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A Critical Review of *Iran as Imagined Nation*

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Abstract

The topic of Iranian identity is one that many are willing to recognize, while only a minority choose to reject it. The author of the book in question belongs to the latter group. The title suggests that the author intends to challenge both Iran and the historical foundations of Iranian and national identity. Influenced by contemporary theoretical discussions that overlook the historical and cultural contexts of the nations being examined, he tends to regard Iran and its national identity as constructs devised by Orientalists. He does not acknowledge the historical importance and development of the term "Iran" itself. The writer of Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity, who draws from Edward Said's Orientalism and Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities, contends that both Iranian and non-Iranian authors view Iranian and national identity as a historical phenomenon. These authors, shaped by Western methodologies and influenced by racial and ideological perspectives, have narrated history in a way that is both ahistorical and misleading, replacing genuine historical events with fabricated stories. This article does not critique every chapter of Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity. Instead, it will concentrate on sections that present weak or incorrect claims regarding Iran's historical roots, its attributes, and its ethnic and linguistic diversity, with the aim of clarifying and illuminating these issues.

Keywords: Iran; Persia; National Identity; Iranian Identity; Persian Language.
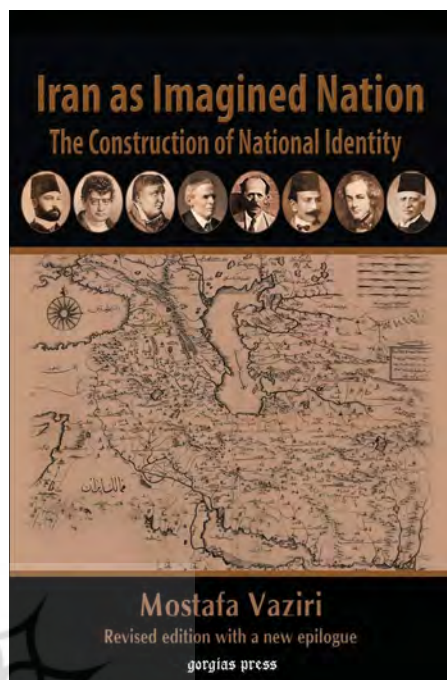
Introduction

In 1983, Benedict Anderson published the book *Imagined Communities*, where he distinguished between human groups as either real or imagined. Real groups, including clans, tribes, villages, neighborhoods, and schools, are small enough for members to engage closely and form personal bonds. Conversely, imagined groups typically encompass larger entities like ethnicities and nations, where the sheer size of the population inhibits intimate connections; instead, individuals depend on a conceptual understanding of the community to which they belong (Anderson, 2006: 9-47). The concept of imagined societies opened the door for various opportunists to take action. Through a cursory reading and a shallow comprehension of the book Imagined Communities, they conjectured about Iranian and national identity, leading them to think that they have encountered illusions and conspiracies. Mustafa Vaziri's book *Iran as Imagined Nation: the Construction of National Identity* was produced within a distinct cultural and historical framework. In his analysis, Vaziri contends that writings about Iran and its history have been influenced by nationalist sentiments, resulting in the development of nationalist historiography that requires critical scrutiny. Mostafa Vaziri views Iran's national history as a newly constructed idea, emerging from the efforts of individuals who embraced a nationalist, ideological, and biased view of history. This viewpoint contributed to the formation of what is referred to as national identity, which he claims is merely an illusion. He argues that the perspectives of orientalists on nationhood and nationalism have distorted historiography with racial theories, leading to a version of history that cannot be seen as accurate or impartial. According to Vaziri, both Western and Iranian scholars in Oriental and Iranian studies linked archaeological and linguistic findings to racial theories, aiming to provide a unique interpretation of Iran; orientalists used the term "Iran" not only to denote a specific group but also to signify a broader linguistic, civilizational, and cultural legacy. They connected Persian language and literature with the national traditions. The author of *Iran as Imagined Nation: the Construction of National Identity* asserts that Iran was not a singular and unified entity in its ancient past and criticizes those who created a misleading sense of national identity. Vaziri notes that during the Sasanian era, the term "Iran" was more closely tied to religious meanings than to ethnic or political implications.

