The myth of "national identity": Psycho-nationalism in Iran and the Arab world[1]

「国民意識」の言説： イランとアラブ世界におけるサイコナショナリズム

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　「サイコ・ナショナリズム」は、現在の中東地域において不安定要因を形成する主要な要因であり、それは排他的な国民意識の核となる集団的自己意識の半ば意図的に捏造された発明品である。本論は中東イスラーム世界における哲学的議論の豊かな蓄積—イブン・ハルドゥーンの政治学的・社会学的考察を含む—の上に、近年盛んに行われているアイデンティティー政治学の宗派主義・部族主義的な分析枠組みの脱構築を意図している。本論ではまずアラブ世界およびイラン世界における「想像的共同体」の具体的な構成要素に検討を加えたうえ、とりわけ中東地域においては人間集団間の長期的な混交と相互依存構築という歴史的な経験を踏まえた理性的な対話・交渉による関係の構築が地域的平和の実現のための不可欠の要件であることを確認する。

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"The Middle East" and its discontents

The Middle East is an invention. It was the US American naval officer Alfred T. Mahan who popularised the term designating this area in West Asia and North Africa in an article published in the British National Review in 1902. The geographical delimitation catered to the strategic interest of the British Empire and thus focused upon Aden, India and the Persian Gulf area. Thereafter, the term "Middle East" was used by the Times of London where part of Mahan's article was published. Subsequently, Valentine Chirol, a Times correspondent, began publishing a series of articles dealing with the "Middle Eastern Question" centring around India as the strategic heartland of the British Empire. With shifting colonial and "strategic interests" the delineation of the "Middle East" changed as well: when Winston Churchill was British Colonial Minister the term referred to the area between the Bosporus and the borders of India and when the colonial focus shifted towards Egypt after the Second World War Egypt itself was considered to be the centre of the "Middle East". The imagined borders of the region thus shifted with the strategic interests of external powers, i.e. Great Britain and after the Second World War until very recently, the United States.

Although the etymology of the term can be traced back even to antiquity when Roman historians referred to this so called "Middle East", the current map of the region largely emerged out of the break-up of imperial structures, i.e. the Ottoman Empire and the Qajar Empire in Persia[2]. The two pivotal nodal points that have been repeatedly referred to in analyses of the map we are dealing with and which remains largely unaltered until today are firstly the "Sykes-Picot zeitgeist" in the beginning of the 20th century – the imperial "lines in the sand" drawn by European strategists which effectively divided the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire outside of the Arabian peninsula into areas of future British and French control or influence and partitioned the whole of Syria and Iraq and a large part of southern Turkey. France's area corresponded to the future states of Syria and Lebanon and Britain's area to Iraq and Transjordan. France achieved direct control of the Mediterranean coastal regions and Britain gained the provinces of Basra and Baghdad in today's Iraq. In accordance with these rather arbitrary delineations, which are easily recognizable by the straight "pseudo-borderlines" between newly constituted entities such as Syria, Iraq or Jordan, the new "Middle East" was engineered.

The second event of historical importance is, of course, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which refers to a letter from the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Baron Rothschild, a leader of the British-Jewish community, for transmission to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. The letter was incorporated into the peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire and gave impetus to the creation of the state of Israel within the British mandate in Palestine. The analytical bottom line of the previous paragraphs is that the contemporary regional system, so Eurocentrically termed "the Middle East", came about within a period of imperial hegemony which necessitated the invention of nation-state boundaries and their

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[2] For a deeper analysis of the term "Middle East" see Lorenzo Kamel, The Middle East from Empire to Sealed Identities, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 31-33.

corresponding identities in a way that had never occurred before in that area of the world. This region was ordered for hundreds of years in accordance with confessional sovereignties and legitimacy steeped in religious thought systems: Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, Shia Islam in Iran, at least since the Safavid Dynasty which was established in 1501. In the absence of organic nation-state structures "national identity" became a violently contested issue, as nationalism is always also dependent on the definition of self and other (foreign policy becomes central exactly because it regulates the relationship between the internal boundary and the external, the realm beyond the self).

The arbitrary creation of this "Middle East" constituted by imperial interest, rather than strategic viability, gave impetus to a "post-colonial" identity dilemma which haunts the region until today. Apart from the cases of Israel, Iran and Turkey where there was a better scope to delineate "the nation", national identity was a scarce resource exactly because the Arab states that emerged out of the Ottoman Empire did not exist in this shape and form at any time in human history. Being Jordanian, Iraqi or Syrian had to be engineered and different types of "psycho-nationalisms" were created to that end[3].

This post-colonial identity dilemma manifests itself in the repeated challenge to- and erosion of state sovereignties for instance by transnational ideologies: pan-Arabism at the time of Nassir especially in the late 1950s and 1960s or pan-Islamism throughout the period after the ending of the caliphate in 1924. Some of the crises occurring in the region today, the implosion of Syria, the confessional and ethnic strife in Iraq or the Kurdish question for Turkey can be explained by this apparent inadequacy of the "nation-state" as we know it to institutionalise a national identity that is flexible enough to accommodate the widest constituencies in support of the legitimacy of the state. Psycho-nationalisms carried forward by the military strata of society which had the easiest recourse to weapons and to the budget of the state, were quite natural answers to the governance dilemma that was compounded if not constituted by the lack of an organically growing bureaucracy and institutional infrastructure that could carry the meaning of the nation in the first place. The Ba'thist states in Syria and Iraq or the deep state in Egypt are typical examples for a form of militarised governance that sheds its light onto the region until today.

