

De-nationalising Nationalism in Iran: An Account on the Interaction between Domestic and International Dynamics

Zelal OZDEMİR

Dr., Middle East Technical University, Center for Black Sea and Central Asia (KORA)

Ayca ERGUN

Assoc. Prof. Dr., Middle East Technical University, Department of Sociology

To cite this article: Zelal Ozdemir and Ayca Ergun, “De-nationalising Nationalism in Iran: An Account on the Interaction between Domestic and International Dynamics”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 18, No. 69, 2021, pp. 87-102, DOI: [10.33458/uidergisi.849365](https://doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.849365)

To link to this article: <https://dx.doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.849365>

Submitted: 15 April 2020
Last Revision: 05 November 2020
Published Online: 28 December 2020
Printed Version: 17 April 2021

Uluslararası İlişkiler Konseyi Derneği | International Relations Council of Turkey
Uluslararası İlişkiler – Journal of International Relations

E-mail : bilgi@uidergisi.com.tr

All rights of this paper are reserved by the *International Relations Council of Turkey*. With the exception of academic quotations, no part of this publication may be reproduced, redistributed, sold or transmitted in any form and by any means for public usage without a prior permission from the copyright holder. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the author(s)'s and do not reflect those of the *Council*, editors of the journal, and other authors.

De-nationalising Nationalism in Iran: An Account on the Interaction between Domestic and International Dynamics

Zelal ÖZDEMİR

*Dr., Middle East Technical University, Center For Black Sea and Central Asia (KORA), Ankara
E-mail: zelal@metu.edu.tr*

Ayça ERGUN

*Assoc. Prof. Dr., Middle East Technical University, Department of Sociology, Ankara
E-mail: ayer@metu.edu.tr*

ABSTRACT

The discipline of International Relations is increasingly paying attention to nationalism, although this attention is mostly limited with the role of nationalism on international system. By presenting an approach born out of the intersection of Historical Sociology in International Relations (HSIR) and the Modernist School of Nationalism, this paper aims at expanding the terrain of nationalism studies in International Relations (IR). Using Iran as an example, it demonstrates that three basic premises of HSIR—the interaction between domestic and international dynamics, historicization, and multi-causality—are central to analysing nationalism, which is only associated with the domestic level. It argues that HSIR has much to offer not only to studies of nationalism and/in the Middle East but also to the discipline of IR by elucidating the international connections of this seemingly domestic issue.

Keywords: Historical Sociology, Nationalism, Internationalization of Nationalism, Iran, Pahlavi Period

İran'da Milliyetçiliği Millilikten Çıkartma: Ulusal ve Uluslararası Dinamiklerin Etkileşimi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme

ÖZET

Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplini milliyetçiliğe giderek daha fazla önem vermektedir ancak bu önem çoğunlukla milliyetçiliğin uluslararası sisteme etkisi ile sınırlı kalmaktadır. Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplindeki Tarihsel Sosyoloji ve modernist milliyetçilik teorilerinin kesişim noktasına dayanarak kavramsal çerçevesini oluşturan bu çalışma, Uluslararası İlişkilerde milliyetçilik çalışmalarına alan açmayı amaçlamaktadır. Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplindeki Tarihsel Sosyolojide yer alan ulusal ve uluslararası dinamikler arasındaki etkileşim, tarihselleştirme ve çoklu-nedensellik prensiplerinin, sadece ulusal alan ile ilişkilendirilen milliyetçilik analizi için önemini İran örneği üzerinden tartışmaktadır. Çalışma Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplindeki Tarihsel Sosyoloji yaklaşımının sadece milliyetçilik çalışmalarına ve Ortadoğu Çalışmalarına değil, ulusal kabul edilen milliyetçiliğin uluslararası bağlantılarını göstererek Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplinine de katkıda bulunacağını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tarihsel Sosyoloji, Milliyetçilik, Milliyetçiliğin Uluslararasılaşması, İran, Pehlvi Dönemi

Intro

By the 1990s, students of International Relations (IR) began to pay greater attention to nationalism as a way to understand global politics.¹ Despite this increased interest, studies mainly engaged in nationalism from a rather narrow perspective and centred on the effects of the national idea and nationalist movements on the world order. IR scholars later drew attention to other forms of political, sub-national and supra-national identities.² This study aims at re-building analytical bridges between IR and nationalism studies through Historical Sociology in International Relations (HSIR). There are a number of studies that have employed the premises of HSIR.³ Our aim is to apply the HSIR framework to studies of nationalism with reference to the case of Iran. This article problematizes the nature of the interaction between domestic and international factors and its impact on the processes of nation building. The literature on nationalism in Iran is limited in that most recognition is directed towards the international context rather than taking it as a constitutive part of national identity.⁴ The Iranian case is illustrative since it provides an exemplary case to understand how international factors shape a non-European and semi-colonial context. The stories of Iranian nationalism(s) and Iranian interaction with the globe are distinct but interwoven. There are multiple international connections forming Iranian identity, from modernization to Westernization, Aryanism to non-aligned nationalism, and militarism to secularism; many aspects of Iranian nationalisms and their struggle against alternative nationalisms is coloured by these interactions. This article provides a historical-sociological account based on a review of the secondary sources and an analysis of the speeches and biographies of key political actors, including the leaders (Reza Shah and Mossadegh), ministers, members of the parliament, journalists and intellectual elites.