About the Book

This book was originally published by Paragon House in 1993. The second edition, which serves as the basis for this criticism, was released by Gorgias Press in 2013. This edition retains the main title, *Iran as Imagined Nation*, while omitting the original subtitle, *the Construction of National Identity*. Clearly, whenever the title of the work is referenced, I will only include the primary title as per the second edition, omitting any reference to the subtitle. The book being reviewed contains nine chapters; in the first chapter, the author focuses on the concept of national identity and explores a range

of related topics. In this chapter, the author explores several key topics, including the rise of nationalism, the waning influence of the Latin language alongside the rise of local languages, the development of racism, and the prejudiced connections between language and ethnicity. Additionally, the chapter discusses the Indo-iuropean language family and the concept of the Aryan race, as well as racial variations and anthropology. It also examines the interplay between race, language, national identity, and the evolution of history and historiography within the framework of national ideology (Vaziri, 2013: 15-47). In this chapter, Vaziri argues that the development of national identity is closely linked to the rise of national governments in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries. To support this assertion, he highlights that prior to 1500 AD, almost eighty percent of printed books were in Latin, indicating that local languages had not yet evolved into national languages due to the absence of established national governments. For instance, during

Iran as Imagined Nation, Mostafa Vaziri, Gorgias Press, 2014, 348 Pp, ISBN: 978-1463202279 (book)

the French Revolution, half of the French population did not speak French, with only about twelve or thirteen percent using a standardized language. Similarly, in 19th century Italy, merely two and a half percent of the population spoke Italian (Vaziri, 2013: 18). The author's most important ideas and arguments are introduced in the opening chapter of the work. The second chapter focuses on how Europeans have historically viewed and interacted with the East, tracing how Western perceptions of the East have changed over time. However, the summary of this chapter's contents does not follow a clear chronological structure, and the information is presented in a rather disorganized manner (Vaziri, 2013: 47-59). The third chapter, a crucial and foundational part of the author's work, explores the conceptualization of Iran within a nationalist context. The author argues that the term "Iran" was invented as part of an Orientalists agenda, Silvestre de Sacy is particularly knowledgeable in this narrative. This chapter will focus extensively on the critical analysis of the work's content, where I will emphasize the author's inaccurate and historically unfounded perspectives. In the fourth chapter, Vaziri discusses Iranshahr and its equivalent names, asserting that Iranshahr refers to the land itself and lacks any political or ethnic connotations (Vaziri, 2013:

