirrored the broader spatial but also played a vital role in facilitating them.

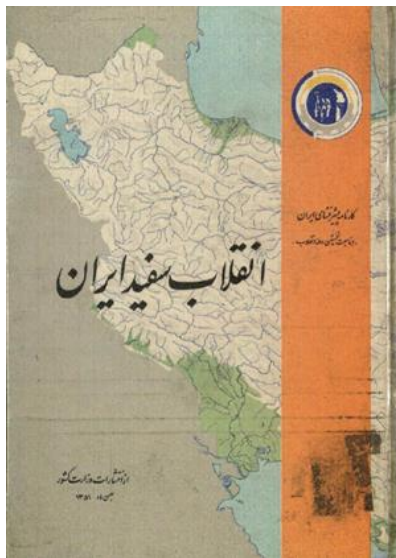


Figure 59 (Left). Front cover of *Iran's White Revolution* (1972).

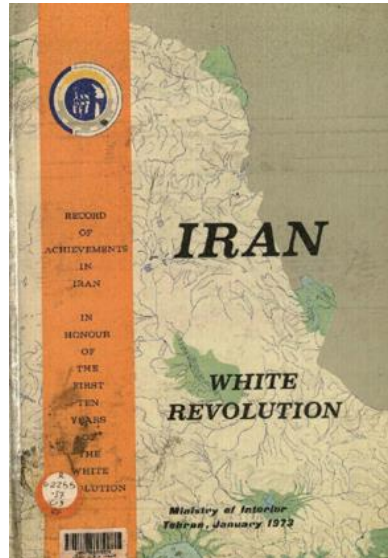


Figure 60 (Right). Back cover of *Iran's White Revolution* (1972).

Based on the examined cartographic practices so far and the more detailed maps published in *Iran's White Revolution*, it can be argued that it was not until the 1970s that the necessary conditions were established to produce Iran as a national territory-economy. This period marked a critical juncture where the convergence of advanced cartographic techniques and state planning enabled the conceptualization, production, and management of the national economy. Among these conditions is the capacity for producing abstract representation of Iran. This book was intended to present a comprehensive visual and detailed account of the achievements of the White Revolution³⁸⁵, with a particular focus on the outcomes of the land reforms. The extensive use of maps throughout the book is so integral that it effectively functions as an atlas of the White Revolution. It was only through this cartographic revolution that the state was able to depict Iran as a unified entity. This new capability enabled the state to *practically* claim authority over the space. The state's infrastructural interventions in spacetime during the 1960s and 1970s allowed it not only to recognize its own space but also to produce it as a – forcefully – unified national

³⁸⁵ White Revolution, aggressive modernization program implemented in Iran in 1963 and continued until 1979. It is believed that the reforms, undertaken by Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, upended the wealth and influence of the traditional landowning classes, altered rural economies, and led to rapid urbanization and Westernization.

territory. Therefore, this atlas is not merely a representation of the White Revolution or land reforms; it rather signifies a revolution in cartography.

The maps included in this book are filled with charts and other visual techniques for disseminating information, methods that were unprecedented. Consequently, this atlas represents the apex of quantification and abstraction of space. I argue that the White Revolution was as much focused on the visual and cartographic representation of Iran as a unified, knowable, and physically accessible space as it was on land redistribution or the implementation of political and administrative reforms. Indeed, one might suggest that the former was the primary, albeit implicit, objective of the White Revolution. Let us not forget that the 1960s, were a decade characterized by a quantitative revolution in geography that facilitated the production of abstract state space.

The book opens with a map illustrating Iran's position in the Middle East (Figure 61), which is the first map of Middle East in its kind. This map provides a comprehensive representation of the national territories that were produced mostly following World War I and in the subsequent years. At the beginning of each section of the book, the title of the section is accompanied by an image of Iran's map, further reinforcing the abstract representation of space (Figures 62 and 63).

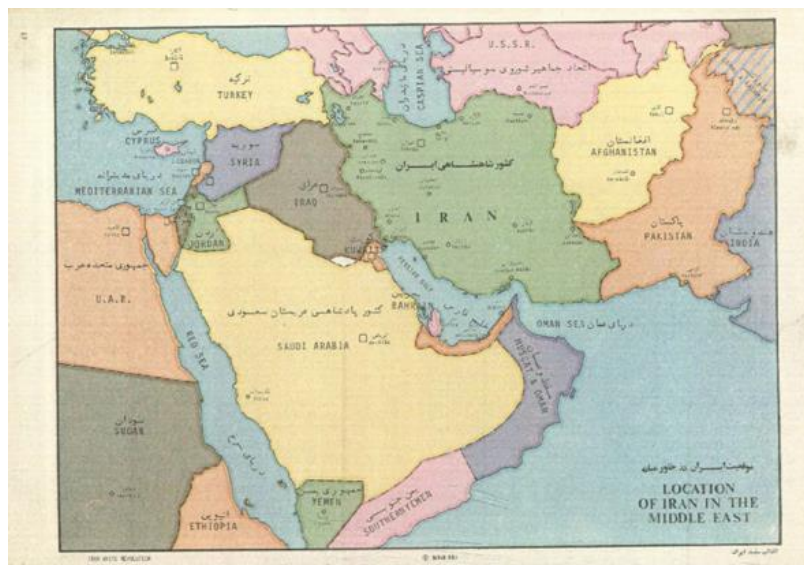


Figure 61. Map of the Middle East from Iran's White Revolution (1972).

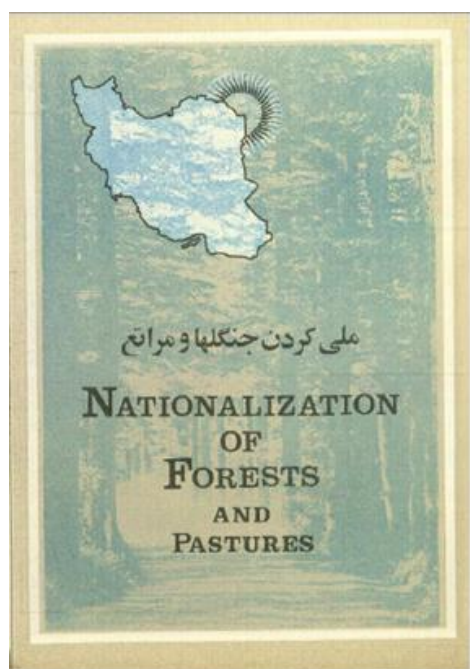


Figure 62 (Left). Nationalization of Forests and Pastures from Iran's White Revolution (1972).

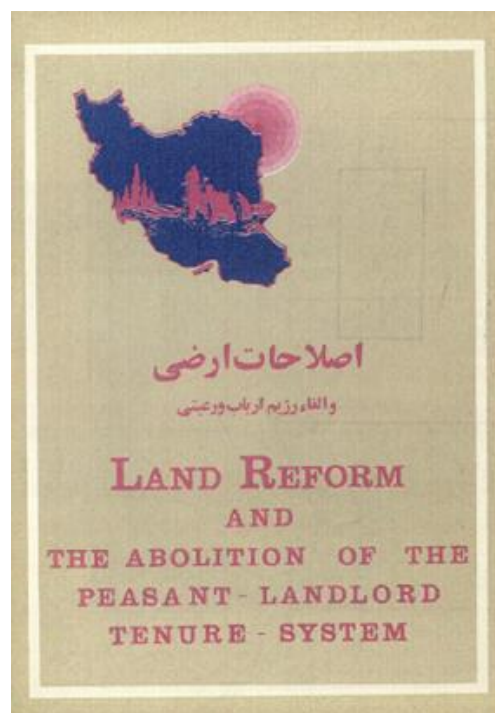


Figure 63 (Right). Land Reform and the Abolition of Peasant-Landlord Tenure System from Iran's White Revolution (1972).