Psycho-nationalism defined

I have argued that in the absence of institutional and administrative structures to govern, the post-colonial states of the Arab world, even after nominal independence in the 1950s, experimented with radical forms of nationalism that were ideological and not pluralistic. All governments use a range of national narratives imbued with emotional vigour and tantalising myths. The point is that in the familial language of (psycho-)nationalism, in the Arab world and elsewhere, the nation is routinely represented almost like an irresistible muse, a siren song with distinctly emotional

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[3] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Psycho-nationalism: Global Thought, Iranian Imaginations, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

undertones. "God bless America", "Roma o' Morte" as Italian psycho-nationalists proclaimed or Gamal Abdal Nassir's repeated references to the greatness of the Arab nation – the target of such phrases is our state of mind and emotional habitat. My term psycho-nationalism derives from such psychological dynamics. Government, the media, social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, even popular culture in the form of soap operas, and music have emerged as the primary carriers of the symbols of this emotive discourse. The target of these subtle forms of political manipulation is our mind and our emotions. As such, psycho-nationalism has a cognitological effect.

At the same time, the state hovers over a complex system in which psycho-nationalist narratives are moulded and implemented. Therefore, the state and its underbelly continues to be the primary harbinger of psycho-nationalism, primarily to legitimate its existence and the governmental forms of power projection that are in place to administer society. Hence it claims the Gewaltmonopol, defined by German sociologist Max Weber as the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. So if "romantic" persuasion is not enough, if the siren song of the nation fails to entice, the nation-state can be enforced through violence, brute if necessary. You can be beaten into submission. There are important differences in the ways in which state violence is implemented against assertive dissenters, but governments routinely crush opposition in the name of the nation and in West Asia and North Africa such state violence has repeatedly been particularly excessive. In most countries of the "west", this systematic power of the state is professionally and effectively exercised through the machinery of laws, norms and regulations. If these strategies are not enough to deter a revolt, the state in Europe and North America or Japan as well uses violence through its security forces, police, the military etc in order to defend the sovereignty of the state and its legitimacy to use force to that end. This latter form of state power is rather more prevalent in West Asia and North Africa as indicated, but it lingers behind the liberal façade of the state all over the world. Here, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben remains firmly within the Eurocentric universe in his empirical analyses, but his focus on the 'state of exception' is a good conceptual tool for understanding this violence of state sovereignty[4]. The state allows itself to suppress. Thus, our lives are determined by this nation-state, whether we like it or not. From provisions for housing, university fees and food to war and peace, the nation-state continues to be a major factor in the lives of its citizens all over the world. In many ways the nation-state is more consequential in our lives than our parents. It 'stalks' us all the way to our living rooms, regulating everything from TV programmes to schooling issues. If this regulatory power, which always also includes surveillance, is not checked properly by civil society it threatens to turn into a form of arbitrary tyranny. A critical and educated civil society, then, is crucial for the survival of democracy and human rights.

Therefore, this article takes seriously the power of the nation-state and modes of resistance to it with particular reference to some aspects of the Iranian and Arab political context. I will attempt to dislocate some of the debates on nationalism by investigating several 'sites' where 'psycho-nationalist' dynamics appear. I will keep a close eye on 'new', avant-garde disciplines such as global thought, global history and comparative philosophies, and my evidence is primarily discussed in terms of concepts and political ideas, that is what I have called "psycho-nationalism in particular, and not so much in terms of empirical case studies which go beyond the confines of this analysis.

There is controversy over the genealogy of nationalist thinking in Turkey, Israel, Iran and the Arab world in the scholarly literature. But in general, research in Europe and North America tends

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[4] See further Giorgio Agamben, State of Exception, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

to locate the emergence of 'modern' nationalism in the so called "west" in general and Europe in particular. In a rather more critical study of the subject matter, it is observed that the "west" saw nationalism as the 'quintessential expression of inclusive tolerance. And this image was then often reinforced by a distinction between the West's "civic" nationalism and illiberal "ethnic" nationalism'[5]. The non-western world was juxtaposed to this self-image: 'As the central organising principle of modern politics, nationalism was thus dichotomized between a noble Western invention and an ignoble non-Western imitation'[6].