83-97). The author engages in philological debates and references certain informa-
tion regarding Iran and Iranshahr, which reflects a misinterpretation and misunder-
standing of these subjects. In the following sections of this essay, I will demonstrate
the unfounded nature of Vaziri's interpretations. The fifth chapter focuses on national
historiography and the formation of Iranian identity. Orientalists aimed to connect
ancient and modern eras through their literary works and translations. Scholars such
as Sir John Malcolm, James Darmstetter, Edward Brown, Sir Percy Sykes, and George
Rawlinson endeavored to illustrate the historical and cultural continuity of Iran by
producing significant studies in Iranian philology and history (Vaziri, 2013: 97-135).
The sixth chapter explores the connection between Iranian dynasties and identity
formation, emphasizing the contributions of Vladimir Minorsky, a prolific author on
Iranian history. Vaziri argues that Minorsky included the Daylamite dynasty within
Iran's national history, a perspective that had not been adopted by previous historians.
The central argument presented by Vaziri in this chapter is that the history of a lan-
guage should be viewed separately from the physical geography of the region where
that language originated (Vaziri, 2013: 135-159). The seventh chapter addresses nation-
alist historiography and identity formation in Iran. In this section, Vaziri examines
the contributions of Iranian figures to the national historical narrative, identifying
writers like Mirza Malkam Khan, Dehkhoda, Mohammad Ali Foroughi, Hassan Pirnia,
Ahmad Kasravi, Isa Sedigh, and Saeed Nafisi as followers of Western methodologies.
He critiques their approaches as fundamentally racial and biased. Essentially, these
individuals are recognized as key contributors who reinforced the tradition of nation-
alist historiography and continued the legacy established by orientalists (Vaziri, 2013:
159-179). The title of the eighth chapter of the work is "The Emergence of Iranian Iden-
tity." In this chapter, the author discusses the changes and developments that have
shaped the perception and understanding of what it means to be Iranian. The coun-
try's underdevelopment, along with the British and Soviet occupation of Iran, were
significant factors that led intellectuals to emphasize the importance of political and
cultural awareness. They sought to raise public consciousness regarding Iran's state of
backwardness. The results of these efforts during the Pahlavi era ultimately contribut-
ed to a sense of unity in Iran. Throughout the first and second Pahlavi eras, there was
considerable emphasis on the ideas of homeland, nation, ancient Iran, and the broad-
er concept of Great Iran. A substantial portion of textbook material focused on topics
pertaining to ancient Iranian culture. However, during the Islamic Republic period,
this focus shifted; the identity of the Iranian nation was replaced by that of the Nation
of Islam, with Islamic identity taking precedence over Iranian identity. The content of
textbooks following the revolution reflects this change (Vaziri, 2013: 179-191). The ninth
and concluding chapter of the work focuses on Iranian, Islamic identity and cultural
schizophrenia. This chapter synthesizes the themes explored in the earlier sections.
Vaziri argues that Iran is a transnational territory inhabited by various ethnic groups,
each with its own language. Consequently, he contends that it is impossible to asso-

ciate the Persian language exclusively with national traditions or to forge a singular, cohesive identity under the banner of the Iranian nation. Vaziri discusses the concept of Iran in the context of the Sassanid era, arguing that the historical validity of the term "Iran" is questionable. He perceives the formation of this name as a form of manipulation and misdirection, asserting that its significance is rooted more in religious connotations than in ethnic or political identities. According to Vaziri, all geographical names are merely human constructs that carry historical narratives. Political interpretations elevate the significance of these names. Consequently, Vaziri criticizes the premature application of the term "Iran" in the context of shaping national tradition and history. He views it as both ethical and essential to challenge this trend (Vaziri, 2013: 225-285). The book chapters provide a wealth of detailed information and explanations. However, to keep this summary concise, only the most essential points will be highlighted. As Bayhaqi stated, "I mentioned these long words for this reason" to familiarize the reader with the work and its overall structure.

Content Review

Before critiquing Vaziri's perspectives, it is worthwhile to examine Mustafa Vaziri's comprehension and interpretation of history. On the fifth page of his work, Vaziri cites a quotation from Michael Morony, a specialist in the Sasanian era, which reflects the author's historical viewpoint. I like to present the original text so that readers can form their own interpretations; "History is not the past; It is what we say about the past." Vaziri's perspective on Iran and Iranian identity suggests that he views history as a construct rather than a mere record of past events. He posits that it is historians and researchers who actively shape history, implying that the past, as we understand it, may not have existed in the way we perceive. It is important to recognize that a significant portion of historical understanding is derived from interpretation and the context in which historians operate. Consequently, a researcher's interpretation plays a crucial role in shaping our knowledge of history; in other words, knowledge cannot exist without interpretation; without interpretation, knowledge cannot progress. Michael Morony emphasizes the critical role of historians, who enhance and develop historical understanding through their interpretations. In summary, Vaziri emphasizes that the historical narratives we engage with are not externally imposed but rather constructed by us. He argues that we actively shape this past and present it to society. Mustafa Vaziri's perspective on Iran and Iranian national identity reflects this understanding.