When we consider the theories of nationalism in the context of Iran or other late modernizing countries in the Middle East, conceptual problems arise.⁵ The generalizations derived from the

-
- 1 James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990; Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil, "Revisiting the 'National': Toward an Identity Agenda in Neo-Realism?", Y. Lapid and F. Kratochwil (eds.), *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, London, Lynnee Rienner, 1996, p. 105-129; Martin Griffiths and Michael Sullivan, "Nationalism and International Relations Theory", *Australian Studies of Politics and History*, Vol. 43, No 1, 1997, p. 53-66; Bruce Hall, *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International System*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999.
 - 2 Morten Valbjørn, "Three Ways of Discussing Identity Politics in the Study of International Relations of the New Middle East", *MENA Politics Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No 1, 2019, p. 1-6.
 - 3 See Ewan Stein, "Ideological Codependency and Regional Order: Iran, Syria, and the Axis of Refusal", *Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 50, No 3, 2017, p. 676-680; Gülriz Şen, *Devrimden Günümüze İran'ın ABD Politikası: Tarihsel Sosyolojik Bir Analiz*, Ankara, ODTÜ Yayıncılık, 2016; Kamran Matin, *Recasting Iranian Modernity: International Relations and Social Change*, London, Routledge, 2013; Maryam Panah, *The Islamic Republic and the World*, London, Pluto Press, 2007.
 - 4 Reza Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Dislocative Nationalism, Race and Modernity in Iran*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2016; Pinar Arıkan, *Discursive Continuity of Political Nationalism as a Form of Opposition Politics in Modern Iran*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, Graduate School of Social Sciences, 2016; Majid Sharifi, *Imagining Iran: The Tragedy of Subaltern Nationalism*, Plymouth, Lexington Books, 2013; Ali Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012; Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power and the State: 1870-1941*, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 2008; Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*, Mass., MIT Press, 2002; Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2000; Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation: 1804-1946*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2000; David Nejde Yaghaubian, *Ethnicity, Identity and the Development of Nationalism in Iran*, PhD Dissertation, University of Berkeley, 2000; Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation*, New York, Paragon House, 1993; Susan Siavoshi, *Liberal Nationalism in Iran*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1989; Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh University Press, 1979.
 - 5 Ali Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012; Kamran Scott Aghaie and Afshin Marashi (eds.), *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2014, p. 10-13.

Western experiences remain limited. The Iranian case is more complex than any other Middle Eastern countries, most of which underwent direct colonial control. As Afshin Marashi reminds,⁶ Iran's history of nationalism must be understood as emerging out of the specific context of Iran's position as semi-colonial in the world system of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, the international milieu has played a constitutive role in the formation of Iranian identity(ies). The production of a Western-type identity at the beginning of the Reza Shah period, the invention of supposedly racially superior Aryanism in the context of rising fascism in Europe, and the anti-colonial movement all swept through the world and affected Iran, including the blossoming of Mossadegh's non-aligned nationalism and the "positive nationalism"⁷ of Mohammed Reza Shah against Mossadegh's non-aligned nationalism. All of these turns of Iranian state nationalism reflected the importance of incorporating the realm of the international to the domestic historiography.

We argue that HSIR has much to offer not only to studies of nationalism and/in Iran but also to the discipline of IR. HSIR provides tools with which we can better understand this interrelationship through the concepts of historicization, multi-causality, and most-importantly negation of the binary of domestic/international factors. We start by discussing two strands of approaches in nationalism studies and the place of nationalism in IR studies. Nationalism should also be understood in relation to the international context and with reference to the ways in which it interacts with the international milieu. We then present a framework by discussing the tools that HSIR provides in analysing nationalism with reference to the case of Iran. We focus on the period between 1921 and 1953 and comparatively analyse changing definitions of Iranian identity framed by Reza Shah (1921-1941) and the Prime Minister Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh (1951-1953). While the Reza Shah era, as the foundation years of the Pahlavi Dynasty and modern Iranian state, refers to the beginning of a systemic construction of Iranian national identity by the modern state, the premiership of Mossadegh refers to brief but critical years during which a powerful alternative nationalism arose against the definition of Pahlavi nationalism during second Shah's weak reign. This period is a key example of how the politics of nationalism was the main node of oppositional politics in twentieth-century Iran and partly explains the success of the revolutionary process in 1979. Centering on the key tensions of the era, the clash of two nationalisms, the section focuses on the differences between Reza Pahlavi's and Mossadegh's nationalisms by using historicization, multi-causality, and co-constitution of domestic/international factors.

HSIR enables us to escape territorialized logic in understanding nationalism: 'methodological nationalism' and 'methodological internationalism'. The former refers to the inclination to explain domestic dynamics in isolation from international forces, whereas the latter refers to the tendency to explain all social phenomena with international factors.⁸ As various studies in Historical Sociology show, modernization does not follow a single trajectory but different historical specificities lead to different paths and outcomes. As in the Iranian case, the emergence and development of Iranian state building and (re)construction of national identity took place in the phase of an overwhelmingly international context. This is extremely important when we consider the multiple alliances established in Iran, which vary from relations between a weak central state and great powers to non-state actors'

6 Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power and the State: 1870-1941*, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 2008.

7 Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1961, p.126.

8 Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson, *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 268.

relations with the foreigners and even includes the sponsoring of military coups by foreign actors. Neither the domestic, as the former claims, nor the international, as the latter argues, but the interaction of the international and domestic factors forged Iran's path of modernity and this interlocking conditioned the construction and reconstruction of Iranian nationalisms.

An interdisciplinary re-engagement between HSIR and the Modernist School of Nationalism can provide an important key to the complex puzzle of the politics of nationalism without falling into the trap of Middle East exceptionalism. HSIR, moreover, presents a way to re-tune and re-imagine research on nationalism in IR. We therefore aim to showcase what HSIR knowledge offers to nationalism studies, an area deemed understudied in IR.

Modernist School of Nationalism and IR

There is an ever-growing literature on nationalism, with its competing theories. There are several social science questions involved in the field, such as when nations emerged, what a nation actually is, by what criteria one can determine nation-ness, and what will be the future of nationalism. There are now at least three different schools of thought within the field, which vary more within themselves. Broadly, they are primordialism,⁹ the approach that takes the antiquity of the nations as given; ethno-symbolism,¹⁰ which argues for the ancient myths, symbols, and memories as the founding elements of the modern nations; and finally modernism, which claims that nations are modern phenomena and should be analysed solely within the framework of modern politics. The dominant paradigm in the field is the modernist school, which is mainly composed of two lines of analysis: one that focuses on structural factors and one that scrutinises the cultural aspects of nationalism.