While there is overlap due to the intense dialectic between "East" and "West" during the colonial period which created common Euro-Asian spaces, it is principally problematic to reduce the emergence of nationalism to European ideas. The concept of an organised community is central to the canons of eastern philosophy and its belles lettres. As an example of the latter, the Muslim philosopher Ibn Khaldun (d.1406) redefined "asabiyya" (social solidarity) from its pre-Islamic origin and Quranic legacy, in the first systematic sociological conceptualisation of a polity in his famous Muqaddimah (Introduction to history) as early as in 1377 AD. Ibn Khaldun followed the line of classical philosophers of the Muslim enlightenment, such as Abu Nasr Farabi, Razi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Like them, he was a distinctly original and cosmopolitan thinker for his period of time who took full advantage of the intellectual currents at this juncture of global history. Despite sloppy references to 'negroes' whom Ibn Khaldun deemed emotional and excitable and outdated links between environmental factors and levels of civilization that would be deemed racist in our current understanding, the core of Khaldun's theories offers an inclusive conceptualisation of a social community based on research (however inadequate), rather than ideology or some aggressive imperial impulse. Khaldun was no Ernest Renan, who lent his limited knowledge about the region to French imperial strategists due to his conviction that the Orient had to be civilized. Ibn Khaldun was not an Occidentalist advocate of imperial subjugation of "the other". This un-ideological approach of Khaldun comes out in his depiction of the non-Arab "other", in this case the "Persians":

> Thus the founders of grammar were Sibawaih and after him, al-Farisi and az-Zajjaj. All of them were of non-Arab (Persian) descent ... They invented rules of (Arabic) grammar ... great jurists were Persians ... only the Persians engaged in the task of preserving knowledge and writing systematic scholarly works. Thus the truth of the statement of the prophet becomes apparent, "If learning were suspended in the highest parts of heaven the Persians would attain it" ... The intellectual sciences were also the preserve of the Persians, left alone by the Arabs, who did not cultivate them ... as was the case with all crafts ... This situation continued in the cities as long as the Persians and Persian countries, Iraq, Khorasan and Transoxiana, retained their sedentary culture[7].

According to Khaldun, asabiyya (social solidarity) is an important factor in the cyclical rise and fall of civilisations and empires. Good governance enhances the social solidarity of the

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[5] Anthony W. Marx, Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. vii
[6] Ibid., p. viii
[7] Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, Vol. 1, translated by Franz Rosenthal, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 429–30.

community. Ideally, this socially constructed, politically administered consciousness would strengthen the community against external aggression and internal subversion. Here, Ibn Khaldun reveals himself as a theorist of state power. Comparable to other major political theorists of this period, Khaldun was concerned about the sovereignty of the state and its ability to govern society. The more the state is able to foster this sense of tribal community and kinship, he argued, the more likely it is to survive the vicissitudes of history. In a clear re-conceptualisation of Aristotle's notion of koinonia, Khaldun emphasises the importance of social organisation (or ijtima) for this dialectical interaction between state and society. Human social organisation (al-ijtima al-insani) would be moulded by this ideal state in order to bring out the inherently civilised (madani) nature of the citizenry which indicates a rather positive anthropomorphic attitude, a positivism about humanity that permeates the writings of most classical Muslim philosophers. Khaldun wrote during a period of internal division of the Muslim empire partially caused by external threats. Whilst he had a clear interest in re-inscribing the authority of the state as a prophylaxis to internal divisions, he emphasised that no state can exist without fostering social cohesion amongst its citizenry. Hence, Khaldun shared this preoccupation about the social construction and maintenance of a community with western theorists of modernity, such as Emile Durkheim and Ernest Gellner. As one perceptive scholar demonstrates: Both Ibn Khaldun and Ernest Gellner have developed persuasive theoretical models that challenge such views and place group solidarity at the heart of long-term social change. … while for Ibn Khaldun the opulent urban lifestyles inevitably corrode social cohesion built in the shared ascetic living of tribal warriors, for Gellner modernity forges a new form of solidarity built around the promise of continuous economic growth, moral equality and cultural homogeneity among citizens inhabiting their own nation-state[8].

Even Ibn-Khaldun's largely sober, contra-identitarian and research-led inquiries about world history were abused as tropes in psycho-nationalist narratives. As discussed above, Ibn Khaldun was a complex thinker, whose concepts were nuanced and balanced. He did not have a dichotomous notion of self and other, or an aggressive manifesto for political action or racist identities. And yet, he became a major reference point in the discourse of Arab psycho-nationalists, in particular at the beginning of the twentieth century when Arab (psycho)-nationalism was sponsored by British and French imperial strategists as a means to weaken the Ottoman Empire[9]. Imperial strategy, history demonstrates, is always also driven by a divide-and-rule dynamic that creates fissures in order to crush communities into manageable and governable smaller entities. Conversely, nationalism became a device to resist that effort. For instance, in the voluminous writings of Sati Al-Husri (1882–1962), the Ottoman-Syrian nationalist whose ideas became a pillar of Ba'thist ideology, Ibn Khaldun appears as a purveyor of Arab nationalism in order to create an artificial genealogy for his ideas of Arab unity or a potential pan-Arab super state. Al-Husri borrowed generously from the German romanticists, von Ranke and Fichte, in his reinvention of Khaldun as a pan-Arab nationalist. In typically psycho-nationalist fashion, he reconceptualised asabiyya as a spiritual bond among the members of a nation which is defined in terms of language and a shared memory or historical consciousness. According to this view, there is a metaphysical kinship between society and the nation. In opposition to his influential contemporary Taha Hussein, Sati al-Husri maintained that

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[8] Sinisa Malesevic, 'Where Does Group Solidarity Come From? Gellner and Ibn Khaldun Revisited', Thesis Eleven: Critical Theory and Historical Sociology, Vol. 129, No. 1, p. 97 (pp. 85–99).