Mustafa Vaziri states that the term "Iran" was first introduced into academic discourse by Silvestre de Sacy in the late 18th century. De Sacy's studies helped popularize the use of "Iran" as an equivalent to "Persia", creating the perception that Iran has been the name of the land from ancient times to the present. Vaziri asserts that the inhabitants of this region were unfamiliar with the term "Iran" and had no prior knowledge of it. He argues that it was the orientalists who amplified and popularized the term, bringing it to prominence (Vaziri, 2013: 65-73). There are sources that challenge Vazi-

ri's claims. J. M. Tancoigne, a member of the French Embassy in Tehran, authored a book titled *A Narrative of a Journey into Persia, and Residence at Teheran; Containing a Descriptive Itinerary from Constantinople to the Persian Capital* in 1820. In this work, he highlights several noteworthy points. Notably, in a letter dated January 30, 1808, Tancoigne addresses a significant issue that is not only relevant but also essential to mention here. "The true and proper name for Persia among its people is Iran. In a bid to belittle the Iranians, the Turks refer to them as Ajam, which translates to "the land of those who are unreasonable." Referring to Iran as Persia is seen as disrespectful by Iranians, who find the term Persia to be meaningless and unintelligible. The name "Persia" originates from the region known as Fars or Farsistan. Europeans found this designation suitable and subsequently adopted it" (Tancoigne, 1820: 147). It is likely that prior to J. M. Tancoigne, discussions regarding the confusion surrounding the term Persia among Iranians had already taken place. These conversations highlighted that Iranians refer to their country as "Iran", a distinction that orientalists also recognized. Conversely, the mention of Iran in Western societies stems from tangible realities rather than unfounded theories. This understanding led to the incorporation of the term "Iran" and its associated concepts into European academic discourse. Therefore, it is essential to dispel any misconceptions and recognize that the use of the name Iran is not merely a conspiracy orchestrated by Orientalists or Reza Shah. The people of this region have long been aware that their country is called Iran. It is important to recognize that Orientalists played a significant role in shaping the concept of Iran and enhancing its public awareness and widespread application (Gnoli, 1989: X). However, this contribution should not be viewed as a blameworthy endeavor.

In a different context, Vaziri views the application of the titles Iran and Persia to a vast region characterized by diverse cultures and languages as a distortion of history. He argues that labeling such a varied land with these titles is unjust to the peoples who have historically inhabited and continue to inhabit the area. Vaziri suggests that the term Iran is a fabricated concept, asserting that it cannot be historically contextualized through philological analysis or traced through its developmental phases in history. Furthermore, he argues that it is misguided to attribute any political identity or essence to it (Vaziri, 2013: 73-82). Vaziri's lack of familiarity with Iran's ancient literature has led him to make impulsive and uninformed statements regarding the country's historical context. Archaeological discoveries and written records indicate that Iran, as a religious, cultural, and ethnic entity, has been recognized since the late 6th century BC. It is during the Sasanian period in the 3rd century AD that the concept of Iran as a political entity begins to emerge. The inscriptions of Darius and Xerxes clearly indicate that the Iranians of this period had a strong awareness of their national and ethnic identity (Khaleghi Motlagh, 1992: 237-238); terms such as *airyå-daiŋhāvō* [Aryan Countries] and *airyō.šayanəm* [Aryan Countries] serve as evidence of this understanding. Gherardo Gnoli, a renowned Italian expert in Iranian studies, argued that the rise of political thought in Iran during the Sasanian era was influ-