Objectivist approaches centre on the structural and socio-historical processes in analysing the emergence of nationalism that is seen as a product of modernization and as a response to the problems generated by modern society. These studies tend to ponder on the objective determinants and first causes of nationalism. For Ernest Gellner,¹¹ it is industrialization; for Eric Hobsbawm¹² it is capitalism; and for Tom Nairn,¹³ it is the uneven and combined capitalist development. Building on the dichotomy between traditional and modern societies, nationalism was borne out of the necessity of the modern state and modern politics and in relation to specific economic and social conditions. "It was not an aspect of the human condition that would last forever, nor did it correspond to some inner need of the human psyche"; it was "genuine, objective, practical necessity."¹⁴ The objective accounts also acknowledge the invented character of nationalism.¹⁵ Understanding nationalism from a mobilization perspective, Miraslav Hroch¹⁶ points out that the crises within societies make nationalist ideology and movements relevant. John Breuilly, in a similar vein, argues that nationalist ideology matters, not so

9 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books, 1973; Pierre van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, New York, Elsevier, 1979.

10 Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, New York, Blackwell, 1986.

11 Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964.

12 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

13 Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, London, Verso, 1982.

14 Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 160.

15 Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, p. 1.

16 Miraslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

much because it directly motivates most supporters of a nationalist movement, but rather because it provides a conceptual map that enables people to relate their particular material and moral interests to a broader terrain of actions.¹⁷

The objectivist approach seeks to prove the modernity of nationalism and the nation state as opposed to the perennial understanding of nationalism. Instead of describing the nation as a coherent something that is awakened or revived, it analyses the issue within the realm of modern politics through historicization. This task has a paramount importance for the IR discipline. It is an ‘emancipatory task’¹⁸ as these scholars are indeed denaturalising the central concepts including “nation” and “state” upon which IR based itself. Their weakness is resorting to structural explanations and prioritization of ‘why’ questions over ‘how’. Yet, here, there is the danger of overlooking specificities of various nationalisms in historical and particular contexts.

Michael Billig underlines that nationalism is not an ideology that is linked to specific nation states; it is more generally an international ideology.¹⁹ However, unless we untangle the specific interaction between the international and domestic, the international ideology of nationalism is doomed to be an empty signifier in different contexts. Both Iranian and Middle Eastern nationalisms were the product of the confluence of ideational and material conditions that the world underwent especially after global, 19th century developments. However, the specific ideological contents of these nationalisms have been determined by the way that different particularities interacted with the international processes. In this interaction, the international does not remain as a context relatively distant from domestic dynamics but becomes an endemic property of nations. It has a constitutive role in the formation of any social phenomenon, and national identity is but one of them.

The claim of this study is that we cannot grasp why Iranian nation state and national identities produced by the state developed the way they did without using an IR perspective that looks into the specifics of international-domestic interaction, without historicising that process, and without allowing for multiple causes rather than one single cause such as the directionality of modernity.

While the subjectivist approach sharpened our understanding of the internal tensions within nationalist discourse, the disciplinary regimes that shape nationalist practices and the transformation of individuals and collectivities into normative national subjects, they pay less attention to the ways in which broader social processes shape the socio-political and discursive structure of nationalism. “In an attempt to direct attention to the local contours of specific nationalist movements they tend to overlook the transnational and global production of local.”²⁰ However, the fact that we can separate the objective and subjective aspects of nationalism does not mean that they are, in fact, separate. What we need is a framework that bridges the gap between these two approaches and that can account for the interplay between socio-political and discursive levels. HSIR, together with the Modernist School of Nationalism, offers the tools for building such an approach in studying nationalism. Through zooming in on the interaction between domestic and international dynamics, historicization and

17 John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993, p. 13.

18 Fred Halliday, “For an International Sociology,” Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (eds.), *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 247.

19 Michael Billig, “Nationalism as an International Ideology,” Glynis Marie Breakwell and Evanthia Lyons (eds.), *Changing European Identities*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 1996, p. 181-195.

20 Manu Goswami, “Rethinking the Modular Nation Form: Toward a Sociohistorical Conception of Nationalism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 44, No 4, 2002, p. 779.

multi-causality, it becomes possible to analyse the interplay of different elements and different levels in the constitution of a particular problem in question. Focusing on the relations between the state and the nationalist politics, the dual functions of the state at the international and national level are revealed.

Locating Nationalism in International Relations

According to Elman and Elman, “its [Mainstream IR’s] inability to anticipate the end of Cold War forced the field to become more self-conscious of its theoretical limitations.”²¹ Among the aims of this critical engagement with mainstream theory is to develop theoretical tools that can account for and explain the change and transformation of the international system. Therefore, IR began to interrogate the basic, and mostly realist, premises of the discipline, the result of which urged new approaches regarding the nature of international system, states, and change. Thus, IR started to widen its borders towards sociology and history.

