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Racialisation Processes in Iran

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Introduction

The study of the Middle East in terms of racialisation processes and racism is an important one, not only because it helps us reach the core of global clashes between the West and the East, but it also creates a binary for means of defining ambiguous and often misleading terms regarding ethnic groups in the East- the main issue with Iranian studies is, undoubtedly, the blurred distinction between *Persian* and *Iranian.* For centuries, Iran has been at the centre of global and internal clashes, with Persian-centricity asserting cultural hegemony against foreign interventions, as well as their own minority ethnic groups.

This study will seek to create a coherent view of racism and racialisation processes in Iran through the use of four dimensions of race. Each dimension of the study is interconnected and the study will be approached with a view to create a chronological account of racialization processes, beginning in the 16th century and ending in the 21st century. Key events will be used to create this account, using the 1978-79 Iranian revolution as the pivotal event.

Historical racial construction of minority groups in Iran

Iran has, throughout its history, persecuted its minority groups in favour of Persians. Persians share the country with Kurds, Azeris, Gilakis, Mazandaranis, Arabs, Baluchis and Turkmen, but for the purposes of this study, particular emphasis will be placed on Kurds due to their rich history of subordination and oppression. The oppression of Azeris and Arabs will also be evaluated by means of looking at past revolts, violence and oppression by the Persian-centric state. Power relations in Iran heavily favour Persians in terms of culture, politics and economy- the government, which is predominantly Persian, controls the presence of minority ethnic groups within these three arenas. Often, it is felt by minority ethnic groups that they are victims of persecution. It was believed that the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution would bring autonomy and self-rule to minority ethnic groups- the revolution came after years of difficulties encountered by Iran's minority groups. Some minorities welcomed the Islamic revolution, believing that it would grant them autonomy. Instead, the revolution brought with it a system that discouraged anything distinctive to a minority- language, religion, culture, territorial identification. The post-revolution government followed a state concept of unity, which was key in racialization processes of minority groups.

The Kurdish population of Iran is estimated between 7% and 10%. Kurdistan borders Iran, Turkey and Iraq, though Iranian Kurdistan denotes the parts of Kurdistan that are considered Iranian territory, which falls in western parts of Iran. Kurdish agriculture is of great importance to the national economy- despite this, political and social rights do not reflect the Kurds' contribution to the economy. Although Kurds are often presented as a divided group, the question of cultural heterogeneity remains. The view that Kurds are divided does not take into account shared belonging, ancestry and cultural and social features that are found in Kurds. Regarding this, Natali (2005) notes that Kurds claim similar racial purity to that claimed by Persians.

In 2006, Minorities at Risk carried out out the *Assessment for Kurds in Iran*, part of a study collecting qualitative and quantitative data on 283 politically active ethnic groups worldwide from 1945 onwards. The Minorities at Risk study identifies a number of factors that put Kurds at risk of tensions. These include differing languages, religion, geographical location, resistance of domination and history of rebellion and repression. Claims over Kurdistan are contested, with the region bordering Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Iran and the Ottoman Empire attempted to centralise the state, although there

has been much conflict over Kurdish independence and autonomy. Furthermore, Kurds in Iran have multiple and overlapping demands regarding their political future, including autonomy and a more democratic Iran.

The first key date to be studied in Kurdish history before the Iranian Revolution is the Battle of Chaldiran- the catalyst behind the remodelling of the Kurdish border. In 1514, with the help of the Kurds, Sultan Selim's army defeated the army of Shah Ismail Safavid at Chaldiran, which marked the first date of Kurdish territory between Iran and the Ottoman Empire. After the Battle of Chaldiran, both countries attempted to consolidate centralised spaces, which was met with Kurdish opposition. Over the 500 years since Chaldiran, the Kurds have faced hegemony from Isfahan (previous Iranian capital) and Tehran.