enced by the official designation of Iran in the Achaemenid period. He contended that this official title contributed to a weakening of the emperor's authority. Consequently, political, social, and cultural factors necessitated the avoidance of the term "*airyå*" in reference to the kingdom (Gnoli, 1989: 29-71). He posits that the term "*airyå*" originated from a religious context during the Achaemenid era, and it was under Ardashir-i Babakan that "*airyå*" took on a political significance, ultimately becoming the official designation for Iranian land (Gnoli, 1989: 129-175). Several researchers found certain aspects of Gnoli's perspective unconvincing. By examining the Avesta texts, they proposed an alternative interpretation, suggesting that Iran functioned as a national state with political characteristics prior to the Sasanian era. Jalal Khaleghi Motlagh explored Iran's historical origins and demonstrated that during the Achaemenid period, the concept of Iran held significant ethno-political implications, indicating that the Iranians were conscious of their national identity (Khaleghi Motlagh, 1992: 236-243). Jalal Matini illustrates that Iranian identity transcends mere geographical and religious frameworks; it has consistently been intertwined with a political mindset (Matini, 1992: 266). Similarly, Abbas Amanat asserts that the term Iran carries a political and ethnic legacy, emphasizing that Iranian identity is deeply rooted in various elements including language, literature, geography, imperial customs, mythology, history, and religion (Amanat, 2012: 1-27). The concept of "the other" has consistently played a significant role in Iranian society, influencing how Iranians define and redefine their identity in relation to foreigners. At various points in history, they have contrasted themselves with others through the lens of the Iranian monarchy, as well as through language, literature, and religion. As a result, Iranian identity is inherently multifaceted and must be examined from multiple perspectives. A historical understanding of Iran and its identity cannot be achieved through an ahistorical framework. Ahmad Ashraf emphasizes the complex and multifaceted nature of Iranian identity, asserting that Iranians have historically recognized their distinct identity (Ashraf, 2017: 81-105). Alireza Shapour Shahbazi, Iranian scholar, argues that certain texts from the Avesta, particularly the *Farwardīn Yašt*, reference the Iranian nation rather than solely the Zoroastrian community. He posits that *airyå* should be viewed as a nation alongside other nation (Shapour Shahbazi, 2005: 104). Shapour Shahbazi argues that the concept of Iran as a nation-state date back to the Achaemenid era, and even earlier, suggesting that the political notion of Iran should not be limited to the Sasanian period. The Achaemenid rulers recognized this notion, as evidenced by their inscriptions. However, the absence of the official name "*airyå*" (Iran) in their references to their empire poses a question. Shahbazi, along with Gherardo Gnoli, attributes this omission to political and cultural considerations. Shapour Shahbazi examines the use of vague and ambiguous terms like ima xšassam (referring to *the Empire*) by the Achaemenids, suggesting that these terms reflect the diversity of ethnic groups with varying languages and religions within the empire. He contrasts this with the Achaemenian policy of tolerance and patience. The official titles of the empire are described

as optional and transient, crafted for political convenience, often chosen in a vague and secretive manner to appease the diverse populations under their rule. The empire was known as *dahyūnām vispazanām*, meaning "the lands of all nations." This empire was characterized by autocracy and religious tolerance, as evidenced by the motifs found in Persepolis. In contemporary times, this concept remains significant; for instance, the territories of Russia, England, and Germany are referred to as the Soviet Union, United Kingdom, and Das Reich, respectively. Political and cultural factors compelled the adoption of vague and ethnically neutral designations in order to appease subordinate populations. However, these official titles were unable to replace the informal names by which these nations were commonly recognized, and those unofficial names endured. Consequently, the inhabitants of these countries continued to identify them as Russia, England, and Germany (Shapour Shahbazi, 2005: 111). In the Achaemenid period, the term Iran was commonly used, albeit unofficially, by both rulers and the populace. The name Iran continued to exist informally, and the inhabitants of this land maintained and passed it down long after the decline of the Sasanian kingdom.

The significant issue that needs to be discussed here is Mustafa Vaziri's current viewpoint regarding Iran. He asserts that the region is home to various ethnic groups, each with distinct languages and cultures, which historically lacked familiarity with one another. They did not share a common language, leading to significant communication barriers. Consequently, these groups cannot be unified under a singular political or cultural identity represented by the term "Iran." Furthermore, the notion that this territory once possessed a cohesive political-ethnic consciousness is deemed a misconception and mere wishful thinking. Such awareness has not been present in the region's history; it was the Orientalists and Reza Shah who unified the diverse cultures into a singular identity known as Iran. This process marginalized the rich cultural and ethnic diversity, fabricating a superficial sense of unity while mistakenly intertwining the Persian language with national heritage. Notably, foreign entities have historically referred to this territory by names other than Iran, and there is a lack of references to Iran in their historical accounts (Vaziri, 2013: 121, 122, 209, 210, 211). It is widely acknowledged that Iran is home to a diverse array of ethnic groups, each with its own local languages. At the same time, there is a universally recognized standard language known as Persian. This reality is well-documented in the land's written works, both prose and poetry. It is worthwhile to reference a story that could be relevant in discussing the historical inaccuracies associated with Mustafa Vaziri's claims. In the fifth chapter of *Gulistan*, titled "Love and Youth," Sa'di shares a narrative that aligns well with the themes of this essay. "In the year when Muhammad Khovarezm Shah concluded peace with the king of Khata to suit his own purpose, I entered the cathedral mosque of Kashgar and saw an extremely handsome, graceful boy as described in the simile: Thy master has taught thee to coquet and to ravish hearts/ Instructed thee to oppose, to dally, to blame and to be severe. A person of such figure,