[9] See further Nurullah Ardlc, 'Genealogy or Asabiyya? Ibn Khaldun between Arab Nationalism and the Ottoman Caliphate', Journal of Near Eastern Studies, Vol. 71, No. 2 (2 October 2012), pp. 315–24.

Ibn Khaldun's theories did not negate the concept of a "motherland", but rather that the approach of Khaldun needed to be reinterpreted, as it was not "nationalistic" in the modern sense.[10]

In al-Husri (and Michel Aflaq), we find all the ingredients characteristic of psycho-nationalism that I have indicated with admittedly abstract brush strokes so far and that were largely absent in the writing of classical philosophers such as Ibn Khaldun: the nation is represented as the protective mother that Arabs need to honour and sacrifice for; love for the nation entices the individual to unite and fight for a better, utopian tomorrow; nationalism motivates "just" struggles and revolts; politics is configured as an arena of blood, sacrifice and honour; passion is presented as a potent psycho-cognitive force with an ideological edge[11].In the words of al-Husri: 'We must remember that the nationalist idea enjoys a self-motivating power; it is a driving impulse to action and to struggle. When it enters the mind and dominates the soul it is one of the motive ideas … which awakens the people and inspires them to sacrifice'[12].The psychological elements are obvious here and they are far removed from anything Ibn Khaldun had to say about politics in general and asabiyyah in particular. Al-Husri is clearly constructing a psychologised narrative, dotted with anthropomorphic language, which is geared to create an anatomy of his idea of an Arab super-state. In a final ideological stroke which links his psycho-nationalism to the idea of a nation-state, al-Husri says: 'When the language became the heart and spirit of the nation, then the people who spoke one language possessed one heart and a common spirit and therefore formed a nation. It then became necessary that they create one state'[13]. Ibn-Khaldun would have smiled at such an anti-philosophical definition of a nation and al-Husri was right, then, to see the difference between his stringent conceptualization of the Arab nation and the differentiated systems of community that Ibn Khaldun proposed

If Ibn Khaldun is one of the forerunners of the idea of community, then Ferdowsi must be recognised as one of the icons of the eastern belles lettres. A supremely gifted poet, Ferdowsi finished the millennial book of kings in 1010 AD. Like Ibn Khaldun, Ferdowsi was concerned with society, politics, community, the rise and fall of empires etc. But his method was different. Ibn Khaldun spoke as a social scientist; Ferdowsi used the language of romance and poetry. Accordingly, the Shahnameh charts the history of Persia from pre-Islamic kingdoms to the Muslim conquest in the seventh century AD. From the perspective of European Orientalists, this emphasis on Iran's pre-Islamic heritage and his interest in using Persian (Farsi) as a literary medium was indicative of Ferdowsi's aversion to Arabs and Islam in general[14]. Ferdowsi was wrongly portrayed as an early agitator against the Muslimisation of Iran in a grand effort to rescue a purified essence that was deemed distinctly Persian and anti-Arab.

Orientalist themes played a major role in turning the Shahnameh into a psycho-nationalist trope for Iran's nascent dynasties in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Persian grandeur always also has had an aestheticized component. The narratives that were invented around a seemingly coherent national identity, then, were professionally constructed. For instance, Persian language journals such as Kaveh and Iranshahr, which were published in Berlin by a group of influential

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[10] See further Nurullah Ardlc, 'Genealogy or Asabiyya? Ibn Khaldun between Arab Nationalism and the Ottoman Caliphate', Journal of Near Eastern Studies, Vol. 71, No. 2 (2 October 2012), pp. 315–24.

[11] See further Bassam Tibi, Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and the Nation-State, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997, p. 114.

[12] Quoted in William L. Cleveland, The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati' al-Husri, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 105, emphasis added.

[13] Ibid., p. 105.

[14] See further Alireza Asgharzadeh, Iran and the Challenge of Diversity: Islamic Fundamentalism, Aryanist Racism, and Democratic Struggles, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Iranian intellectuals with a nationalist conviction, presented Ferdowsi as an icon of a unique and distinctive Iranian national identity. In particular Hassan Taqizadeh (1878–1969), the veteran activist of Iran's Constitutional Revolt who edited Kaveh between 1916–22, superimposed western Orientalism on to the legacy of Ferdowsi. Highly influenced in his reading of Ferdowsi by Theodor Höldeke's (1836–1930) 'Das Iranische Nationalepos' (the Iranian national epic), Taqizadeh famously proclaimed that Iranians had to embrace everything European wholeheartedly[15]. It was this Europeanised Seyyed, in Iran's intellectual history, a lecturer at SOAS, University of London among other elite institutions, who was instrumental in inventing the Shahnameh as a source of Iranian national identity[16]. In true psychonationalist parlance, Taqizadeh argued that Ferdowsi was the one who 'spun Iranian history and the national story into a perfectly structured narrative, and by establishing this narrative he has created one of the causes of glory for the Iranian nation and has preserved the national story until today'[17]. Taqizadeh uses a distinctly emotive and modern language in order to present the Shahnameh as a source of a purified national pride and consciousness. In this way, he is a psychonationalist par excellence and he should be read and understood in conjunction with Fichte, Herder, Mazzini, von-Ranke and others[18].