Further upheaval came for the Iranian Kurds in 1941, when Soviet, British and American Allied troops entered Iran. Reza Shah's dictatorship was replaced by a weak government with no control over the south of the country. Therefore democratic rights were given to the various political parties in the south, which was at the time occupied by British and American troops. British, American and Soviet troops did not occupy the Mahabad area of Iran, which was inhabited largely by Kurds. Opportunity arose for a Kurdish political movement, and in September 1942 this opportunity was seized and the Kurds of Mahabad launched the first Kurdish political movement, the Komala JK, a nationalist party. The Kurdish Democratic Party was founded in 1945, which all the members of Komala joined. The KDP presented an eight-fold political programme. The following are the key points made in the programme in relation to ending Kurdish oppression in Iran:

1) The Kurdish people of Iran must manage their own business in order to achieve autonomy.
2) Kurds must be allowed to study in their own mother tongue.
3) The country's Constitution must ensure that district councillors for Kurdistan be elected to take charge of all administrative and social matters.
4) State officials must be elected by the local population.

These political demands reflect the oppression of Iranian Kurds until this point. In 1946 the first Kurdish republic was proclaimed and Qazi Mohammed, the leader of the KDP, was elected president. Although the republic lasted less than a year, it achieved an incredible amount of widespread Kurdish aspirations. For example, Kurdish became the official administrative language in schools, many Kurdish periodicals were published and the first Kurdish theatre was founded.

In 1947, the republic fell. The Iranian Armed Forces began disarming the supporters of the republic and Qazi Mohammed was sentenced to death after a full trial. Mass executions in Iranian Kurdistan and Kurd-inhabited territories then began. The failure of the republic may have been due to weak leadership and tribal rivalries, or external factors, such as the Iranian government's determination to oppress Kurdish and Azerbaijani progressive movements, as well as the backing of Soviet troops interested in creating an oil consortium with Iran. Persian supremacy once again rose and any autonomy the Kurds had gained was gone. Following the fall of the republic, there was little to no political representation granted to the Kurds. Most of the members of the KDP were executed of imprisoned. However, young Kurdish people began another uprising. Following Dr Mossadegh's rise to power, there was a revival of progressive party politics and in Mahabad. The KDP received between 80 and 99% of votes, leading to the decision to declare the votes null and void, an instance of political autonomy being taken from Kurds.

In the mid-seventies, the Shah's regime reached its peak- no democracy or agency remained in the country and political autonomy had been completely mobilised by the Shah. Rights of minority groups were low due to priorities lying with positioning Iran as an important member of the global trade, as well as the creation and maintenance of the bourgeoisie. However, due to his Western inspired 'White Revolution', Iran's industrial workers remained in poverty and watched as their rights and political agency were stripped from them. All political organisations, trade unions, professional and even religious associations were banned and there was no freedom granted to the press. In 1977, demonstrations against the Shah began, which marked the beginning of the end of his regime. Demonstrations displayed discontent over apparent Westernisation of Iran- there was a desire for a

return to the previous system, in which class did not play such a huge part in society and the gap in the distribution of wealth was not as cavernous.

A key figure in the Iranian revolution was Ayatollah Khomeini, who became a national hero at the point of his arrest in 1962. He was arrested for his vocal opposition of the Shah's pro- Western capitalist revolution. In 1964, Khomeini was exiled but returned in the late 1970s in order to fight the Shah's regime. In January 1979, the regime and the Pahlavi monarchy fell, leading to a national referendum. Khomeini won the referendum by a landslide victory. He declared an Islamic republic and was appointed Iran's political and religious leader for life. Islamic law was introduced across the country.

Another group facing similar geographical division and social oppression in Iran is the Azeris. Elling notes that "Azeris make up the majority of the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as minorities in Turkey, Russia, Caucasian and Central Asian republics and other countries. The largest Azeri community, however, is located in the area of northwest Iran historically known as Azerbaijan." (2013:28) The Azerbaijani border was drawn in 1828, marking Azeri territory and cementing separatism. This process was similar to that supporting the separation of Kurdistan from Tehran.