Maps such as those depicting forest parks and protected areas (Figure 64), the approximate location and distribution of forests, natural resources, river catchment areas, annual rainfall, meteorological stations, and oil fields clearly indicate the initial systematic steps taken in the expropriation and extraction of nature. These maps, particularly the one illustrating oil fields, reveal a new level of spatial abstraction. A detailed list of forest parks and protected areas is provided (p. 42) which reflects the state's growing capacity to map and thereby produce 'Iranian' nature.

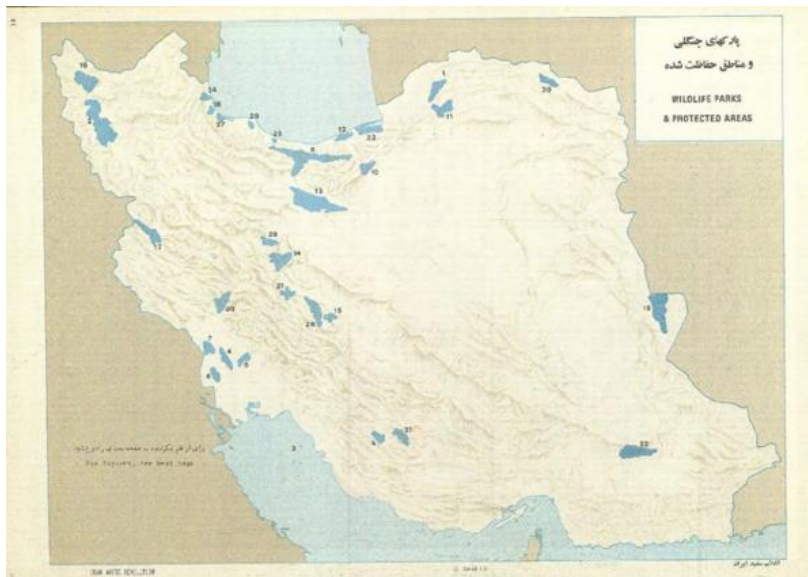


Figure 64. Wildlife Parks & Protected Areas from *Iran's White Revolution* (1972).

This book can indeed be considered as the first Farsi infographics. It is filled with a combination of maps and diagrams (Figures 65 and 66), placing less emphasis on textual content. These two maps depict the distribution of industries in 1972-1973. The concentration of industries in the central and northern regions, followed by the western parts, is evident while there is a limited number of factories in the eastern and southeastern areas.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁶ In the right-side map, the numbers within the circles represent the number of factories in each province and general governorate. The numbers in the rectangles indicate the number of workers in these factories. It is not clear whether these represent all the existing industrial factories or only those in which workers have a share of the profit. Additionally, the number of workers refers to the number of workers who have a share in the profit.

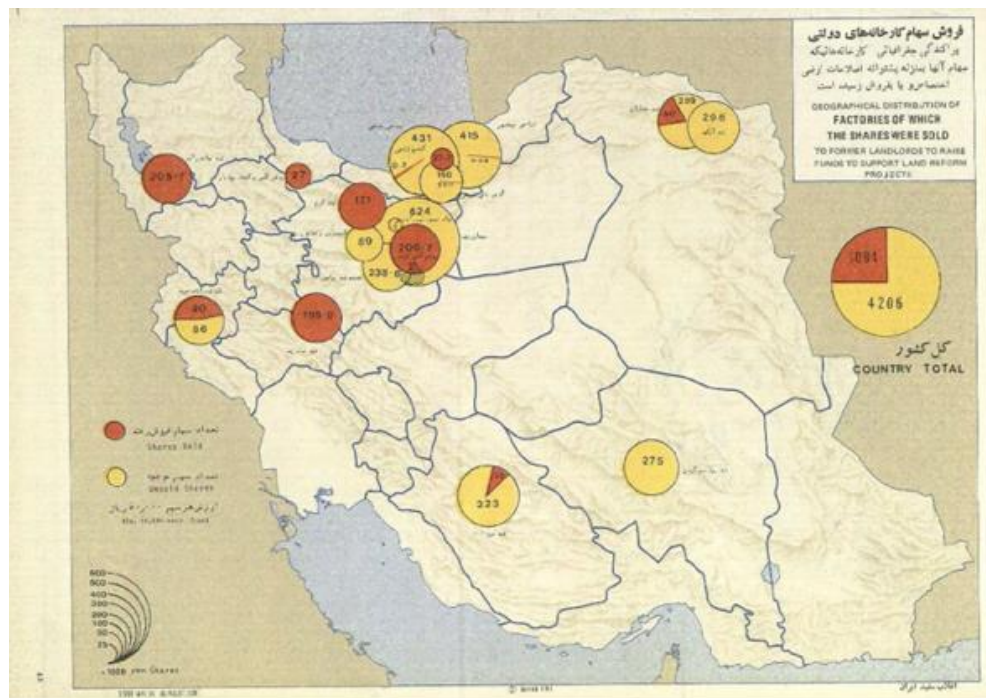


Figure 65. Sale of Shares of State-owned Factories from Iran's White Revolution (1972).

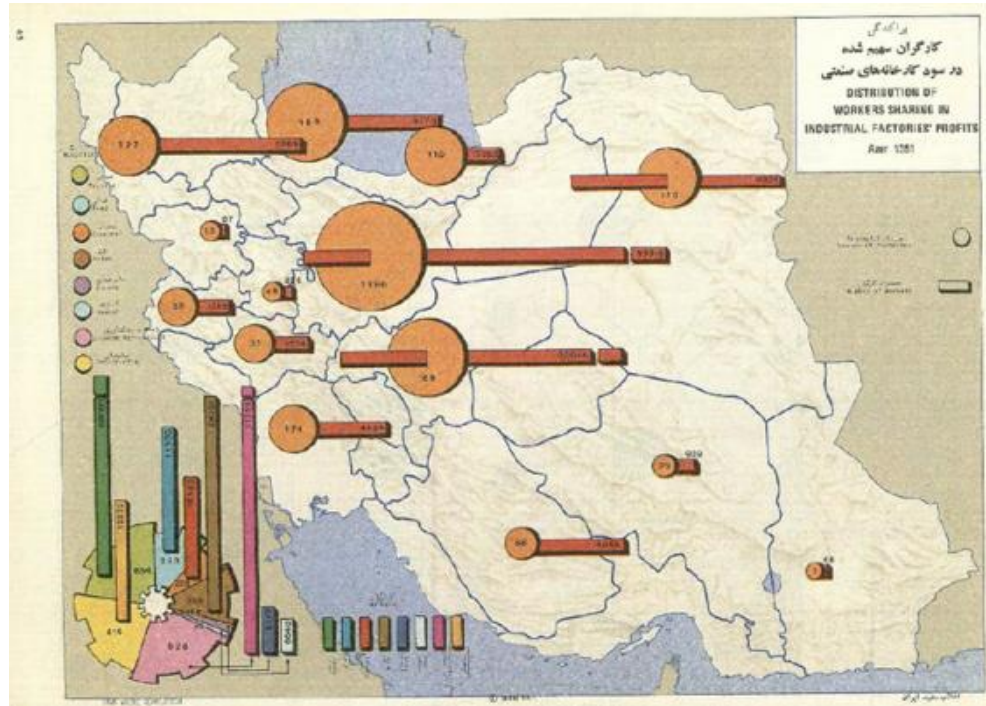


Figure 66. Distribution of Industries from Iran's White Revolution (1972).