Undoubtedly, Ferdowsi was not indifferent to the politics of his day, not least because his livelihood was dependent on the patronage of the Ghaznavid court. As he concedes in the Shahnameh itself: when the poet comes to the Shah, 'he cannot choose but sit before the throne'. Comparable to the tracts of Ibn Khaldun, there is a lot in the Shahnameh about the conduct in politics, community relations, humanity, governance, and identity centuries before scholars and poets in Western and Central Europe experimented with similar tropes. Yet it is central to my argument that the psycho-nationalist interpretations were superimposed. Neither Ibn Khaldun, nor Ferdowsi advocated worshipping the state and the nation. The hysterical emphasis on romance and love with reference to national sentiments is a typically modern project. A global reading of such historical junctures demonstrates that eastern modernities produced their own pioneers of such psycho-nationalism. Iran is simply one example amongst many[19].

Moreover, in Ferdowsi, the "other" does not emerge as someone to be despised and subjugated, as psycho-nationalists would have it. The Shahnameh displays literary genius written in a cosmopolitan mode. Persia as a global effect, and an incubator of trans-regional culture, ideas that have had a long pedigree in Iran. The idea that the book presents a manifesto of purely Iranian origin, undiluted by the vicissitudes of history, and an ideological manifesto against everything non-Iranian is a modern fallacy. It is true that Ferdowsi glorified what he imagined to be Iranian culture, but the Shahnameh is rather more of a cultural festival than an ideological phalanx pointed against the non-Iranian world. As Dick Davies rightly points out in his extensive research about this subject: Ferdowsi also introduced what he considered to be non-Iranians who are portrayed in a positive light, such as women from all over Asia, in particular Sindokht, Rudabeh, Manizheh and Farigis.. In fact, all heroes of the Shahnameh have a mixed lineage and are far from purely 'Iranian' or 'Aryan': the mother of the main protagonist, Rostam, is part Indian and part of demonic descent,

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[15] See further Hamid Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in a Time of Terror*, London: Transaction Publishers, 2009.

[16] See further Afshin Marashi, *Nationalising Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008, pp. 123–25.

[17] *Kaveh*, 3rd October (new edition, no. 10), p. 12.

[18] Taqizadeh mingled with the 'Orientalists' of his day including A.J. Arberry and Walter Bruno Henning. He went on to chair several organisations in 'Iranian Studies'.

[19] See further, Jack Goody, *Renaissances: The One or the Many?,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

and the mothers of the princes Siyavash and Esfandiyar come from Central Asia and Rum (the Christian West) respectively. Therefore the Shahnameh is not ideologically cloistered, but rather a highly aesthetic manifestation of a global consciousness.

Divested of psycho-nationalist ideology, the Shahnameh displays literal hybridity and aesthetic synergy rather than purity and difference. It narrates a 'society that embodies constant internal contradictions; that has an extremely porous rather than simply oppositional relationship with surrounding cultures'[20]. The Shahnameh shows social life in its heterogeneous manifestations. 'If there is a unity to be found in these tales it is a unity of diversity, of disunity … rather than of a single geographic area, or of a single bloodline, or of a single tribe … or of a single religious tradition[21]. Persian culture, Hamid Dabashi recently wrote, is imbued with global thought and world culture[22]. Conversely, other doyens of 'Iranian Studies' such as the late Ehsan Yarshater are wrong to assume that 'Iranian identity is clearly asserted in the inscriptions of Darius the Great (522–486 B.C.) who as an Aryan and a Persian was fully conscious of his racial affiliation and proud of his national identity'[23]. It is problematic, typical and retroactive to assume that language carries identity, that Persian can ever be 'the chief carrier of the Persian world view and Persian cultures'[24]. Indeed, I would go one step further and add that imagining an 'original' Iran has been the cardinal sin of contemporary Iranian history. As we will continue to find out, several depictions of Iran (or 'Irans') have been invented in accordance with political currents. There is no original identity to Iran. Originality is the standard parody that psycho-nationalists routinely display, in Iran and elsewhere.

So the myths of a particularly Iranian or Persian identity were created within a historical context that was geared to psycho-nationalist currents, as demonstrated. Several studies have shown how in the twentieth century the Shahnameh was re-invented as a source for Iran's psychonationalist project, which was intimately linked to imagining a nation ruled by a monarch represented by the Pahlavi dynasty. The Shahnameh as a psycho-nationalist trope was meant to function for the Pahlavi monarchs in at least two ways: first, it was thought to be functional in linking their legitimacy to the emperors of pre-Islamic Persia, and second to emphasise Iran's difference to the 'Semitic' Arabs.