Before the Iranian Revolution, Azeri oppression in Iran began with the drawing of the border in 1828- in a similar process to the division of Kurds, this split the Azeris into three and foregrounded the political unity of Azeris becoming difficult. In the 1920s there was a key uprising- rise of Azerbaijan Autonomous Government. This government sought to decentralise Tehran, although suppression from Tehran, who wanted to remain in possession of all the country's power, and the ultimate execution of leader Pishevari saw the end of the movement.

Azerbaijan contributed to the Iranian Revolution. However, following the revolution, news reached Tehran of unrest in Azerbaijan in 1979 into 1980. Therefore, Tehran were concerned that the unrest was due to ethnic issues that the revolution had failed to solve. However, these concerns were suppressed in the April 1979 referendum and there was denial from Tehran under Khomeini that ethnic rights needed addressing. Once more, Persian-centricity overshadowed obvious unrest and the streets of Azerbaijan's cities became a site of bloodshed, with clashes between supporters of Khomeini and those of Shari'atmadari, a liberal, forward-looking Iranian grand Ayatollah from an Azeri family, who stood against Khomeini's revolutionary clericalism. (Atabaki, 2008:54) Following this, it is interesting to note that during the revolution and in the immediate aftermath, no attempt was made to reference the activities of the old Azerbaijan based movements, such as the Azerbaijan Democratic Party, which, at this point, still had office at Baku. Cultural presence was taken from them and political stands were denied media coverage. This either shows a nationwide race problem denial or yet another display of Persian centricity.

The third and final minority ethnic group to be discussed is Arabs. Elling (2013) points out that Arab is an "umbrella term" used to include a broad range of peoples. The estimated size of the Arab population in Iran ranges and fluctuates between 1.3 to over 2 million to 2.7 and even 5 million. The biggest Arab community reside primarily in the southwest province of Khuzestan. Khuzestan is home to Iran's most important source of income- the oil industry- as well as playing a big part in the agricultural industry. Ethnicists claim that, despite the important role Khuzestanian Arabs play in the Iranian economy, the area is desperately underdeveloped, with issues such as unemployment, environmental problems and poverty plaguing the largest Arab area of Iran. There are concerns that this is a reflection of centralised racist attitudes and priority going to Persian populated areas when it comes to the distribution of wealth.

In the lead up to the revolution, the Pahlavi state uprooted much of Khuzestan's traditional power structures- cities were renamed and policies were implicated which discriminated against local Arabs. This fuelled Arab involvement in the revolution and, similar to the Kurds, encouraged the fight for autonomy. Since the revolution, there have been repeated complaints of the same social issues still plaguing Khuzestan. The Member of Parliament from Abadan, Mohammad Saeed Ansari, has repeatedly voiced concerns of high rates of unemployment despite the region's significant oil reserves and its agricultural, ship-building, manufacturing, and petrochemical industries. One of Ansari's main concerns was that half of those employed by these companies are local Arabs. Ansari claims that racism towards Arabs has also denied them opportunities to work in local government.

State racism- minority and non-Iranian groups in policy

"...the racial state could be said to be everywhere. And simultaneously seen nowhere. It (invisibly) defines almost every relation, shapes all but every interaction, contours virtually all intercourse."
 (Goldberg, 2002:98)

Firstly, it is important to highlight the two parts of Iranian constitution that cover ethnic minority groups:

Chapter 2, Article 15: The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.

Chapter 3, Article 19: All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege.

DaBell (2013) points out that ethnic minorities represent well over a third of Iran's population, and while several of the revolution's biggest figures came from ethnic minorities, there is still frustration towards Tehran regarding their treatment of minority groups. DaBell states: "Yet ethnic minorities are a sensitive political issue, which is one reason accurate numbers in politics and the military are not easily available. The Islamic Republic prefers to emphasize religion to foster national identity and avoid problems of ethnic divisions. Many politicians do not discuss their ethnicity, although several Azeri, Kurdish, Baluchi, and Arab groups have expressed frustration with Tehran. Some have openly protested over several issues, including:

- Lack of government spending on development in provinces with large ethnic
  minorities,
- Revenues from oil and natural resources in their regions being spent on other
  cities and provinces,
- Greater regional autonomy,
- And limits on use of their traditional languages."