The combined impact of the ‘historical turn’ in IR and the rising nationalist movements in the post-Cold War world sparked the scholarly curiosity towards the concept of nationalism. However, this growing interest in the subject is still far from sufficient.²² “Most accounts of nationalism in international relations reduce the phenomenon to a peripheral threat, whereby nationalism only seems to become relevant in moments when the international order is in crisis.”²³ Within this scarce attention, James Mayall²⁴ develops an approach that investigates how the national idea affects international society. He puts the national idea at the centre of the transformation of international structure, yet he does not provide an account of nationalism or problematize the issue of nationalism; instead, he deals “with the interactions of the ideas of nation and international society.”²⁵

Bruce Hall²⁶ recognizes that the constitutive role of agency and the historical nature of the international system and, thus, goes beyond the static and structuralist thinking of realism. He underlines the centrality of nationalism for IR, as well. However, as in the work of Mayall, we cannot find a consistent definition of nationalism in Hall’s study. He mentions the imagined nature of the nation by borrowing from Benedict Anderson;²⁷ yet, he also resorts to Anthony Smith when defining the characteristics of a nation,²⁸ citing two different if not contradictory approaches. Similar to Mayall, the aim of Hall is not to problematize nationalism, but to analyse its impact on the international system. As such, the issue of nationalism is instrumentalised to refute the realist thinking of state-centrism and a-historic comprehension of the world system. Again, the issue of nationalism remains in the field of theories of nationalism.

21 Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, “The Role of History in International Relations”, *Millennium*, Vol. 37, No 2, 2008, p. 361.

22 Harris Mylonas and Kendrick Kuo, “Nationalism and Foreign Policy”, Cameron G. Thies (eds.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 224.

23 Jaakko Heiskanen, “The Spectra of Sovereignty: Nationalism and International Relations”, *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 13, No 3, 2019, p. 315.

24 James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

26 Bruce Hall, *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International System*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Griffiths and Sullivan look at the relationship between nationalism and world order by analysing the approaches of liberalism and realism towards nationalism.²⁹ Similarly, Lapid and Kratochwil engage in neo-realism with the aim of discerning the role of nationalism in neorealist theory building, including the ones from Buzan and Wæver.³⁰ Despite this rising visibility of nationalism starting from the 1990s, IR scholarship remained confined to the impact of nationalism on the international system rather than engaging with the sociology of nationalism. In the world historical context of the 1990s, nationalism is mostly associated with a negative, disrupting force in the international system. In most of the accounts, it “grants validity only to its extreme interpretation and identifies it with fanaticism, violent struggle and disaster”.³¹ In the 2000s, IR’s attention started to turn to identity politics rather than nationalism. Especially with the rise of sectarianism, especially in the Middle East, IR scholarship began to engage in sub-national or supra-national identities instead of territorial ones.³²

The merit of these studies is that they recognize the role played by nationalism for the international system and thus locate the issue within the discipline boundaries of IR. To scholars such as Mayall and Hall, nationalism is taken as a primary factor in international politics, but for others it posits an epiphenomenon of the international system. However, in few of the studies articulate the concepts of nation, nationalism, or nationalist ideology. As a result, “nationalism studies remained largely the preserve of historians, sociologists and regional specialists”.³³ Since they do not problematize nationalism itself, the constitutive role of the international dimension in the construction of national identities, nationalist ideologies, or movements remain unanswered.

Nationalism has long been associated with the realm of domestic affairs, which does not correspond to the disciplinary boundaries of IR and predisposes IR scholars to exclude it. Thus, the constructed differentiation between the international and the domestic becomes fortified and the interaction between the international and the domestic has been overlooked. “International Relations sustains its identity and intellectual autonomy by relegating nationalism to the realm of domestic politics, which reduces it to a phenomenon on the inside of the nation state.”³⁴ However, Iran offers a productive ground to grapple with this boundary in IR and even to expand the terrain of the discipline. It shows that nation building is not a performance of only local actors undertaken within the confines of domestic politics, but in the face of a complex web of relations. Military, economic, political and socio-cultural issues relevant to the world also compose the texture of Iranian politics by way of informing, shaping, contesting, negotiating with, and at times defeating Iranian actors.

While the theories of nationalism do not problematize the role of the international factors, IR scholarship does not explore nationalism. This study, on the other hand, holds the view that a reconstructive theoretical encounter between IR and nationalism studies is possible as well as rewarding through HSIR.

So, what does HSIR offer to nationalism studies in general and Iran in particular? With its emphasis on the historicization of any social formation, focus on processes of change, and aim of relating

29 Griffiths and Sullivan, “Nationalism and International Relations Theory”, p. 53-66.

30 Lapid and Kratochwil, “Revisiting the ‘National’: Toward an Identity Agenda in Neo-Realism?”, p. 105-129.

31 Ibid., p. 114.

32 See, F. Gregory Gause, “Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War”, *Brookings Doha Center – Analysis Paper*, 2014, p. 1-27; Ewan Stein, “Ideological Codependency and Regional Order: Iran, Syria, and the Axis of Refusal”, p. 676-680.

33 Jan Jidy Pettman, “Nationalism and after”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No 5, 1998. p.150.

34 Griffiths and Sullivan, “Nationalism and International Relations Theory”, p. 16.

the broad currents of world politics with events on the ground, HSIR offers a way to transcend both methodological nationalism and internationalism. While the former is overly echoed in nationalism studies, the latter is especially relevant in the context of Iran and Middle East. The Iranian case illustrates these two tendencies well. On the one hand, the idea that the Iranian nation is perennial still has currency within academic circles. The seeming territorial continuity of the country creates a 'territorial trap' for nationalism studies in the Iranian context. Rather than analysing nationalism in its relations with modern politics, which is itself bound up with the international dynamics, scholars fall prey to the appeal of ethno-symbolism.³⁵ In the following section, we will contextualize the study of nationalism by examining three basic premises of HSIR: interaction between domestic and international dynamics, historicization, and multi-causality.

The Interaction between Domestic Factors and International Dynamics

The most important theoretical insight of HSIR is the rejection of the dichotomy between the domestic and international. HSIR takes domestic as the constitutive of international in attempting to broaden the analytical terrain of IR and works to problematize the binary of domestic/international. In this regard, international politics is not a thing out there but a dimension of every event.³⁶ The first premise of this study is that nations are modern constructions and are part of a general transformation in society. The second premise is that transformations of this magnitude have partial causes in the international arena. What follows from these premises is that nationalism as a political movement and the nation state as a modern political institution emerged from the international realm.