From this perspective, Islam was deemed 'other' to Iran's 'true' identity which was invented as Aryan, closer to Europe, even France as the Shah argued in 1963 in an article for Life magazine. Hence, a Shahnameh 'industry' emerged in Iran in the 1920s and 1930s, institutionalised in educational curricula in Iranian schools after the first Pahlavi monarch assumed power in 1925. Subsequently, building on ideas developed by Taqizadeh in the aforementioned Berlin-based journals Kaveh and Iranshahr, Reza Shah sponsored the newly established Society for National Monuments (anjoman-e asar-e melli) to build a mausoleum for Ferdowsi in Tus, located in north-eastern Iran[25]. The architecture of the mausoleum reflects its political utility: it was built in the Achaemenidian style perfectly in tune with the penchant of the Pahlavi dynasty for pre-Islamic Persian empires. Uniformity in discourse facilitated uniformity in culture, which subdued the mosaic,

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[20] Dick Davies, 'Iran and Aniran', in Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani (eds.), *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, London: Palgrave, 2012, pp. 46–7.

[21] Ibid. p. 47

[22] See further: Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.

[23] Ehsan Yarshater, 'Persian Identity in Historical Perspective', *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1–2, 2007, p. 141.

[24] Ibid. p. 142.

[25] See further Afshin Marashi, 'The Nation's Poet: Ferdowsi and the Iranian National Imagination', in Touraj Atabaki (ed.), *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2009, pp. 93–111.

multicultural beauty of architectural designs in Iran. Furthermore, the farvahar, a Zoroastrian symbol central to the empire of Cyrus, satisfied the political quest to disassociate Iranian history and identity from Islam. Not entirely unlike the swastika which has been a prominent symbol in Hindu, Buddhist and Jainist religious folklore for millennia and which was then abused by the Nazis in Germany as a symbol for racial purity, the farvahar too travelled a long way from its neo-Assyrian habitat to Pahlavi Iran, where it was used as an emblem for Aryan/Persian purity.

Psycho-nationalism and conflict

The problem with the ideological underpinnings of psycho-nationalism is obvious: Indulging in the glory of "our" race or culture almost always entails the suppression of equal status for the race or culture that is represented as its other. West Asia and North Africa are no exception. Iranian and Arab identity politics thwarted, perverted, and dismembered communitarian thinking for long periods in the twentieth century and the same applies to other forms of psycho-nationalism in Turkey and Israel that I can't explain here. Today, some of the insidious legacies of psycho-nationalistic thinking are being resurrected throughout the region certainly in the hysterical narratives of the Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman who likened Iran to a Nazi state, to the detriment of symbiotic relations among the peoples of the region.

In Iran itself, psycho-nationalism was subdued as a part of the internationalism and emancipative message behind the revolution in 1979 which was hijacked and turned into a new discourse of hegemony constructed around a hybrid Shia-Persianised Islam that proclaimed a new form of ideological hysteria. And so psycho-nationalism survived and it is being actively resurrected as an expedient shortcut to gain the support of the resurgent bourgeoisie of Iranian society. Chauvinism against Arabs continues to guide the thinking of some Iranian commentators, especially in the Diaspora. The latent powers of deeply internalized ideological constructs, it seems, do not disappear upon the demise of states based on them. "Persianism" nurtured by the Pahlavis has outlived, in a modified form, the emancipative and internationalist momentum triggered by the revolution in 1979.

These antecedents of Iranian psycho-nationalism can be traced back to the writings of late nineteenth-century figures such as Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani and even before as I have argued elsewhere[26]. Demonstrating affinity with Orientalist views of the supremacy of the "Indo-European peoples" and the mediocrity of the "Semitic race," Iranian psycho-nationalist discourse idealized pre-Islamic Persian empires, whilst negating the "Islamization" of Persia by Muslim forces. As I have argued above: Iranian psycho-nationalism had its heydays during the Pahlavi dynasty. The Shah's decadent celebration of 2,500 years of Iranian empire in Persepolis in 1971 and his decision to abandon the Islamic solar hejra calendar in favour of an imperial one exemplify this adherence to the idea of "Persianism" and its anti-Islamic connotations.

By virtue of its psycho-nationalist ideology, Pahlavi Iran needed the "Arab other" to essentialize the Iranian self. Distinguishing the "Iranian-Aryan" in-group from the "Arab-Semitic" out-group, political psychologists would point out, was achieved by emphasizing the superiority of the pre-Islamic Iranian heritage and undervaluing the Muslim identity of the majority of Iranians.

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[26] Adib-Moghaddam, *Psycho-nationalism*, op. cit.

That failure to forge an inclusive identity was anathema to communitarian relations with Iran's neighbours. No wonder then that some Arab governments perceived the Shah's aggressive military build-up under the patronage of the United States, claims to Bahrain that were dropped only after a plebiscite in the sheikhdom voted against unification with Iran, and the seizure of half of the Abu Musa island from Sharjah and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs from Rais al-Khaimah in 1971 as part of a grand strategy to "Iranianize" the area. This might not have been the Shah's ambition, but his adherence to a chauvinistic rhetoric gave all the wrong signals. Ultimately, it widened the gulf between the peoples of the region and inhibited the institutionalization of a functioning regional security architecture — a necessary endeavour that has not been implemented to this day as I have argued in some of my earlier work[27].