The political integration of Kurds leading up to the Iranian Revolution of 1978 was limited and, historically, their political involvement was stifled by Tehran. However, political organisations such as the KDP existed to fight for autonomy and Kurdish rights. In the lead up to the Islamic Revolution, the situation in Iranian Kurdistan was, in many ways, worse than the rest of the country. Areas of Kurdish inhabitancy were heavily militarised. The army, police and particularly the Savak (the secret police) were granted complete authority over Kurdish areas. These authorities put measures in place to ensure that the movements of Kurds were strictly regulated. Possible revolt and revolution was staunchly oppressed by Iranian authorities.

Khomeini's government were cautious of the Kurds owing to their past instances of revolt, and once the imperial army had left its mountain bases between 1978 and 1979, Kurds reclaimed Kurdistan. The revolution appeared to have granted the Kurds the autonomy they desired. However, it only took three weeks from Khomeini's arrival in Tehran for clashes between Islamist revolutionaries and Kurds to begin. This guerrilla war turned Shiite Kurds against leftist Kurds, such as the KDP. Control of Kurdistan, however, belonged to the Kurds until 1984. At the start of the clashes between Khomeini's supporters and the Kurds, the Kurds were keen to negotiate with Tehran and Khomeini initially suggested the Kurds obtain self-rule, although the demands of the two parties were too different to come to a compromise. While the Kurds demanded decentralisation and autonomy, Tehran were concerned with the fragmentation of Iran. However, the KDP never demanded complete separation from Iran, so negotiations appeared to be rejected by Tehran based solely on the desire to oppress the Kurds after their history of conflict. Khomeini maintained through the conflict that Tehran was fighting "separatists" and "counter-revolutionaries".

There were two major revolts of Iranian Azeris during the 20th century demanding change through reform. The first came in 1920 under The Khiabani Movement, A nationalist-democratic and anti-imperialist movement, which opposed Persian-centricity and called for autonomy. (Sanasarian, 2000:10) The key figure of this uprising was Khiyabani, a preacher calling for reform, who lived under Tsarist Russian rule for a time. Khiyabani's calls for reform were rooted in 18th century European social ideas and opposed centralisation. However, this movement did not call for autonomy. The Azeri revolt of 1920 was concerned with preserving Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and demanded "a fair distribution of executive powers between the central government and local authorities in Iran." (Katouzian and Shahidi, 2008:50) The 1920 revolt was sparked by calls for political reforms throughout the country from the capital, as opposed to more regional initiatives. This spanned more minority groups than just Azeris. Khiyabani's policy sought to decrease the role of the capital and decentralise Tehran. However, this was met with opposition from the Iranian nationalist-reformist camp, who felt that any weakening of Tehran would weaken the rest of the country. The uncompromising stand taken by Khiyabani not only meant that he refused support from foreign powers, but he could not negotiate with central government or other regional movements of Iran. The conclusion of this political revolt came when the central government appointed Mokhber al-Saltaneh Hedayat as the governor of Azerbaijan in August 1920. Although Khiyabani's rule power was short, he made an impact in Azeri politics and attitudes throughout Iran. His suppression can be seen as a sign of widespread legitimacy of Persian-centricity and minority oppression.

From 1945-46, the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was established with Soviet help.
The key figure of this revolt was Pishevari, a revolutionary communist. He maintained that he had learned from Khiyabani's lead and drew on Marxist-Leninist views to push for autonomy. Pishevari saw Azerbaijan as separate from the rest of Iran and insisted on carrying on the Bolshevik's cry of "the right of nations to self-determination, the right to secede and form and independent state." (Atabaki, 2008:50) The intention was to establish a sovereign state and the movement was undertaken with the view that the Soviet Union, as the leading communist power, was to be trusted above British and American powers. The intervention of the Soviet Union was quite an unpopular decision of Pishevari's due to the lack of trust given to foreign powers by Iranian people. Soviet backing was given and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan was born, although Soviet support had negative consequences. Many Iranians were wary that this new movement was the start of a Soviet movement to annexe Azerbaijan from the rest of Iran and the reliance on Soviet support alienated Azeri people. One year after its inception, the Azerbaijan Autonomous Government's rule in Azerbaijan came to an end.