The international structural conditions, such as the encroachment of Western capitalism upon the rest of the world in an accelerated pace that shaped the Iranian economy (revenues of various sorts, including oil were monopolized by foreigners); Iranian administration (foreign advisers sent, foreign laws adopted in Iran); Iranian political culture (the idea of citizenship, of nation, of constitution, of republic, of communism and socialism roaming around the country); and Iranian territory (the great power rivalry that was a direct product of the expansion of capitalism to the other parts of the world resulted in several invasions of Iran by foreign powers). Following Halliday, this impact can be labelled as general historicity, as these factors have a weight on the world in general rather than on Iran in particular. Secondly, the interaction between international politics and domestic politics cannot be limited to the macro-level, as it was usually done in the field of nationalism. The reality of day-to-day international politics, treaties, armistices, international public opinion, revolutions, and political transformations elsewhere, all went into the "specific causation"³⁷ of Iranian nationalism.

It is only when we escape methodological nationalism that we can clearly identify these influences. Without this focus on the interaction between domestic factors and international milieu, Iranian nationalist uprisings, Reza Shah's or later his son's, Mohammed Reza Shah's determination to build a strong Iranian nation state seemed to stem from and to be encouraged and facilitated by domestic developments only. Since the issue is not simply to identify that there is an Iranian nation and

35 See Mansoor Moaddel, *Islamic Modernism, Nationalism, and Fundamentalism*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2005, p. 171.

36 Stephen Hobden, "Theorising the International System: Perspectives from Historical Sociology," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No 2, 1999, p. 269.

37 Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 56.

nationalism in the modern era but to explain how they came about, the field of nationalism studies is strengthened by this focus on international-domestic interaction.

The focus on international-domestic interaction as an integral part of the explanation of nationalism leads to a second suggestion as well. Since domestic politics forms the second part of this interaction, a closer examination of the details of domestic politics would bolster the attempts of those IR scholars who seek to escape the state-centric approach in IR. Hobson's arguments against methodological nationalism and internationalism alike are relevant on this point. With the systematic treatment of domestic politics as they relate to IR, the tendency to approach international factors as explanatory of all politics as well as the reverse tendency of building explanations solely from domestic politics would be undermined.

The inner conflicts of a society also come to the fore, as it is not always the state that interacts with international politics, but also opposition forces, other contenders to power, students, men of religion, tribal leaders, and so on. Therefore, the inclusion of nationalism within IR through this historical sociological lens leads to the inclusion of non-state actors to the international scene.

Historicization

"If there is a motif that lies behind historical sociology, it is 'never forget time and place.'"³⁸ The historicization of the international system as well as of particular events and themes within international politics is one of the chief objectives of HSIR, a good example of which is Justin Rosenberg's work on anarchy and its historicization.³⁹ This attempt is of paramount importance for the study of nationalism, as "the historicization of the state and nation challenges perennialism."⁴⁰ This task is indeed what the modernist school of nationalism attempted to accomplish. By relating the development of nationalism to the broader world of politics, it aimed to reveal the historical nature of the phenomenon rather than capturing it as a given and timeless phenomenon.

Historicization was necessarily accompanied by being space-specific. The moment in 1921 when Reza Khan produced an acutely nationalist discourse in his attempt to capture and transform the state should be located within its specific history: that of foreign involvement and domestic protests of several decades. It should be located in its specific historical context because the danger of not doing so is to produce "natural histories of nations."⁴¹ Delanty and Isin claim that HS was always about escaping national histories and historicising the modernity that brought nations about, which would then shed light upon the present day.⁴²

However, historicization is not exhausted by merely including the conditions and implications of a moment of change. It also includes, especially since this study aims to utilize the tools of HSIR, the location of the phenomenon to be explained within international history. In that regard, the emer-

38 George Lawson, "Historical Sociology in International Relations: Open Society, Research Programme and Vocation", *International Politics*, Vol. 44, No 4, 2007, p. 359.

39 Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society*, London, Verso, 1994.

40 Halliday, "For an International Sociology", p. 244.

41 Gerard Delanty and Engin F. Isin, "Introduction: Reorienting Historical Sociology", Gerard Delanty and Engin F. Isin (eds.), *Handbook of Historical Sociology*, London, Sage, 2003, p. 1-9.

42 Also, historicization of the state in particular is a trait of the neo-Weberian historical sociology very well represented by Michael Mann's seminal work. Michael Mann, *the Sources of Social Power, Vol. 1 & 2*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989 and 1993.

gence and development of the Iranian nation state and Iranian nationalism is linked to ideological, political, and social developments worldwide. Historicization transcends mere narration and periodisation and becomes a substantial research choice.

Historicization has further implications for the discipline of IR. All the critical approaches in the discipline point out the ahistorical character of mainstream IR.⁴³ Thus, case studies on nationalism in IR would contribute to that effort of problematizing the use of history. So, this study suggests further theoretical contemplation on historicization and actual applications in detailed case studies.

Multi-causality

Another classic methodological orientation of HSIR is multi-causality.⁴⁴ Multi-causality is not listing several causes with no interaction or hierarchy between them; rather, it seeks to make sense of the 'interplay' between different causes, a sense that can only come empirically in the details of the case. In the Iranian case, it means how ideological, political, and economic factors that cut across international and domestic realms created the conditions for the rise of the Iranian nation state and Iranian nationalism.

Historicization and multi-causality are also effective tools against Middle Eastern and/or Iranian exceptionalism. What is denaturalised and put in its complex context cannot be used to argue for the uniqueness of case, as every case is only as unique as any other. The general theoretical and methodological applications, on the other hand, are universal. Since nationalist myths are one of the arenas where exceptionalist arguments are employed by Europeans and non-Europeans alike, it is important to emphasise a perspective that rests on solid ground in IR; that contextualizes the case in international history; and that is sensitive to the many factors at play.