In this book, the divisions of national space, for the first time, extend beyond the basic administrative boundaries such as provinces and counties, to include separate maps for electoral districts. Among these are maps illustrating the geographical distribution of representatives in the 'National' Consultative Assembly (*Majles*) and the Senate. These maps not only underscore the

constructed nature of administrative divisions but also emphasize the centrality of Tehran in the national space (Figures 67 and 68). The first map (on the left) reveals the gendered nature of the national space and its relation to the colonization of non-Persian peripheries by the center. The number of male representatives stands at 252, while there are only 16 female representatives, the majority of whom are concentrated in Tehran. Furthermore, an examination of the maps illustrating the distribution of industries reveals a stark absence of industries in provinces such as Sistan and Baluchestan, and Ilam. This lack of industrial development in these non-Persian regions underscores the colonial nature of the national space.



Figure 67. Senate Representatives from Iran's White Revolution (1972).



Figure 68. National Consultative Assembly Representatives from Iran's *White Revolution* (1972).

A map titled Population Density in Counties³⁸⁷ (based on the 1966 census) (Figure 69) goes beyond the provincial (*ostani*) level, for the first time, dividing the national space into smaller pieces of counties (*shahrestanha*). This indicates a new degree of abstraction of space. Furthermore, for the first time, a map has been generated that provides a comparative depiction of *urban* and *rural* populations in the counties using a circular diagram (Figure 70). This approach not only introduces a new level of spatial division and abstraction of space but reflects a reduction in defining population components of the national state space base on a Farsist dualism: *shahri* vs *roustaei* (urban vs rural). Notably absent from the book is any map illustrating the dispersion of tribes and nomadic populations, which implicitly gives the wrong – statist – impression that the entire population of the country has become sedentary, and the nomadic, mostly non-Persian spatiotemporal regimes are eliminated. Towards the end of the book, the roads of Iran in the years 1926 and 1941 are compared in two maps (Figure 71). These maps clearly indicate the physical

³⁸⁷ In this map, dark blue represents the highest population density, while white represents the lowest population density.

connections of scattered and inaccessible geographies of Iran in those years that was a major obstacle to the entry of nature into the nationally colonial and late production of Iran in the context of international division of labour.

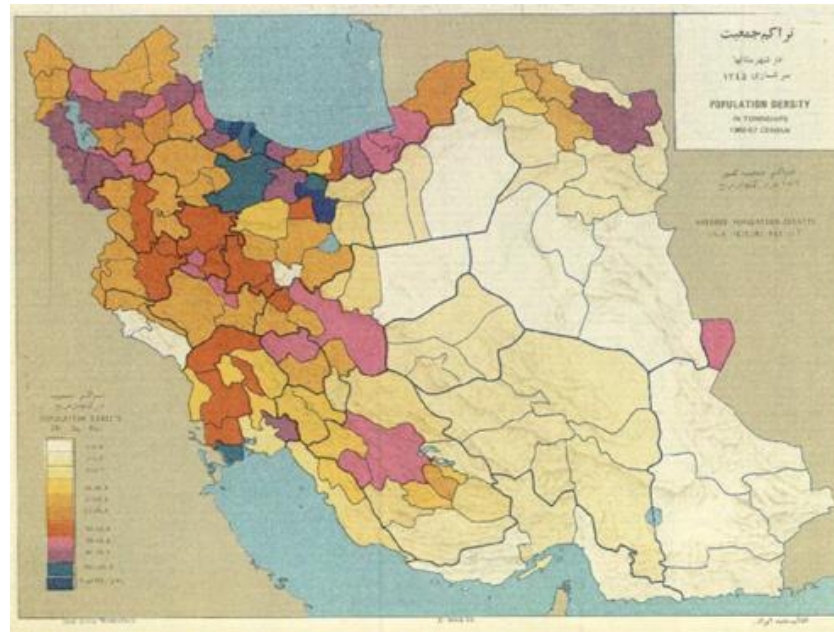


Figure 69. Population Density in Counties from *Iran's White Revolution* (1972).

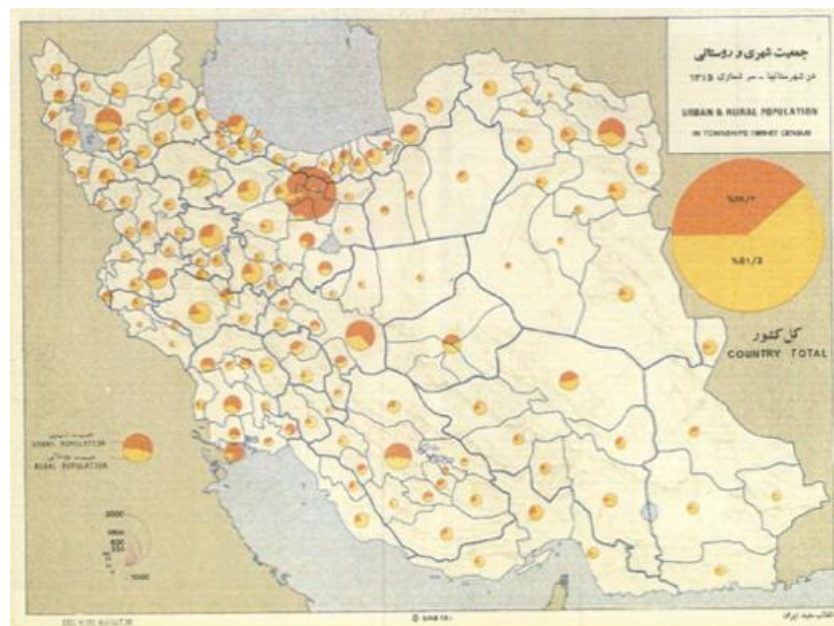


Figure 70. Urban and Rural Populations from *Iran's White Revolution* (1972).

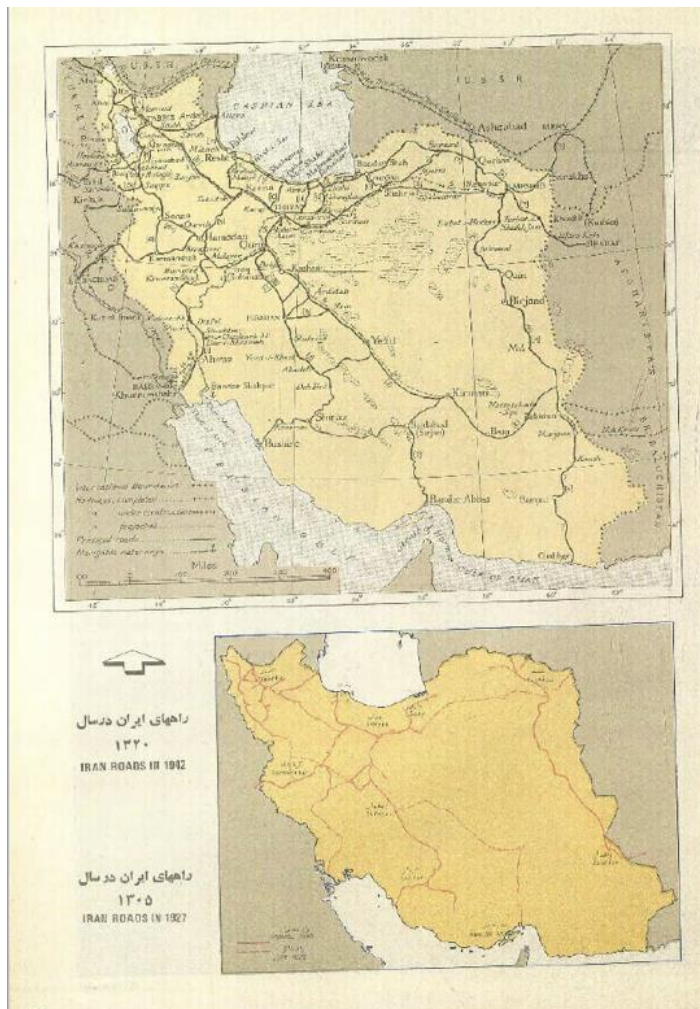


Figure 71. Roads of Iran in the years 1926 and 1941 from *Iran's White Revolution* (1972).