This study has already touched upon the political oppression of Arabs in the historical minorities section. However, it is important to delve deeper into how Iran's policies implicated this oppression. Historically, Arabs have always seen Tehran as having Persian-centric values and priorities, suggesting that they are victims of discrimination within policy.
"They also complain of being subject to what they see as a calculated policy of ethnic and cultural discrimination by a state that sees them as threats to internal unity and pawns of hostile foreign interests. In this regard, Iranian Arabs claim to be the target of a deliberate campaign by the state to erase their Arab cultural identity in favour of the ethnic Persian-dominated character propagated by the Islamic Republic."(Zambelis, 2014)

Before the revolution, Arabs were denied cultural, social and economic representation in policy. One of the main reasons for this during the 20th century was British occupation of Khuzestan, which afforded power over much of the area to the British. British involvement in Khuzestan became rife during 1909 after the discovery of oil in the area, coupled with the inception of the Anglo-Persian oil company. This expansion of industry granted Britain a quasi-colonial rule over parts of Khuzestan. However, this was met with Arab discontent due to a collective feeling of loss of nationalism and a revolt was carried out against the Iranian government, with the ultimate aim being Khuzestan's complete separation from Iran.

Racial Persianisation and Persian-centricity

So I like to think that in our thousands of years of continuous civilisation, we Persians have gained certain insights and exhibited certain characteristics that the world needs.

- Shah of Iran Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, *Mission for my Country* 1974

Having viewed the ways in which Persian-centricity is exercised in Iran through the subordination of minority ethnic groups, a conceptualised understanding of Persianisation is now to be undertaken. One way to see the resilient Persian-centricity in Iran is through European Orientalism, which placed the Persian ethnic group in a place of superiority in terms of language and religion- this became dominant discourse. However, according to ethnicists and commentators, there are many structural and sociological issues surrounding the elevation of Persians to superiority. The political domination of Persians in Iran places Iran at the core of Hesse's 2004 conceptualisation of racism- that it is a social force used in the political interests of governments, and that it is at the core of policy.

When conceptualising Persians as an ethnic group, it is important to first create a foundation for how they have been labelled as such through looking at what an ethnic group is. There is not really an agreed blanket definition for what an ethnic group is. Elling (2013) brings forward the idea of "ethnic commonsense", which suggests that ethnic traits are taken for granted when identifying peoples. "Just as "ethnic group" in English, *qowm* in Persian is a highly ambiguous term. In the majesterial *Dehkhoda's Dictionary, qowm* is defined as "a group of men and women" and in *Mo'in's Dictionary* as "a group of people" or "relatives". Counteracting the idea of ethnic commensense, Brubaker suggests that "ethnicity should be treated as a processal, situational, relational and contextual dynamic of identification, and not as a marker signifying essential traits or indicating membership of static, internally homogenous, externally bound groups." (2004:102)

However, Tapper (1988) wrote that *qowm* "may be used for a major linguistic group, but more often in a strict family/descent-group sense." This echoes Shils' (1957) definition of an ethnic group, which prioritises blood, race, language, religion and custom as inescapable characteristics of one ethnic group.

Iranian history is often nationalist, ahistorical and Persian-centric accounts of events "rooted in pervasive nationalist assumptions." (Elling, 2013:15) Here, Elling is possibly suggesting that the fault of Persian-centricity in Iran can be laid at the feet of, not only the Persians, but also the rest of the world for accepting the ahistorical accounts. Boroujerdi (1998) argued that Persian-centric accounts of Iranian history "further entrench the marginalisation of minority groups." Using the definition of "ethnic group" provided by Dekhoda, would Persians even be defined as an ethnic group? Dekhoda's definition of an ethnic group encapsulated ideas of kinship and descent. What is it that Persians have in common and are they tied together through blood? Is it merely a disassociation of the Persians from other groups?