Studying Nationalism in Iran through Historical Sociology in International Relations

From the 19th century onwards, Iran underwent a great transformation. Various international processes were at work that rendered the political, economic, and social conditions of Qajar Iran unbearable for people living in the territories. The specific ways in which the Qajars shaped Iran's integration to the world market, the interventions and supremacy of the great powers, rapidly changing international political and economic structures, and roaming ideas of constitutionalism, all of these turned the Qajars into 'backward rulers' who either needed to be 'modernized' or 'toppled down'.

Against this backdrop, in 1921 Colonel Reza Khan, who in 1925 became Shah of Iran, entered the Iranian political scene. These years witnessed the establishment of the modern nation state under his rule. Keddie⁴⁵ states that the broad template of modernization adopted in Reza Shah's Iran, from 1921 until his abdication in 1941, had achieved widespread and largely unquestioning acceptance throughout the Middle East. Governments of the left and right and monarchies and republics, all

43 For a discussion of the timelessness of realism see Barry Buzan, "The timeless wisdom of realism?", Steve Smith et al. (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 47-65.

44 Robert Holton, "Max Weber and the Interpretative Tradition", Gerard Delanty and Engin F. Isin (eds.), *Handbook of Historical Sociology*, London, Sage, 2003, p. 32.

45 Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 39.

embarked on programmes of authoritarian modernization, characterized by rapid social change and etatist economic development. The year 1921 was also the founding moment for the formation of Iranian nationalism by the state. Although nationalist ideological discourse stretched back to the Constitutional Revolution, the systematic construction and reproduction of Iranian national identity by the state started in this era and became part and parcel of future nationalisms in Iran.

Reza Shah constructed the main pillars of Iranian identity alongside the process of state building. In doing so, he first facilitated the “discourse of disintegration”, which came to be dominant among political elites especially after the World War I, and presented himself as the saviour of the country.⁴⁶ The weakness of the centre vis-à-vis local and decentralized movements in the country was conceived as a state of chaos and a threat of territorial disintegration in the face of the developments taking place in the Ottoman or Austro-Hungarian Empires within the postwar international system.

This international context—the impact of World War I on the Middle East and foreign policies of big powers, the Bolshevik Revolution, the balkanization of the Arab Middle East—also conditioned the views of Iranian elites. After witnessing the collapse of empires one after another, the urgent need for the political elite started to change as the world changed. A romantic sense of nationalism replaced by the fears of disintegration and preserving territorial integrity started to be conceived as the state’s central mission. In the context of this discursive transformation, the ideals of the 1905 Constitutional Revolution, such as social egalitarianism and liberalism, were superseded by the ideas of modern and centralized state building and political authoritarianism. Some even argued that “being contemporary or modernized, would be attainable only when an ‘ideal dictator’ had set up the country for a social revolution by retaining power and concentrating his political authority through ‘banning the press, dismissing the parliament, and restricting the power of the clerics.’⁴⁷ So, the postwar years created a moment rooted in international context in which a political and discursive correspondence between elites, Reza Khan, and the main foreign actors developed. The elite saw him as a strong leader capable of securing order and the country’s territorial integrity; “the British ministers thought he was indispensable for ending the chaos”⁴⁸ that would aggravate its already uneasy position in the Middle East after the war; and “Soviet ministers saw him as bourgeois nationalist leader trying to put down feudal reactionaries, most of whom were also agents of imperialism”⁴⁹.

Secondly, Reza Shah included the monarchy as one of the founding elements of Iranianness, after a failed attempt of regime change to republic in 1924. Since the Constitutional Revolution, there were occasional references to the possibility of change in the form of Iran’s government. The issue was revived again after Reza Khan eliminated the contenders for power in the country. Following the regime change in Turkey, a campaign for republicanism re-emerged. The press and elites depicted it as the solution that could terminate royal and clerical despotism in Iran.⁵⁰ Reza Khan saw this atmosphere suitable and pro-

46 Oliver Bast, “Disintegrating the Discourse of Disintegration”, Touraj Atabaki (eds.), *Iran in the 20th Century*, London and New York, I.B Tauris, 2009, p. 55.

47 Touraj Atabaki, “From Multilingual Empire to Contested Modern State”, Homa Katouzian and Hossein Shahidi (eds.), *Iran in the 21st Century*, New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 47.

48 Touraj Atabaki and Erik J. Zürcher, *Men of Order*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2004, p. 20.

49 Ibid., p. 20.

50 Vanessa Martin, “Mudarris, Republicanism and the Rise to Power of Riza Khan, Sardar-i Sipah”, Stephanie Cronin (eds.), *The Making of Modern Iran*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 71; Touraj Atabaki, “Agency and Subjectivity in Iranian National Historiography”, Touraj Atabaki (eds.), *Iran in the 20th Century*, London and New York: I.B Tauris, 2009, p. 82.

posed regime change from monarchy to republic. However, due to the strong opposition coming mainly from the ulama and conservatives, he demanded the withdrawal of the bill. He declared that republicanism was against the principles of Shi'a Islam⁵¹. In 1925, by the help of the re-alliance with the conservatives, the Majles drafted a bill that aimed to terminate the Qajar Dynasty and in 1925 Reza Khan was appointed to the throne, launching the Pahlavi Dynasty. The republican uproar provided one of the most salient features of Iranian identity. The monarchy and monarch were included in the contours of Iranian-ness. The historians of the Pahlavi period were to re-write this episode: "the most profound reason for people's objection to a republic was the fact that the Iranians have principally identified themselves with a 2,500-year-old tradition of practicing monarchy and have found the institution of monarchy the key to their survival."⁵² As such, monarchy was redefined as part and parcel of Iranian national identity, which would be elevated during the reign of Mohammed Reza Shah.