Conclusion:

Investigating cartographic practices of the state through border formation, infrastructural projects, expropriation of land (nature), and urbanization, and highlighting their relative absences, I demonstrated the absence of Iran as a national territory in late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods. I illustrated that these practices have been essential mechanisms in the production of a national spatiotemporal regime. I therefore suggest that the political organization of space in pre-Pahlavi periods was non-national and heterogeneous. The examination of historical maps from the pre-Qajar era to the Islamic Revolution reveals the intricate role of cartographic practices of state in the production of Iran as a national state spacetime. I showed that racial-colonial capitalism

extends beyond labour proletarianization, venturing into knowledge production for colonial dominance and cartographic production of spacetime. It becomes evident that the Farsist ideology and its racist Irancentric ontology, initially text-based, gained an objective guise via cartography, particularly during the Pahlavi period. This transformation reflected the main mechanism of hegemony-building: internal colonization through Farsization. Cartographic shifts, especially noticeable during the White Revolution, not only highlighted land reforms and urbanization but also marked a significant transformation in map-making, contributing to the demarcation of internal/national colonies and the infrastructural unification of the 'Iranian' nation and production of 'Iranian' nature. The study underscores the pivotal role of cartography in intertwining infrastructural development, urbanization, and the extractive expropriation of nature as a constitutive process in the production of national state space, illustrating the state's active role in molding national economy and territory. Thus, the cartographic representation of Iran is not merely a reflection of its physical landscape but a state-crafted image that has facilitated the internal colonization of non-Persian regions, shaping the modern Iranian nation through a complex interplay of spatial abstraction, technological advancement, and the colonial production of space.

By examining historical maps, this analysis has highlighted the transformation from depicting scattered geographies to a unified national territory, thereby illustrating the constructed and contingent nature of Iran's national identity. The role of cartography in converting natural frontiers into political borders and the impact of administrative, infrastructural, and urban developments in this transformation have been thoroughly investigated. This exploration reveals the complexity of producing Iran as a national state within its unique spacetime. It situates this process within the broader context of the international state system, examining the spatiotemporal (multirhythmic) aspects of hegemony. I focused on the cartographic practices of the state since

late 19th century, highlighting their role in the materialization of Iranian nationalism. I accordingly argue that this cartographic lens allows us to rethink critical theories of nationalism and address their neglect of space and spatial practices.

Conclusion:

In this dissertation, I asked how has Iran been produced as a *national state spacetime* in the context of the colonial expansion of the capitalist state? I have broken down this question into three distinct sub-questions: 1. How has Iran been produced through the historiographic practices of the state? 2. What has been the role of Farsi (and Farsist ideology-ontology) in the production of Iran? And 3. How has Iran been represented and produced through the cartographic practices of the state? I argue that Iranian historiographies are nationalistic, Farsist, and Iran-centric. In these historiographies, Farsi is perceived as the language of an always already unified Iranian nation, and non-Persian peoples are depicted as ethnicities within the historically uninterrupted geography/territory of the Iranian nation-state. These historiographies take for granted the existence of Iran as a nation-state; an assumption that remains largely unchallenged even in critical analyses of Iranian nationalism. My study revealed that this dominant presupposition stems from an ahistorical conception of space and geography, a problem that is also evident in theories of nationalism at large. Theories of nationalism have focused on time, history, culture, or economy, overlooking the role of territory and, more specifically, spacetime in the formation of the nation-state and its associated ideology, nationalism.

Examining the historiographic practices of the state and its intellectuals, my study demonstrated that nationalist narratives represent Iran as a pre-existing, fully formed, and unified (Persian) *nation*, enclosed in a pre-existing national territory and history. Iran is therefore represented as external to Farsi *and* to the spatiotemporal matrices of capitalist national state. Even in critical analyses of Iranian nationalism, Iran is treated as a pregiven, passive entity *external* to class relations of production and therefore to spacetime, language (Farsi), and state formation. However, these relations are neither spatially exterior nor temporally sequential (Poulantzas, 1978;

Harootunian, 2015). Moreover, although the state institutes power relations between the *spaces* that *classes* occupy (Poulantzas, 1978) dominant accounts disregard the internal relation between class and the state spacetime. This problem is linked to the class structure of the world. The dualism/division of intellectual and manual labour is vital for the bourgeois class rule (Sohn-Rethel, 1978). As a strategy to retain private ownership of space (including knowledge-language) (Lefebvre, 1991), this division perpetuates the class spacetime of the national state. Spatiotemporal matrices of the national state are the materialization (not merely representations) of this dualist division of labour (Poulantzas, 1978). The production of space has freed an enormous quantity of time (Lefebvre, 1991) which is capitalized in leisure-cultural space and ‘parasitic forms’ like the production of Farsist-nationalist specialized knowledge. As a fetishized incarnation of the ruling class’ intellectual labour, nationalism is the ideological embodiment of the dualist division of labour in spacetime. I accordingly define nation state as the inscription of the dualist division of labour in spacetime. Drawing on dialectical theories (as organic responses to the structural dualisms of national state) I considered ‘production’ in its totality, not merely in terms of a capital-labour dualism. I demonstrated the spacetime-dependency, language/concept-dependency, and state-dependency of Iran by examining the nationalist *historiographic*, *linguistic*, and *cartographic* practices of the state as fundamental mechanisms in the production of Iran as a Farsist dualist spacetime.

Dealing with the mentioned problematics, and drawing on dialectical Marxist theories of spacetime, national state, and language, my dissertation explored several interlocking themes such as the spatial-temporal materiality of the national state, the role of historiographic, linguistic, and cartographic practices of the state in the production spacetime, and the critique of nationalist conceptions within Iranian and Marxist literature. Furthermore, my research situated the Iranian

national question within the broader theoretical landscape. Developing a critical literature review, I provided a robust foundation, weaving together theoretical discourses and empirical observations to challenge prevailing nationalist narratives within Iranian historiography and Marxist theory. It called for a nuanced spatiotemporally informed approach to class analysis and the study of nationalism, developing a more dialectical understanding of Iranian national state formation. In this concluding chapter, I briefly summarize the key findings and theoretical contributions, implications, and limitations and areas for further research.

1. Key Findings and Theoretical Contributions:

1.1. Spatiotemporal Materiality of the Farsist National State:

In this research, I have developed a spatiotemporal conception of Iranian nation state, moving beyond conventional analyses that overlook the role of state spacetime in its differentiated forms. By examining the historical spatiotemporalities of the Iranian state, I conceptualize the nation-state through its material practices. Building on the existing body of critical literature on Persian-centered nationalism – including the works of Vaziri (1993), Boroujerdi (1998), Asgharzadeh (2007), Marashi (2008, 2014, 2020), Cole (1996), Kashani-Sabet (1997, 1999, 2011, 2013), Fragner (1993, 1999, 2019), Matin-Asgari (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2014, 2024), Elling (2013), Ehsani (2014), Zia-Ebrahimi (2016), and Mohammadpour and Soleimani (2020, 2022) – my research has critically analyzed Farsist underpinnings of Iranian nationalism, which have historically colonized non-Persian spaces (environment, language, and culture). This Farsist nationalism, deeply rooted in the linguistic, historiographic, and cartographic practices of the state, has not only shaped the narrative of national unity but also reinforced the Farsist hegemony over the past century. This research has dissected how the Iranian state has produced and perpetuated a Farsist nationalism to colonize non-Persian peoples and cultures and subsequently produce its territorially demarcated boundaries. It has been through this very spatiotemporal process of

Farsization that Iranian nation state has been materially formed. By critically examining the role of Farsi as both a linguistic tool and an ideological medium, this study has highlighted the layers of Farsist practices that have naturalized the statist knowledge, rendering it as the scientific and objective truth.