Nationalism is closely related to those defined as Persians because Iranian-ness and Persian-ness are often blurred. Iranian and Persian interests are often considered one and the same when constructing policy and Iranian ethnic hierarchy reflects this. When discussing nationalism in terms of Persian-centric Iran, it is worth mentioning Banton's (1993) idea of ethnic competition. He suggests that ethnicity is a social, political and cultural tool used in competition for resources or motivation for conflict. This is particularly poignant in this example, because Persians are in control of most of the oil wealth, despite parts of the oil industry being in Azeri territory. This is directly related to political hegemony- Persians make up nearly all of the Iranian government, which means that the distribution of wealth is left up to them. Very little national wealth stemming from oil, agriculture and other national industries trickles down to the poorest members of Iranian society and, historically, wealth is reserved for the Persian elite. During the dying days of the Pahlavi dynasty, future leader Khomeini addressed the Shah as "you miserable wretch" and "attacked him for his pro-American policies." (Hiro, 2005:xxi) This is one example of the staunch protection asserted by Persians of their culture and civilisation.

Violence against minority ethnic groups perpetrated by Persian-centric authorities has been the core of foreign concern recently, as well as in the past. The durability of this racist violence can be read on a number of levels. Given the fact that violence is usually orchestrated as a result of ethnic tensions owing to cultural hegemony of Persians and the Persians' desire to maintain power, this study will use

meso explanations as the basis for theoretical understanding of racially fuelled attacks on minority ethnic groups. This means analysing how racism is orchestrated among certain groups and in certain settings, namely by Persians towards minority ethnic groups during times of revolt. Firstly, there has to be a sense of logic behind the violence for Persians to begin acting violently towards minority ethnic groups. It could be argued that this 'logic' stems from territorial-political beliefs- Persians believe they have the rights to the land. However, it could also be argued that racist violence in Iran is ideologically grounded- cultural pluralism is a threat to the state and must be stamped out.

Anti-Christianism and anti-Semitism

Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education.
           -Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre (2004)

Article 14 [Non-Muslims' Rights]

The Iranian government is hostile towards non-Shia Muslims. Not only is punishment of Sunni Muslims regular, but the treatment of other religions is also a concern, as voiced by the U.S Department of State in 2011 and 2012. Once again, the issue of superiority arises when analysing the ways in which "the other" is treated in Iran. In order to assess anti-Semitism and anti-Christian attitudes and behaviours in Iran, this dimension will be a more contemporary one, evaluating instances from 2001 onwards.

A key event in contemporary Iranian history in terms of anti-Semitism is The Durban Conference on Racism 2001, which became a "forum for racism" (Bayefsky, 2002:65)- the parallels drawn between Zionism and racism in the lead up to Durban I lead to Israel and the U.S to withdraw from the conference altogether Four regional meetings prior to the convention took place. The fourth was held in Tehran, and this marked the end of the spirit of tolerance encouraged for Durban I. Isolation of Israel was advocated by Iranian authorities and championed in the Tehran meeting. Iran was at the forefront of Israel's isolation and the parallels drawn between Zionism and racism. This was undoubtedly due to conflict between Israel and Palestine, which fuelled many countries to side with Palestine.

Lantos notes that "The majority of the blame for the failure of Durban… must be laid at the feet of several members of Organization of the Islamic Conference" (2002:32) Eastern regimes were unwilling to compromise and blame laid at Iran's feet for the failure of the conference. Means of tackling racism were undermined by their disdain for Israel, as well as that of much of the Middle East. Much of the blame for Iran's failure within Durban I can be placed on Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who held presidency between 2005 and 2013. Ahmadinejad has championed the plight of the Palestinians- an issue with resonance in the Islamic world. In order to place himself as a global defender of Islam. In 2005 he claimed the Holocaust was a myth and claimed that Israel should be "wiped off the map" in a bid to demonstrate defiance towards the US and Israel. (Michael, 2007)

Christianity in Iran dates back to the pre-Islamic era (171 BC) and during Islamic rule, Christian groups resided in Iran. However, under Reza Shah's regime, missionary activity was limited and in 1931, village evangelism was prohibited. The Shah's secret police were granted powers to place Christian churches under close surveillance. It is important to note that Christians dwelling in Iran never appeared to lose their cultural identity, even under scrutiny from the Pahlavi dynasty and Reza Shah, who advocated cultural singularity.