temper, stature, and gait/I have not seen; perhaps he learnt these tricks from a fairy. He was holding in his hand the introduction to Zamaksharni's Arabic syntax and reciting: Zaid struck Amru and was the injurer of Amru. I said: 'Boy! Khovarezm and Khata have concluded peace, and the quarrel between Zaid and Amru still subsists!' He smiled and asked for my birthplace. I replied: 'The soil of Shiraz.' He continued: 'What rememberest thou of the compositions of Sa'di?' I recited: 'I am tired by a nahvi who makes a furious attack/Upon me, like Zaid in his opposition to Amru. When Zaid submits, he does not raise his head/and how can elevation subsist when submission is the regent? He considered awhile and then said: 'Most of his poetry current in this country is in the Persian language. If thou wilt recite some, it will be more easily understood.' Then I said: 'When thy nature has enticed thee with syntax/it blotted out the form of intellect from our heart. Alas, the hearts of lovers are captive in thy snare/we are occupied with thee but thou with Amru and Zaid (Sa'di, 1989: 141-142). Before delving into the interpretation of this story, it's essential to understand the geographical context of Kashgar. Kashgar is a pivotal city in East Turkestan, situated 170 kilometers northwest of Yarkand along the banks of the Kashgar River, a tributary of the Tarim River. This city is nestled within towering mountains at the junction of China, Turkestan, and Afghanistan. In contemporary terms, it is referred to as Xinjiang in Chinese (J.M, 2010: 237). From a contemporary perspective, similar to that of Mustafa Vaziri, it can be reasoned that Kashgar is a city predominantly inhabited by Turkic tribes along with various other ethnic minorities. The key takeaway from Sa'di's story is that the handsome boy, who was also learning Zamaksharni's grammar, struggled to comprehend Sadi's poetry when it was read in Arabic. He pointed out that Sa'di's poems are well-known in this land in Persian, where they are more easily understood. If Vaziri's assertion is accurate, suggesting that various regions of this land spoke distinct languages without a common standard, then Persian would not be understood in Kashgar. Additionally, it's noteworthy that Sa'di and his poetry were well-known in this land, and the acclaim of this Iranian poet extended across many areas; Ibn Battuta notes that in one of the cities of China, sailors were familiar with Sa'di's poetry. If these observations are deemed adequate and persuasive, it follows that the contemporary perception of Vaziri stems from extreme separatist ideologies. These perspectives lack historical foundation in Iran's past, as there has traditionally been no significant cultural, ethnic, or linguistic conflict within the country. This notion represents a contemporary innovation.

Another significant issue that Vaziri addresses is the terminology used by Westerners to refer to this land. According to the author of *Iran as Imagined Nation*, prior to the adoption of the term Iran by Orientalists and Reza Shah, Westerners referred to this land as Persis and Persia. The historical usage of these names can be traced from the time of the Greeks up until the 18th century. Most importantly, the term "Persis" specifically refers to the province of Fars in contemporary Iran, rather than encompassing the entire territory of Iran during the Achaemenid Empire. Europeans, following historical precedent, referred to this land as Persis, Pers, and Persia, all of which