My critical lens on Iranian nationalist narratives showed an ahistorical and aspatial approach that has long dominated the discourse. By explaining the state's role in constructing these narratives and inscribing them in spacetime, I have indicated the main mechanisms through which a homogenized national identity has been shaped. The research challenged the taken-for-granted notion of Iran as a pre-existing, unified entity, and developed a more nuanced understanding that acknowledges the dialectical interplay of space, time, and language. In contrast to the existing analyses of Iranian nationalism, I demonstrated that Iran is not a pregiven, passive entity *external* to class relations of production. More specifically, my study indicated that 'Iran' is not external either to Farsi *or* to the spatiotemporal matrices of the nation state. They are essential geohistorical elements that constitute Iran in practice.

The dissertation identified a methodological gap in the critical literature on nationalism, which often overlooks the spatiotemporal materiality of the national state, leading to the reproduction of nationalist conceptions of space. I accordingly emphasized the importance of historicizing space and time, drawing on critical and radical geography tradition to understand the material structure of nationalism. I criticized existing perspectives on Iranian nationalism for their lack of engagement with critical state theories and radical geography, highlighting the material (spatiotemporal) foundations of colonialism.

Building on Matin (2013), and integrating my own theoretical framework, the empirical and analytical findings of this dissertation call for incorporating the international into an explicit theory

of the production of space and scale. While the international plays a pivotal role in the production of space, it is imperative to recognize that there exist other fundamental aspects that extend beyond the international per se. By examining the infrastructural and cartographic dimensions of imperialism and elucidating how these mechanisms have been crucial in the production of Iran as a component of the international system, this research paved the way for a multiscale theory of the production of space.

The worldwide process of formal subsumption has been essential in the planetary proliferation of the nation state form and the rise of nationalism. Nationalism, along with nationalist historiographies, is inseparable from the development of capitalism and nation state formation. As indicated in this research, the production and planetary diffusion of national state space can be understood as a process of formal subsumption or passive revolution. Consequently, I conceptualize Iranian nationalism as a particular moment of the planetary passive revolution.

Situating the production of Iran within the context of the international expropriation of land and nature through the practices of the state such as border formation (production of national territory), infrastructural expansion, the production of a national economy, and urbanization, I have demonstrated how colonialism, as a multiscale project, is historically linked to the spatiotemporal matrices of the nation state. Furthermore, I have shown how the representation of Iran as a unified body through multiple maps, which portray and produce 'Iranian' nature in its various layers, made the production of Iran as a national market possible. Hence, the international dimension must be understood in conjunction with the expropriation of nature. It is through cartographic and infrastructural practices that the state succeeded in incorporating 'Iranian' nature into the extended reproduction orbit at the international scale.

By drawing from spatiotemporal theories of national state, and examining the recent geohistories of Iranian state formation, I demonstrated how Iran as a national state spacetime is a very recent construct, tied to specific state practices. By employing a total/integral conception of state and seeing intellectual production of specialized/nationalist knowledge within the broader context of dualist division of labour in class society, I underlined the role of Iranian intellectuals in the naturalization of Iran, spacetime, and national state. I suggested these intellectuals can be characterized as organic intellectuals of the national state since they have an organic relationship with the state.

Exploring the inherent spatiotemporality of language, I indicated how Farsism has been produced and practiced as the central mechanism of hegemony building. Farsism serves as the worldview/philosophy of Iranian ruling class, not merely in terms of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, or its culture and poetry, but as an ideological apparatus. I discussed how Farsist dualisms have led to the negation of subaltern (non-Persian) geohistories. The dominance of nationalist specialized knowledge leads to the undervaluing of physical realities in more local scales, as is evident in the subordination of manual to intellectual labour. Consequently, the emphasis on abstract concepts like nation and national territory aligns with the dominant class monopoly over the intellectual production of nationalist knowledge.

1.2. Cartography and Nationalism: Historicizing Space and Time

By examining the state's cartographic practices and their role in producing national state and nationalism, I suggest class struggle should be seen as a struggle over the production in its totality which includes cultural and linguistic production, and not just the physical means of production. My research underscored the need to recognize the social roots of nationalist naturalization, revealing the historical production of seemingly natural categories like a national economy and territory. By emphasizing the cartographic practices of Iranian state my dissertation has

historicized spacetime, national state, and Iran. I explored how ahistorical conceptions of Iran and spacetime itself – critiqued by scholars such as Vaziri (1993), Boroujerdi (1998), Fragner (1993, 1999, 2019), Marashi (2008, 2014, 2020), Matin-Asgari (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2014, 2024), Ehsani (2014, 2017), and Mohammadpour and Soleimani (2020, 2022), among others – have resulted in oversimplified social analyses of Iranian nation, state, history, and revolution. Additionally, I examined how these analyses perpetuate the existing class structure and hinder the emergence of alternative political structures.

The cartographic production of Iran as a national territory, paired with the infrastructural practices like railway and road networks, has significantly contributed to the spatial production of national identity. This research has highlighted how maps and infrastructure not only delineate physical spaces but also construct social and political realities, thereby shaping the collective national consciousness. Cartographic representations do more than represent geographical realities; they are instruments of power that can include, exclude/absent, and prioritize certain narratives and lives over others. Cartography in this sense represents a relationship of hegemony. The cartographic delineation of national borders and the prioritization of certain infrastructural developments have played a pivotal role in consolidating the state's control over diverse territories and peoples. The transformation of Iran into a national state space has been markedly influenced by these cartographic and infrastructural practices, which have forcefully imposed a Farsist unity and facilitated the suppression of local and tribal autonomy. This research has indicated how these spatial practices of the Iranian state formation have been intertwined with and implemented through the internal colonization of peripheral non-Persian spaces. By developing a spatiotemporal critique of Farsist nationalism and cartography I have formulated a framework for historicizing

space and time. I indicated why such a spatiotemporal framework is important in expanding our understanding of nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism.

1.3. Marxist Theory, Nation State, and Nationalism

By conducting archival research through a dialectical spatiotemporal methodology, my dissertation contributes to the Marxist theories of nation state and nationalism. I make a case for a spatiotemporal understanding of Iranian nationalism and a spatiotemporal theory of the nation-state, demonstrating how the nation state is geohistorically intertwined with and characterized by the nationally colonial production of spacetime. I discussed how dualistic readings of capitalism and Marxism – centered on the capital-labor dynamic while overlooking the role of land – contribute to a nationalist outlook³⁸⁸. This, in turn, naturalizes internal colonization and reproduces the existing class order.