The development of psycho-nationalism as a part of state conduct in the Iranian context was comparable, albeit not identical, to the ideological evolution of Arab psycho- nationalism. Whilst the Iranian variant during the Pahlavi era showed closed affinity with French notions of Indo-European supremacy most forcefully elucidated by Ernest Renan, the branch of Arab psycho-nationalism developed by al-Husri and institutionalized in the Ba'th (rebirth) party by Michel Aflaq was closer to the tradition of German romanticism. Following Johann G. von Herder's idea of a Kulturnation, that is, a cultural community transcending the confine of the state (the idea later developed by Johann Gottlieb Fichte), al-Husri, as we have established in the previous section, advocated the view that the "Arab umma" was a cultural nation held together by a common national language and shared common folklore.

So, like Pahlavian psycho-nationalism, which developed insidiously racist narratives during periods of crisis, the Arab variant too, gave birth to its own abominations. Nowhere was the process of psycho-nationalistic radicalization of Arabism more pronounced than in Saddam Hussein's Iraq where anti-Iranianism (next to anti-imperialism and anti-Semitism) became a central ideological pillar of the Ba'thist state. Pamphlets such as Khairallah Talfah's Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews and Flies, books such as Ta'rikh al-hiqd al-Farsi 'ala al-'Arab [The History of Persian Hatred of the Arabs], serials entitled Judhur al-'ada al-Farsi li-l-umma al-'Arabiyya [The Roots of Persian Hostility toward the Arab Nation], and proverbs such as Ma hann a'jami 'ala 'Arabi [An ajam, or Persian, will not have mercy on an Arab] repeatedly depicted Iranians as cruel and merciless, the ultimate bearers of shu'ubyya possessed by a "destructive Persian mentality" (aqliyya takhribiyya). The myth was created that hatred towards Arabs was an integral part of the Persian character and that this racial attribute had not changed since the days of the Islamization of the Sassanian empire in the seventh century AD. No wonder then that Saddam Hussein ordered the establishment of the "Arab Gulf Office" in 1977. By disseminating maps designating the Gulf as Khaliji Basra (the Gulf of Basra) or al Khalij al-'Arabi (the Arab Gulf), Saddam Hussein claimed a prominent role in the region, appealing to (Iraqi-centric) Arab nationalist sentiments with anti-Iranian precepts. Some of these racist sentiments towards Iranians can be easily discerned until today, especially in the pamphlets of terror movements such as ISIS or al-Qaeda.

The phenomenon of psycho-nationalist discourse in Iran and Iraq sketched here is an example of the invention of nations and nation-states examined by Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm among others. (Psycho-)nationalism was a means to mobilize the support of the populace and a symbol of legitimacy for the authoritarian regimes in power. In order to manufacture

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[27] See further Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A Cultural Genealogy, London: Routledge, 2006.

salient state identities, differences were accentuated and commonalities underplayed, hardening the invented self-other dichotomy between the peoples of the region Iranians and Arabs, but also Turks, Kurds and/or Israelis. At the peril of abstraction we can say that in all contexts, psycho nationalism has served political ends that proved to be anathema to regional cohesion and harmony. For Iranian psycho-nationalists, representation of the "Arab other" was perverted in order to herald Iran's distinctiveness and the country's "natural" affinity with the "West." Arab psycho-nationalism, on the other hand, was invoked as a political strategy to exclude Iran from the arena of inter-Arab politics. The politics of identity, then, created a regional system imbued with insecurity and recurrent conflict.

After psycho-nationalism: Therapies for the future

In the lived reality of the peoples of the region and beyond, national narratives are never immutable; they are impure, creolised phenomena, porous and polluted spaces that are open to interpretive manipulation. In order to govern that reality, psycho-nationalisms are socially engineered to simulate uniformity and positive distinction from the "other". In this sense, psycho-nationalism is a border creating device, it is meant to create "iron walls" staffed by intolerant gatekeepers (e.g. the planned wall between the United States and Mexico and the separation wall between Israel and the West Bank). In its most extreme manifestation psycho-nationalism provokes distinctly fascist politics. In Apartheid South Africa and in Israel among the right wing, it has informed policies of separation and oppression. And in continental Europe today, it is challenging the idea of the European Union in the name of an anti-immigration agenda – borders are re-staffed, barbwires rolled out and fences are being put up. The resurgence of the politics of identity spearheaded by Geert Wilders, Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen is a strong contemporary indicator of the dangers of psycho-nationalism. The so-called 'Left' is trapped in ideological controversy that merely proclaims a counter-identity, admittedly more optimistic, but without a great leap towards a politics of radical federal democracy that empowers citizens and communities rather than the central state.