In 2011, Amnesty International made a plea with Iranian authorities to release a Christian pastor at risk of execution for "apostasy" for refusing to renounce his religion. (Amnesty International, 2011) The pastor faced death, despite the fact that disaffiliation from Islam is not criminalised in Iran.

In 2012, The US Department of State remarked that Mohamed Badei made several anti-Semitic statements, including "It is time for the Muslim [nation] to unite for the sake of Jerusalem and Palestine after the Jews have increased the corruption in the world…." He added that "Zionists only

know the way of force." President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continued to question the existence and the scope of the Holocaust, and stated that "a horrendous Zionist clan" had been "ruling the major world affairs" for some 400 years, while Vice President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi publicly blamed the "Zionists" for spreading illegal drugs around the world.

Although anti-Semitism is clearly a problem in Iran, denial of racism is once again exercised by Iranian scholars. The concept of unity is constantly upheld for the public eye, despite how false these claims may be. In 1998, Iranian scholar Mohammad Khatami claimed that "Anti-Semitism is indeed a Western phenomena. It has no precedence in Islam or in the East. Jews and Muslims have lived harmoniously together for centuries." (quoted by Sayyid, 2010:5)

CONCLUSION- A Contemporary Global Place for Iran

The concept of nationalism is perhaps the most important means of placing this study globally. Cottam (1966) suggests that, once nationalism had arrived in Iran, it brought a dialectical dilemma. The concept of nationalism is, according to Cottam, a Western one, and the Iranians who were first impacted by the nature of nationalism were those who had felt the cultural impact of the West the strongest. "But nationalism calls for stressing and glorifying the uniqueness of one's own culture", Cottam states (1966:29) and therefore there was some contestation when deciding how Iran should assert the concept of nationalism in their newly-Westernised country. Should they discard their old civilisation in favour of a new Western one? Many believed that the old Iranian civilisation could not compete in the global market economy unless they did so. However, their opposition favoured upholding Iranian-ness in its classic form. The extreme views on this end of the spectrum link in with cultural and racial superiority- they believed that Iran's greatness stemmed from rejecting the ways of culturally and racially inferior groups and races, e.g. the West. It was views like these that acted as a catalyst for the Iranian Revolution, which counteracted the Shah's "White Revolution"- there was a widespread rejection of Westernisation and assimilation with the big players in the global economy to the point where a monarchy and a Shah were overthrown in order to keep Westernisation at bay. The rejection of Westernisation may indeed be owing to the remnants of occupation by the British, Soviet and Allied forces- bitterness to the West is no doubt left behind by forces who come and stay in Middle Eastern countries. Soviet control was handed to some Azeri communities, which had mixed reactions. However, there was a time, under the Pahlavi dynasty, that Westernisation was believed by the government to be the only way for Iran to gain any real global power. Here we may also return to Hesse (2004), who suggested that racism is not an exceptional social ill, but a political tool used in governments as a means for creating policy. Hesse's conceptualisation of racism also challenges Eurocentricity, and that racism originated in Europe. In the case of Iran, it is obvious that racism pre-existed Western influences.

Patterns of Iranian racism can be seen elsewhere- such as assimilation, racism denial and suppression of minority groups. Processes driving racism in Iran in comparison to processes driving racism in other countries- parallels can be drawn between Iran and Japan- both countries oppose Westernisation and hold anti-Semitist values. However, Iran is exceptional in terms of its constantly evolving patterns of racism. Racism in Iran is not only persistent, but it is also ever changing. The nature and targets of Iranian racism and racialization processes appear to adapt according to political regime and monarchy. Anti-Semitism is rising, and means of oppressing minority ethnic groups are ever changing, ignoring the concerns of the US and the West. The study has shown that racism is a durable social and political force- it has spanned centuries and demonstrated the ways in which groups are persecuted by the Persian-centric authorities.

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