Drawing on Lefebvrian reinterpretation of Marx's trinity formula (land-labour-capital), the dissertation contributes to revising dualistic (Marxist or otherwise) readings. Developing an interesting reading of Marx's trinity formula Moore has interpreted the value theory as a 'law of Cheap Nature'. (Moore, 2015: 24) The core of this law is the ongoing 'quest to turn the work/energy of the biosphere into capital'. Moore, in this way, reasserts nature (and space) into the value form³⁸⁹. Therefore, the strategic pivot of capitalism is not wage-labour or the production of capital per se, but the appropriation of planetary work/energy. Highlighting the importance of space, he argues that "the crucial question turns on the historical-geographical connections between wage-work and its necessary conditions of expanded reproduction." (Ibid: 26)

³⁸⁸ Matin-Asgari (2009b: 134-136) offers a critical analysis of the ways in which Iranian Marxism has contributed to the development of both Iranian nationalism and Islamism.

³⁸⁹ He explains that value 'operates through a dialectic of exploitation and appropriation': "the relations of exploitation produce abstract social labour. The relations of appropriation, producing abstract social nature, enabled the expanded accumulation of abstract social labour." (Moore, 2015: 26).

The mentioned conditions depend on massive contributions of unpaid work, outside the commodity system through mechanisms such as internal colonialism. This attention to the spacetimes that have not yet been commodified has been central in my research since it explains the situation of the latecomers like Iran in a spatiotemporal manner. Latecomer nation states are essential in the reproduction of the relations of production. They function as the agents³⁹⁰ of the appropriation and production of nature/energy. So, the focus is placed on the reproduction of relations of production (capitalist and non-capitalist), not on the capitalist production per se. This change in the level of abstraction shows the centrality of the production of nature and spacetime in an alternative political strategy. This shift is essential for effectively addressing the contradictory relationships between coexisting capitalist and non-capitalist spatiotemporal regimes. My research accordingly suggests that it is not merely capitalism and wage labour regime per se that need to be abolished; eradicating the *class* and *colonial* relations should also be a main target of revolutionary strategies.

Analyzing Iranian nationalism in this light, I demonstrated the political consequences of dualistic social analysis. I showed this ahistorical reading of Iran is linked to the class structure of the world order and its dualism/division of intellectual and manual labour. I illustrated that Iranian nationalism as a fetishized incarnation of the ruling class's intellectual labour, is the Farsist inscription of the dualist division of labour in spacetime. By highlighting the geohistorical

³⁹⁰ Having Philip Abrams (1998, cited in Jessop, 2016: 17-18) critique of a reified account of the state; or the state as a 'substantial, unitary entity', as is known for instance in realist international relations theory, in mind, it should be noted that defining the state as the agent here does not mean that it is separated from social relations. Employing a critical realist terminology, I would say that the state as a condensed and contradictory social form is always an emergent entity, gaining new layers through the hegemonic struggles and in the context of structural social forces. So, by characterizing the state as the agent of the production of national spacetime I do not mean that it is operating as a hidden structuring mechanism of political life. There is in fact a dialectical relationship. The state as the agent works as a social form which is distinct from the algebraic addition of its components. But at the same time, the state, as condensation of a class relation of forces, is continuously changed and reproduced. The state then is the condition and the product of the hegemonic struggles simultaneously.

specificities of Iranian state formation and nationalism, I suggested why and how class analysis is inherently spatiotemporal.

1.4. Three-Dimensional Dialectics and Going beyond Linear History

The linear interpretations of history, Iran, and capitalism are tied to a particular reading of Marx where the emphasis is placed only on labour and capital rather than the trinity formula of land-labour-capital³⁹¹. The omission of land (which symbolizes ‘pre- or non-capitalist’ means of production) reflects a tendency to perceive everything as having become capitalist, with all non-capitalist elements either disappearing or being completely subsumed (‘real subsumption’) under the logic of capital. This aligns with the stagist readings of ‘transition’ from feudalism to capitalism.

The view that everything has been incorporated into capitalism leaves no room for spatiotemporal differentiation. In this research I showed how Iranian national space – despite the appearance of homogeneity – is embodiment of the co-existence of different temporal regimes. Consequently, space cannot be confined to the capitalist temporality; instead, it encompasses multiple contrasting temporalities that coexist, and this is beside the multiplicity of the temporality of capital itself³⁹². The point is that there might be external-contingent relations between these temporal regimes, between different social forms-rhythms.

³⁹¹ The misleading account of Marx’s view on ‘primitive accumulation’ is also connected to this stagist view. In the dominant reading, it is implied that a primitive *stage* has now passed. Additionally, the emphasis on accumulation and exploitation masks the ongoing process of expropriation. In contrast, Marx says what the economists call ‘*Previous, or Original Accumulation*,’ ought to be called *Original Expropriation*. On June 20 and 27, 1865, Karl Marx gave a two-part lecture to members of the International Workingmen’s Association (the First International) in London in which he criticizes the *so-called* ‘original accumulation’ as used by Adam Smith. Marx added ‘so-called’ to make a point: that the historical processes were *neither* primitive *nor* accumulation. He “is condemning those who use the concept to conceal the brutal reality of expropriation” (Angus, 2022). The examples Marx describes in ‘So-called Primitive Accumulation’ “all refer to ... *Expropriation, not accumulation*” (Angus, 2022). Expropriation of land in this sense is *the basis of the capitalist mode of production* (Ibid).

³⁹² As a social form, capital encompasses various temporalities, including the cyclical nature of production and reproduction, as well as long-term processes of accumulation.

As Lefebvre elaborates, Marx's initial intention in *Capital* was to analyze the capitalist mode of production in terms of a binary model that opposed capital to labour. This polarity presupposes the disappearance of a third element: the land. Time and history, as a result, are understood based on the measure of social labour. However, "on a world scale, landed property showed no signs of disappearing, nor did the political importance of landowners." My research substantiates this claim, demonstrating the enduring relevance of land and non-capitalist spatiotemporal regimes in producing Iran.

Emphasizing the three-dimensionality of relations of production serves as a mechanism to counteract the dualisms of nationalist historiographies. In speaking of the earth in his 'trinity formula'³⁹³, Marx did not simply mean agriculture or underground resources: "so too was the nation state, confined within a specific territory" (Lefebvre, 1991: 323-25). This is exemplified in my analysis of the production of Iran. Moving beyond the labour-capital duality, my research reveals that the production of Iranian territory is fundamentally rooted in the systematic expropriation of non-Persian natural resources and lands.

1.5. Rethinking Imperialism: The Environmental and Urban Dimensions of National State

Lefebvre's theory of the production of space underscores the coexistence of historical forms, viewing land and colonial relations not simply as relics of the past or as pre-capitalist phenomena. This approach shifts the focus from mere capital accumulation to the production of spacetime encompassing the expropriation of the means of production – nature, spacetime, and language-knowledge. The systematic production of nature which lies at the heart of this process provides an alternative to the dualistic ideology of nature. The theory of the production of nature aligns with

³⁹³ the Earth, capital, and labour.

dialectical critique of the dualist modes of thought and their underlying dualism of nature-society. As demonstrated in this research, nature is not something from the outside, but already exists in the relation of production. More importantly, to produce nature is not limited to capitalism. Production in general is the production of nature (Smith, 2008: 77).³⁹⁴ Uneven development is the concrete process of the production of nature under capitalism (Ibid: 8).

Putting the production of Iran in the context of late development and imperialist rivalries and understanding it as a formal subsumption and passive revolution, I problematized the dominant conceptions of nature, environment, and space in Iranian social thought. These conceptions are the product of a Farsist production of knowledge by the organic intellectuals of the integral state. I tried to demonstrate how these middle-class intellectuals helped naturalize the internal colonization of non-Persian peripheries by the center. Production of Iran depends on the colonial relationship between the Farsist center(s) and non-Persian colonies. Essential to this colonial relation is the production of nature which is another name for the systematic expropriation, dispossession, and extraction of nature/energy and other means of production including non-Persian languages.