In order to create a unified national identity, Reza Shah used Persianism and aimed to de-link the existing identities within. After the First World War and in the face of a weakening central government, the fact that the largest proportion of Iranian territory was under the control of tribes was a pressing problem for Tehran because of the need to secure borders, where Iran shared cross-cutting identities shared with neighbouring countries. In this process tribal identities were presented as hostile to the national unity and became the internal other of Iranian national identity. The external boundaries were drawn especially with Arabs and Turks that were perceived as responsible from the backwardness of the country. Their "languages and dialects were represented as inferior, backward and alien in comparison to Persian."⁵³ Iranian nationalist opinion located the 'tribal problem' as a key weakness in Iran's development, a "legacy of the Turco-Mongol hordes."⁵⁴ As such the new regime created its internal Other by degrading existing identities and tribes were conceived of from a perspective in which security and identity merged together.

The last feature of Iranianness defined by the state was Aryanism. The regime linked Persianism and Europeanness through Aryanism in an effort to ease the tension between authenticity and Westernization. The nineteenth century anthropological theories of race were revisited and Iranians were claimed to be Aryans who migrated to the Persian Plateau.⁵⁵ The history textbooks were re-written based on the European fivefold racial system, and argued that the white-skinned race, the Aryans, which included the Iranians, was the Indo-European peoples and migrated to this area long ago. Westernization was thus in the minds of the political elite not as an alienation but a return to 'the true self'. Also, with the Aryan thesis, the state was differentiating itself not only from its neighbours but also from the previous Qajars Dynasty. This racist element was fed with the rise of fascism in Europe in general and the growing contact with Germany in particular.⁵⁶ In 1935 Reza Shah changed the name of the country from Persia to Iran, which means the land of Aryans in Persian.

51 Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 134.

52 Quoted from Atabaki, Agency and Subjectivity in Iranian National Historiography, p. 89.

53 Sharifi, *Imagining Iran*, p. 89.

54 Stephanie Cronin, "Re-Interpreting Modern Iran: Tribe and State in the Twentieth Century," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 42, No 3, 2009, p. 362.

55 Here we can trace the ideational support coming from the international. The academic works produced in Europe has also been utilized as a source for Iranian identity. For a detailed analysis of the impact of academic studies on Iranian nationalism see Vaziri, *Nationalizing Iran*.

56 Masoud Kamali, *Multiple Modernities, Civil Society and Islam: The Case of Iran and Turkey*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2006, p. 156; Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran*, London, Macmillan Press, 1981, p. 105.

Despite the power that Reza Shah accumulated, the Second World War changed the political conditions for him and Iran. Britain and the USSR invaded the country in 1941 and the era of Reza Shah was terminated in the same year. When he was forced to abdicate in 1941 by Britain and the USSR, nearly no one, including the military and bureaucracy that he had most invested in, protested it. In 1921, he had been perceived by Britain as the man who provided the necessary stability on the borders of India, Iraq, and Russia, and secured British interests as a stabilizing factor on the southern border with the USSR. He had emerged as the national saviour who could bring order and independence in the internal sphere of Iran. But as of 1941, he was perceived by many Iranians as an arbitrary dictator and de-stabilizing figure by the USSR and Britain in the context of the Second World War. Thus, this intersection led to his abdication in favour of his son, Mohammed Reza, almost without opposition.

Reza Shah could not create a political community that identified itself with his state and failed to nationalise his definition of Iranian-ness. However, this comprehensive experience is essential for understanding the ways in which Iranian nationalism(s) developed afterwards. Not only the reflexes of the state but also those of the opposition were shaped in reference to this period. In the late 1940s and in the first three years of the 1950s, Iranian nationalism took a special turn that culminated in the establishment of the National Front government under the leadership of Mohammed Mossadegh that was to be toppled down in 1953 by one of the infamous internationally orchestrated coup *d'états* in the history of the 20th century, and also clearly shows the constitutive role of the interaction of domestic and international dynamics on Iranian politics.⁵⁷

The rise of Mossadegh as one of the most influential political figures in Iranian history started with oil politics. Iran's oil industry was established in 1901 by the D'Arcy Concession and granted to Britain. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) was the main controller of the oil industry, which grew steadily.⁵⁸ The oil was important for the new regime, as it was one of the most important sources of revenue, especially to meet the growing expenditures of the army and the country's massive infrastructure projects. Yet the APOC produced limited revenues. More importantly, it was the last remaining foreign concessions that were seen as the main threat for national independence. Although Reza Shah terminated the 1901 D'Arcy Concession in 1932, he reached a compromise with Britain and a new concession was signed in 1933. Thus, Iran agreed to extend the concession for 32 years.⁵⁹

57 In 1953 Mossadegh was overthrown with a series of events that started to unfold with the coup attempt organized by the US and Britain. After nationalization of the Iranian oil Britain imposed an extensive oil boycott and the US participated to the boycott as Iran constituted a risk of becoming an example for Venezuela or Saudi Arabia whose oil was crucial for the US. To increase the revenues and create a non-oil economy, Mossadegh brought a series of measures including increasing the taxes. His measures were opposed by the upper classes, the landed elite and merchant class. The refusal of Mossadegh to employ the Shari'a laws and the fear of secular republicanism made the ulema one of the fiercest opponents of his regime. Patrick Clawson and Cyrus Sassanpour, "Adjustment to a Foreign Exchange Shock: Iran 1951-1953", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 19, No 1, 1987, p. 1; Homa Katouzian, "Oil Boycott and the Political Economy," James A. Bill and WM. Roger Louis (eds.), *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1988, p. 213; Mansoor Moaddel, *Class, Politics and Ideology in Iranian Revolution*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 49.

58 See Hassan Hakimian, "Industrialization: The Reza Shah Period and Its Aftermath 1925-53", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Vol. XIII, Fasc. 1, pp. 105-110, online available at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/industrialization-i> (Accessed 22 July 2019).