And yet, as I have tried to demonstrate in On the Arab Revolts and the Iranian Revolution, any effort to separate the 'self' from the 'other' creates a very particular form of interdependence, a "disjunctive synthesis" that does not yield neatly delineated identities[28]. Thus, representations of "self" and "other" are entirely interdependent even when they are geared towards antagonistic politics. The deeply dialectical history of this region and its hybrid ethnic and cultural make-up provides many historical examples for this reality. It is exactly because of this ancient hybridity that psycho-nationalism, even if in its most horrific manifestation, never really subdued a common regional spirit and humanity amongst the majority of the people living in West Asia and North Africa. Iranians may have parodied seemingly divergent identities with their significant others – Arabs, Europeans, Americans – aimed at setting themselves apart as a separate and authentic "nation", but their performative acts achieved the opposite. By allocating to the other side a prominent discursive presence, the interdependence between the national narratives suggesting "an Iran" are now entirely dependent on the ideational territory presumed to be beyond those imagined confines. In other words, Iran's significant "others" are now subsumed in the meaning of Iran. The

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[28] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, On the Arab Revolts and the Iranian Revolution: Power and Resistance Today, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

same applies to the "Arab" space which is entirely interspersed by its significant others: Turks, Iranians, even Israelis. Moreover, this creolised space is lived on a daily basis throughout the region in cosmopolitan centres such as Beirut, Doha, Dubai, Tehran or Istanbul. The lived reality in the region is a constant therapeutic anti-dote to the psycho-nationalism of the states, and within the right historical context it could be a panacea to the crisis of governance throughout the region. The Arab revolts, despite their limited success in terms of "good governance" to date, were a beginning to that end.

It is true, as Asef Bayat argues, that daily "anti-order" practices and activities such as setting up 'illegal' street businesses in main squares, squatting in public parks and tourist hubs or challenging moral sensitiveness through provocative dress, have always been part and parcel of public life in the region and beyond[29]. But these "non-movements" are decisively morphed into a political upheaval during revolts exactly because the anarchic, daily actions that questioned public order are suddenly coordinated and enriched with political symbols and imagery that promise a better future for the people. Under the pressure of such an event, daily routines that rupture public order transform into active detachment from the demands of the state: The street vendor marches to the public square to demonstrate; the squatters set up camps with the help of organised student movements; and housewives sabotage infrastructure as a part of a grand strategy to overcome the oppression of society. In other words, daily dissent transmutes into a revolt with transversal capability that challenges both established norms within society (horizontal movement) and the truth conditions held up by the state and the normative order of the international system (vertical movement). The revolts in Tunisia and Egypt which heralded the "Arab Spring" in 2010, despite of the subsequent disappointments, were exactly multi-dimensional in this sense.

Second, until Tunisia and Egypt erupted, the dominant narrative in the western media was that Arab and Muslim societies are beset by radicalism and that al-Qaida is a viable political force. In the 21st century, the fight against "Muslim radicalism" (or what Bernard Lewis infamously called "Muslim rage") has seen huge resources allocated to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; to the regime-change strategy in Iran, Lebanon and Gaza; and to huge military budgets and many national-security papers. With the Arab revolts, a deep transformation exposed the failures and follies of this approach. The uprisings in the Arab world and beyond were a key agent of this process of renewal. More recently the demands for democracy and social empowerment engendered mass movements in Sudan, which helped to topple "President" Omar al-Bashir, who had ruled the country for over three decades. Similarly, in Algeria, protesters prevented Abdelaziz Bouteflika from seeking yet another term in office, a major achievement for the democracy movement in the country.

These are the anti-dotes to psycho-nationalism that continue to permeate the civil societies in the region. They have proven to be exemplary for other resistance movements all over the world

As a way of summarising my argument: In today's ideational tapestry of West Asia and North Africa there is quite literally no intellectual and geographic space that imagined communities such as Jews, Turks, Iranians, Palestinians, Arabs, Christians, Berbers, Muslims, Copts, Kurds, might claim for themselves in total independence from the neighbour. In the nomadic spaces of West Asia and North Africa, in EurAsia Eurasia more generally, and indeed in an increasingly interconnected world, the neighbour is immanent to the self; waging war against her is always also an act of self-harm. The 21st-century reality is that peace cannot be safeguarded on a national or

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[29] See further Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, pp. 77 ff.

"civilisational" basis, and that the only option to ensure peace is to make a viable neighbour policy a priority. This is at the heart of the concept of human security, as opposed to state security – a commitment to world peace rooted in respect and tolerance between peoples. The security threats emanating from the global system require a strategy that moves beyond notions of territoriality and psycho-nationalist cohesion, and embraces as far as possible a contra-identarian and humanistic approach to international affairs. To these ends, emphasising and then moving beyond the linkages between "us" and "them" rather than any supposed opposition is vital. Both a new generation with a global mindset, and members of minorities expressing ideas from outside the mainstream, are well placed to contribute to this process. In many ways they are proof that for a long time, and without realising it, we have been living in the end times of divisive ideologies based on racial designations or geographic "origin". To move against psycho-nationalism does not mean to stop loving your culture. For example, being overwhelmed by the texture and taste of Japanese food or the beautifully arched curves framing the Zen temples of Kyoto is not psycho-nationalistic. But if these manifestations of a hybrid Japanese culture are used to denigrate others as ingredients of a pure, one-dimensional Japan, as Iranian psycho-nationalists misused the Shahnameh, then we are devaluing the impact of various cultures on Japanese architecture and cuisine. In that case, truth would be discarded for ideology, and antagonism towards the "other" would be rather more likely. Once we cast psycho-nationalism aside, we get closer to "our" interdependent truth, which is the only source of authenticity in this world. At that stage, we can be at peace with "us", and "them" and the smiling face of the "other" appears as the mirror image of our "self".