The environmental expropriation and the oil/energy extraction have been critical in producing Iran as a national state space. This underscores the impact of imperialist capitalism on the formation of national boundaries. The production of nature is achieved through the expropriation/colonization of nature/energy. This expansion necessarily entails the destruction of the subsistence/indigenous (non-Persian) modes of life since it requires demolishing their natural environment to forcefully absorb them in the national economy. It is thus necessary to see the state

³⁹⁴ That is why Smith argues that the production of space, in fact, is premised on a more foundational production process. The production of nature provides a rather philosophical foundation for discussing the uneven development of capitalism (Smith, 2008: 50).

organization of labour and spacetime (including nature) simultaneously. In late developers like Iran, the land/nature question even precedes the labour question. More precisely, the production of space and expropriation of nature condition labour relations. It is the national state that organizes labour relations through spatial (environmental and urban) interventions.

Specifically in Chapter Four I showed that production of Iranian national state space through the expropriation of nature shapes the colonial context within which capital accumulation and exploitation take place. Expropriation refers to those processes that “identify, secure, and channel unpaid work outside the commodity system into the circuit of capital.” The extraction of this unpaid energy necessitates the deployment of specialized knowledge and specific sciences and technologies (Moore, 2015: 27). As indicated, cartography and mapping are essential in the expropriation and production of nature.

As I demonstrated, the production of Iran as a national territory has been impossible without cartographic practices. The technological-infrastructure projects have been essential in the appropriation of work/energy. The whole process is unimaginable without the central role played by the national state and the *international* system of states. States in the global north have reproduced the capitalist relations of production through the ever-expanding expropriation of nature, both within their internal peripheries *and* the peripheralized states of the global south. The multiscale expropriation of nature in the colonies (including the internal colonies of the latecomer national states) has been crucial to the formation and reproduction of imperialism.

Such a spatial analysis enables me to rethink imperialism. Capitalism has managed to survive through the (bourgeois) state system and, more specifically, through the state production of national space³⁹⁵. The space of the state expands to the extent that several previously marginal

³⁹⁵ Nations are also seen as pre-dating capitalism by both political Marxists and Althusserians (Wood 1991, 2007; Balibar 1991), “for whom nations are apparently a phenomenon with a purely contingent relationship to the dominant

fields – town-planning, transport, the environment – are integrated into the spatial processes that underpin the reproduction of capital (Poulantzas, 1980: 167-168). In this context, land reforms and urbanization in general can be seen as the specific form of the colonial production of center-periphery relations since the early twentieth century. Urbanization, in this sense, embodies the fundamental spatiotemporality of the national state and therefore is essential to imperialism.

Nature is continuously (re)produced through urbanization. The strategic pivot of capitalism is not the production of capital itself; the expropriation of planetary nature/energy is of greater importance. So, a change in the level of analysis is required. In my research, a focus on spacetimes that have not yet been commodified – but were being expropriated – was crucial. This analysis provided a more nuanced spatiotemporal understanding of latecomer nations like Iran. These lately produced national states play a key role in perpetuating the racial colonial relations of production, acting as agents³⁹⁶ of the ever-expanding expropriation of nature/energy. This further reinforces the idea that the state is defined by the planning of production and space and time (Lefebvre, 2009: 110). Furthermore, this analysis enabled me to develop a material definition of nation state as the producer of energy. The expropriation of non-Persian lands/natures through cartographic practices – such as infrastructural projects, land reforms, and urbanization – has been a key mechanism in the formation of Iranian nation state. I suggest that by adopting this dialectical materialist approach to the nation state, we can avoid abstract theories of nationalism that overlook the material dimensions of the state.

mode of production” (Davidson, 2009: 20). However, as Claudia von Braunmühl noted the bourgeois nation state is part of the capitalist mode of production. Davidson elaborates that “the prefixes ‘bourgeois’ and ‘nation’ are not simply terminological elaborations ... but ... a key distinguishing feature of capitalist states” (Davidson, 2009: 20).

³⁹⁶ Having Philip Abrams’s (1998, cited in Jessop, 2016: 17-18) critique of a reified account of the state in mind, it should be noted that defining the state as the agent does not mean that it is separated from social relations. The state as a condensed and contradictory social form is always an emergent entity, gaining new layers through the hegemonic struggles. So, by characterizing the state as the agent of the production of national space I do not mean that it is operating as a hidden structuring mechanism (let alone as a subject). The state, as condensation of a class relation of forces, is continuously changed. The state is the condition *and* the product of the hegemonic struggles simultaneously.

1.6. Resistance and the Quest for Autonomy

By focusing on the nature of the production of the Iranian national state, which defines its place in the international division of labour, I demonstrated that Farsization of spacetime has been the key mechanism of this internally colonial production of Iran. Through oil-urbanization and the environmental expropriation of the internal colonies, the 'Iranian' ruling class is materially produced and remains connected to its counterparts in the global north. A Farsist 'Iran' is produced to serve a hegemonic project. Elites naturalize/depoliticize the physical interventions by representing them as serving an abstract 'nation'. At what costs does this occur? To the detriment of peripheralized people's flesh and blood. It is the physical bodies (cheap labour force, the precariat, the unemployed, non-Persian internal colonies, etc.,) that are being eliminated to ensure the dominance of Iranian national state. This trend must be resisted and transformed. Accordingly, an 'integral' conception of the national state which is inherently spatiotemporal, denotes the totality of geohistorical-economic-political-ideological relations and provide an appropriate tool to develop a more revolutionary praxis.

Despite the centralized efforts to homogenize the national space under the Farsist identity, there have been persistent resistance from local forces and non-Persian entities/natures. The struggle for autonomy and recognition is emblematic of the larger conflict between the centralized state power and marginalized communities. This ongoing tension underscores the necessity of reconceptualizing Iranian national identity beyond the confines of Farsist nationalism to embrace the diverse cultures, languages, and histories that constitute Iran. This research highlighted the ways in which 'Iranian' subalterns have sought to assert their autonomy and preserve their distinct identities within the overarching national framework. The quest for autonomy, particularly in non-Persian regions, challenges the state-centric approach to nation-building and calls for a reimagining of Iranian national identity that is more inclusive.

1.7. Toward a Multi-Scalar and Multi-Rhythmic Conception of Iran

When I emphasize the necessity of writing history of Iran that focuses on its multilayered spatial (international, infrastructural, urban, and environmental) aspects, I am highlighting a political imperative. The national state – through a range of practices such as historiography, the current archival system, the knowledge, and Farsist discourse – has made the existing analyses of Iran and nation state abstract. In the dominant view, there is an emphasis on this dematerialization of social processes. A significant consequence is that the struggle itself, and the processes of change, become abstract. One way to avoid falling into this idealistic/abstract perspective is to focus on spatiotemporal aspects of the national state. When we talk about the importance of relational space, it is crucial to emphasize that relationships are not just at the level of ideas and discourse. Relationships have a fundamental material aspect, made possible through physical infrastructures: from roads, streets, and highways to airports, ports, terminals, and subway tunnels; from oil and gas transmission lines to optical fiber lines and power cables; and from centralized ventilation systems to water and sewage pipelines.

In line with the call for a non-Farsist history of Iran, this research advocates for a multi-scalar and multi-rhythmic approach to understanding Iran. By problematizing the taken-for-granted notion of Iran as a pre-existing, unified national entity, this study opens up avenues for exploring the dynamic interplay of various spatiotemporalities that have contributed to the production of Iran. In this sense, the dissertation builds upon and seeks to further expand and deepen the existing critical literature on Persian-centered nationalism, as developed in the works of Vaziri (1993), Boroujerdi (1998), Asgharzadeh (2007), Marashi (2008, 2014, 2020), Cole (1996), Kashani-Sabet (1997, 1999, 2011, 2013), Fragner (1993, 1999, 2019), Matin-Asgari (2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2014, 2024), Matin (2013), Elling (2013), Ehsani (2014), Zia-Ebrahimi (2016), Mohammadpour and Soleimani (2020, 2022), and Kia (2020). This approach not only

enriches our understanding of Iran's multilayered history but also offers a framework for envisioning future emancipatory political strategies that prioritize local autonomy and resist the homogenizing forces of different forms of nationalism.