denote the same area of Fars located in southern Iran. Following the advent of Islam, the names Fars and Ajam were adopted to describe this land, both of which indicated the same province of Fars. Before the term Iran was coined, the people of Iran referred to themselves as Ajam, their land as Mulk-i Ajam, and their rulers as Moluk-i Ajam (Vaziri 2013: 60-65). Some of Vaziri's statements are nearly accurate; however, as the saying goes, "There's something wrong with his words." The issue lies in Mustafa Vaziri's reliance on Western interpretations of his country's name and history. He appears to overlook the significance of the historical context and the names that the people of this land use to identify themselves. The distinction between the names by which Greeks, Arabs, and Europeans refer to us such as Persis, Ajam, and Persia—and the name we use for ourselves, Iran, warrants explanation. This phenomenon is not unique to Iran; there are numerous similar instances globally. For example, Polish citizens refer to their country as Polska, while we know it as *Lahistān*. The English refer to it as Poland, the French as Pologne, and in Latin, it is known as Polonia. In some Eastern European languages, the term "*Lech*" or "*Leh*" is also used to refer to the people of Leh (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2019: 4-20). The country known as Germany is referred to as Almāniā by Arabs and Germany by the British, while its inhabitants call it Deutschland. It is worthwhile to explore how different cultures refer to a country that we have long known as Iran and to its people as Iranians. It's good to see the various names that have been attributed to the land we have long known as Iran and to ourselves as Iranians. The Greeks referred to it as Persis, while the Arabs called it Fars and Ajam. The Ottoman Turks also used the term Ajam, the British designated it as Persia, and the French referred to it as Pers (Matini, 1992: 245-246). If we focus solely on these examples, the name that foreigners use to refer to this land- here, Iran- is different from the name that the people of that land use to identify their country. Mustafa Vaziri has based his investigation of the names Persia and Iran on tenuous foundations, attempting to formulate a new plan that relies on superficial and simplistic arguments. In short, Iran is not a fabricated term created by Reza Shah or Orientalists. To truly understand its significance and origins, we must delve into the history of this land and explore the roots of the word itself.

Vaziri asserts that when foreigners referred to this land as Persis and Persia, they were specifically alluding to the state of Fars rather than the entire region. Crucially, this land is home to diverse groups, including Turks, Kurds, Baloch, Arabs, and Turkmens, each distinct in language, culture, and religion. Consequently, using the terms Persis and Persia—designations that pertain to a specific people—to describe this land is both vague and unreasonable (Vaziri, 2013: 121, 122, 209, 210, 211). Earlier, I discussed the names of countries and the various terms used by locals and foreigners, providing examples for clarity. Now, I aim to elaborate on the distinction between the names Persis and Persia, which foreigners used to refer to our land, in the context of the concept of "part to whole." The term Lahistān refers to the inhabitants of *Leh* or *Lekh*. Are all the residents of Lahistān solely from the Leh community? Don't other

ethnic groups exist in Poland? I also noted that we refer to the country of Deutschland as *Almān*; however, *Almān* is a group of Germans, not a designation for everyone living in Deutschland. Are all individuals in Deutschland part of the German family? Now that the Greeks referred to us as Persis, it is worthwhile to examine that region and compare it to how we perceive Greece. The area known as Greece is made up of various regions, including Thrace, Macedonia, Ypres, Thessaly, and the Peloponnese. The term "Greece" itself is derived from "Ioniai," which specifically pertains to the western section of Asia Minor along the Aegean Sea and some of its islands. Despite the region's ethnic and cultural diversity, during the Achaemenid period, it was collectively referred to as Greece, with Ionia being a part of this territory rather than encompassing the whole area. We regard Greece as the birthplace of philosophy and its thinkers, and we are familiar with the names of numerous Greek philosophers. It is clear that the philosophers we refer to as Greek were not all from Ionia (the western coast of Asia Minor and its islands). Some of them may have originated from regions such as Thrace, Macedonia, Thessalonica, Ypres, and the Peloponnese. However, we collectively regard this varied territory as Greece and its thinkers as Greek philosophers (Matini, 1992: 249). Consequently, others adopted the same naming convention for us, referring to Persia not only as the area of Fars but also as the whole country of Iran.