I propose one specific way to write-map a non-Farsist history of Iran. This history cannot and should not take any geographical scale or any temporal regime for granted. It should geohistoricize all of them. It is only in this way that we can develop an emancipatory political strategy of change which is not beforehand fixated on a particular spacetime. Such a task will be possible only through problematizing the ubiquitous and dominant taken-for-granted-ness of Iran. The very existence of Iran is not therefore presupposed external and prior to the hegemonic struggles and social change. In this light, this research excavated a range of major *polyrhythmic spatiotemporalities* that have led to the production of Iran.

2. Implications:

The implications of my research extend beyond academic circles and the specific context of the 'Iranian case', offering a new vantage point to reassess nationalism and state formation. Particularly, the findings underscore the colonial role of infrastructural practices, cartographic representations, and environmental expropriation in forming the national state space. The findings of this research compel a reconceptualization of Iranian state and Iranian nationalism.

The critical role of infrastructural development, from the establishment of transportation networks to land reforms and urbanization, in shaping Iran as a national space highlights the tangible dimensions of state formation. This aspect underscores the material basis of nationalism, where physical infrastructures facilitate internal colonization. For politicians, urban planners and environmental policymakers, these insights advocate for a nuanced understanding of urban policies and infrastructural projects, not merely as economic or logistical endeavors but as pivotal

components in the ongoing nationally colonial production of Iran and Iranian national identity. This dissertation also sheds light on the environmental dimensions of Iranian state space, particularly through the lens of oil urbanization and land expropriation. These implications also extend to environmental justice discourses, demanding a critical examination of how national development projects affect local ecologies, while systematically accelerate climate change.

3. Limitations and Areas for Further Research:

While my study provides substantial insights, it also acknowledges its limitations, particularly in the depth of engagement with non-Persian communities' perspectives. Future research could further explore these dimensions, potentially unveiling alternative narratives that could enrich our understanding of Iran's multiple social fabrics. The methodological approach of this dissertation, while comprehensive, predominantly relies on textual and archival analysis and historical documentation. This approach may not fully capture the lived experiences of individuals and communities navigating the complexities of Iranian state space. Expanding the methodological toolkit to include oral histories, participatory research methods, or geocritical analysis could provide more nuanced insights into the everyday realities of nation-state production including everyday life of non-Persians.

Another limitation lies in the scope of comparative analysis. This research primarily focuses on the Iranian context without extensive comparison to other nation-state formations. Future studies could benefit from a comparative approach, examining similar processes in other lately-developed/produced states or within different historical periods. Such an analysis could illuminate common patterns and divergences in the production of national spaces, contributing to a more robust theoretical understanding of nationalism and state formation. While I have intermittently addressed the gender dimension of the production of Iran as a national state space, for instance in

Chapter Three, further research is needed to systematically analyze the production of Iran as a gendered space. Additionally, the interplay between this gender dimension and Shi'ism warrants deeper exploration.

Moreover, I have signposted various class-based aspects of state-space formation, including the roles of elites and intellectuals of the state – who occupy one side of the division of labour between mental and manual labour – with the intention of providing a fuller treatment in the future studies. Although my research has attempted develop a class analysis of Iranian intellectuals, a full-fledged class analysis of the production of Iran remains essential and would significantly enrich the findings of this study.

Conclusion

This dissertation has endeavored to unravel the intricate processes through which Iran has been produced as a national state spacetime. I offer a critical analysis of how Iran was systematically produced as a modern nation-state, through three intertwined moments: historiographic, Farsist, and cartographic practices of the state. Each chapter delves into different dimensions of this production, revealing the influence of Farsism in producing Iranian nation at the expense of its non-Persian peoples. The first chapter argues that during the late Qajar period, there was no unified national temporal regime. Instead, the concept of 'Iran' was produced through state-driven historiographic practices that imposed a linear conception of history, centered around Aryan racism. This linear narrative, grounded in the repression of non-Persian temporalities, allowed the state to craft a homogenous national identity while systematically erasing alternative histories. The legalization and administrative division of space engraved the national identity in time and space.

The second chapter turns to the role of Farsi, demonstrating that its elevation as the national language was inseparable from the racial-colonial-class dynamics of the Iranian nation-state. Farsi, far from being a neutral linguistic medium, was produced as a tool of Farsist internal colonization.

Farsi therefore was instrumental in actualization of a linear, monorhythmic time and an abstract space that marginalized non-Persian geographies and histories. However, it was made clear that despite over a century of systematic efforts, Farsi failed to become an organically hegemonic culture-language, as it remained overtly repressive and too weakly integrated across Iran's internal/national colonies. The chapter underscores how Farsi was weaponized to erase and subordinate non-Persians.

I also distinguished between Farsi as a long-standing historical phenomenon and Farsi as a more recent product of the nation-state over the past century. This distinction is crucial to avoid conflating Farsi as a living language with Farsi as a state product, which I theorize under the concepts of Farsism and the Farsization of spacetime. While Farsi historically functioned as a regional language with its own variations and nuances, the state's deliberate standardization and enforcement transformed it into a colonial body of knowledge and practice aimed at producing Iran through internal colonization. My critique of Farsist nationalism opens new avenues for studying Farsi as a language that has been practiced diversely both within Iran and beyond, highlighting the tensions between its state-imposed form and its organic linguistic diversity.

The third chapter explores the state's cartographic practices, which were instrumental in translating Farsist ideology into the material reality of a national territory. The analysis traces how, from the late Qajar period through the Pahlavi era, cartography served as a key mechanism of internal colonization. Through the delineation of borders, land expropriation, and urbanization, the state transformed Iran from a heterogeneous collection of regions into an abstractly unified political entity. The chapter emphasizes that cartography was not a neutral or merely technical practice but a profoundly political one, facilitating the colonization of non-Persian regions and the inscription of a 'unified' nation onto the physical landscape.

In summary, the research presents a compelling critique of the contested nature of Iran's national identity. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the Iranian national identity, challenging the dominant Farsist narrative. Through historiographic, Farsist, and cartographic practices, the state systematically produced a national spacetime that marginalized non-Persian histories, languages, and geographies. The study highlights how Farsization of spacetime, operated as the ideological and practical foundation for this process of internal colonization. Ultimately, the research calls into question conventional understandings of nationalism, offering a critical rethinking of how space, time, and language were mobilized to construct and sustain the modern Iranian state. This study not only contributes to the theories of nationalism and state production but also offers insights for reimagining Iran in a more equitable and differentiated manner.

Over the past five thousand years kingdoms and empires were just isolated and limited islands of political hierarchy, surrounded by much larger territories whose inhabitants systematically avoided any kind of rigid, overarching state authority (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). Defining civilization through the lenses of sedentarism, centralized states, or more precisely, state-centric forms of life reveal that civilization has acted as a major barrier to the free movement of individuals and, consequently, liberty in general. Civilization, in the dominant narrative, is essentially defined by a central state's systematic control-prohibition of the movement of nomadic populations. If the freedom to defy authority, the freedom of movement, and the freedom to create new social orders are essential components of human freedom, how can a statist form of life, based on exclusionary territories like national borders be considered civilized?

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