Vaziri argues that the term Iran is a contrived label lacking any ethno-political significance, viewing it instead as primarily religious in nature. He refers to the concept of Iran as it emerged post-Islam, a period characterized by the absence of a cohesive government until the Safavid era. During this time, various regions operated under their own kings, whose main objective was to consolidate and extend their power rather than to govern a unified territory known as Iran (Vaziri, 2013: 141-155). If Vaziri identified an ethno-political characteristic for Iran during the Sasanian period, it can be argued that there is essentially no political framework for post-Islamic Iran, as he believes that a unified government is not a priority. In earlier sections, I applied the principle of analyzing the part in relation to the whole. Here, however, I suggest an alternative approach: applying the whole to the part. This perspective will demonstrate that Iran possesses its own distinct political nature during this era. The references to Sultan Mahmud and Masoud of Ghazni as *Khosrow* of Iran and other similar titles by historians and poets highlight a significant cultural connection between the Turkish rulers of the Ghaznavid dynasty and the legacy of Persian kings (Nizamī-i Arūzī-I, 2003: 18). The Ghurid dynasty, which governed the area that is now Afghanistan, was acknowledged as a significant regional force and also asserted its influence over Iran. The culturally oriented rulers of the Samanid and Buyid dynasties referred to themselves as the *Shah and Khosrow of Iran* (king of Iran), even though their control extended only over certain regions of the country. To gain public legitimacy, leaders from various Turkish dynasties often claimed descent from Iranian families, aiming to win the approval of the local communities. As a result, despite

a period characterized by fragmented governance, Iran maintained a distinct eth-no-political identity, as reflected in existing historical documents.

Mustafa Vaziri critiques the commonly held view of the Safavid era as a unified Iran. He asserts that historical texts from this period refer to the region as *Mamâlek-i Mahruse-ye Irân* (the Guarded Domains of Iran). Vaziri interprets the term "Guarded Domains" to imply that different regions within Iran operated autonomously, each re-sembling its own separate entity or nation. This viewpoint contests the conventional narrative that suggests a singular, unified Iranian identity during the Safavid era (Va-ziri, 2013: 93-96). In the textual sources from the Safavid period, a variety of synonyms for Iran are frequently mentioned. Notable terms include *Ajam*, Iran, *Mamâlek-i* Iran, *Mamâlek-i Fasih al-Masālk-i* Iran, *Velāyat-i* Iran, *Velāyāt-i Iranzamin*, the imperial gov-ernment, and *Mulk-i* Iran. These terms reflect the diverse ways in which this land was referred to during that era (Matini, 1992: 253). The terms *Iranshahr*, Iran, *Iranzamin*, and *Mulk-i Ajam* have historically been used interchangeably to refer to the nation of Iran. This practice has persisted through various historical periods, reflecting the continuity of cultural and national identity among the Iranian people (Safa, 1954: 160). Mustafa Vaziri asserts that the *Mamâlek-i Mahruse-ye Irân* suggest that this region has never been unified and that each area has functioned as an independent country. This perspective is fundamentally ahistorical and misguided. Vaziri's statement highlights a significant lack of understanding regarding Iran's rich history and cultural unity.

Conclusion

Denial of Iranian and national identity, presented in a manner that is both ahistorical and anachronistic, defines the mission of Mustafa Vaziri in his book *Iran as Imag-ined Nation*. Iranian identity is a multifaceted and intricate subject. To fully grasp its complexities, it is essential to examine a diverse array of written sources across vari-ous genres. Only through a comprehensive analysis can we attain a scientific under-standing of Iranian identity. The term "Iran" carries profound and complex meanings that cannot be divorced from its historical context. Moreover, the notion that Iran is merely an invention of Reza Shah and Orientalists oversimplifies its rich heritage and cultural evolution. The evolution and transformation of Iran, along with its ethno-po-litical dynamics, cannot be dismissed based on contemporary assumptions. Instead, Iran can be conceptualized as a complex and multifaceted nation.

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