59 Shahrough Akhavi, "State Formation and Consolidation in Twentieth Century Iran," Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds.), *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1986, p. 204; Ali Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: The Pahlavis and After*, London, Pearson Education Limited, 2003, p. 57.

The Second World War increased the importance of oil. Growing fleets of trucks, tanks, and planes were dependent upon oil products. Although the USSR had its own reserves, it suffered a scarcity arising from their own oil supplies and facilities. With the war, the importance of Iranian oil increased, as Iran was the largest oil producer in the Middle East.⁶⁰ The geopolitical competition intensified, when the Iranian government started to negotiate an oil concession with the United States without informing the British and Soviet governments. Given the increasing importance of oil, the USSR, which was already alerted by the growing American-Iranian rapprochement, demanded an oil concession. During the negotiations, Mossadegh firmly rejected the idea: “giving such a concession is like asking a one-handed person to cut off his remaining hand so that he can have balance.”⁶¹

The existence of oil in Iran was at the heart of Iranian society and affected various layers to different degrees. It rendered the country vulnerable to all kinds of foreign intervention that inhibited the state to exercise its sovereignty and to adopt an independent policy both in the economic and political realms. For Iranians, the existence of oil in the country and its exploitation by AIOC⁶² was not only a matter of high politics that remained aloof from the people but was part of the everyday lives of Iranians. In contrast to British employees, the conditions were severe for the Iranians. It was the epitome of the inequality that Iranians felt and experienced everyday vis-à-vis the Westerners. The fact that Mossadegh voiced his objections fervently against the oil concessions attracted Iranian people from various angles. The increasing pressure of the Majles and the politicised situation in the Abadan oil fields forced the British government to revise the agreement. When they made a new offer, the Prime Minister invited them to negotiate the new deal, but Britain did not accept negotiation. This attitude increased the tension, and most of the deputies denounced the agreement.

Against this backdrop, Mossadegh formed the National Front, a loose unification of various segments of society ranging from liberals, conservatives, and Islamic modernizers during the weak reign of Mohammed Reza Shah. The Front’s main objective was to oppose foreign domination and limit the authority of the Pahlavi monarchy, defend the constitution, and political self-determination.⁶³ In the next elections in 1950, seven members of the National Front were elected to the Parliament. Although the communist Tudeh Party had first brought the idea of oil nationalization at the beginning of 1940s, Mossadegh re-raised the issue in an atmosphere in which oil politics became a rallying point for different segments of Iranian people.⁶⁴ The news came from Saudi Arabia regarding the new deal of the American-Saudi Arabian Oil Company (ARAMCO), which would give Saudis half of the company’s profits, encouraged the opposition and, in the following days, huge demonstrations took place to nationalize the AIOC. In 1951, the Majles passed the bill that nationalized Iranian oil.⁶⁵ The oil issue provided an opportunity for Mossadegh to form a political community. During and in the aftermath of the process of oil nationalization, Mossadegh constantly used words like national interest, sovereignty, and independence. He formulated a discourse standing on three legs: first, he framed the process of oil nationalization as a “war of independence”. He presented his political choices as a holy

60 Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East*, Boston, Beacon Press, 2009, p. 50.

61 Susan Siavoshi, *Liberal Nationalism in Iran*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1989, p. 55.

62 The company was renamed to Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in 1935 after Reza Shah changed the name of the country from Persia to Iran.

63 Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 253.

64 Ansari, *Modern Iran*, pp. 136-143.

65 Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 2003, p. 79.

war. Thus, he created a way to escape from criticisms that especially arose when his politics antagonized different social groups. For Mossadegh, oil nationalization was the struggle for independence against the imperialist patron. Second, he located this war of independence within the wider politics of imperialism and colonialism. Mossadegh stated: “until the emergence of national movement, they [British] thought we exist only for being humiliated and exploited by the looters, now the nation is united ... we are the symbol of national resistance against the world imperialism.”⁶⁶

As opposed to Reza Shah, for Mossadegh “us” was the ‘humiliated and exploited Iranian nation’, irrespective of ethnic, sectarian, and tribal differences, not the Aryans. *Them*, on the other hand, referred to the imperialists.⁶⁷ This discourse was more unitary and civic than Reza Shah because it did not include racist elements but conceptualized the Iranian nation as people living in Iran. The enemy responsible for the bad situation was the imperial other, not the Arabs or Turks, as the conventional nationalist history argues.⁶⁸ Mossadegh located Iran’s war of independence with the wider debates of decolonization and redefined the counters of Iranian identity not vis-à-vis Arabs and Turks but vis-à-vis the imperial other. This also built a feeling of solidarity with the rest of the colonized world. He presented Iran as an inspiration or an example in front of the colonized world, which fuelled romanticised, Great Nation perceptions of Iranians. Third, Mossadegh linked the monarchy directly with the imperialism. If the external other was the imperial powers, the internal other was their cohort, the monarch.

With this three-pronged discourse, he redefined the meaning attached to identity and managed to wrap fragmented definitions of Iranianness into one canvas. The ideological content of this nationalism, on the other hand, was very different from Reza Shah’s. Mossadegh did not refer to the great Persian history; rather, he used the vocabulary of anti-imperialism. This ideological shift in the content of nationalism was part of a wider pattern of nationalism in the Third World that emerged during the era of decolonization. The discourse of nationalist politics that incorporated anti-imperialism could mobilize broader segments of society in the face of overwhelming foreign domination. With this nationalist narrative, Mossadegh could coordinate and mobilize people and provided legitimacy to him. If in the early 1920s Reza Shah could address the needs of people, by referring to the need of creating a strong state, in the 1950s Mossadegh’s politics actually addressed the needs of the people at that time.

The themes, including rule of people, national dignity, and sovereignty had been in the political lexicon since the Constitutional Revolution. These hopes helped Reza Shah rise to the power but remained unanswered during his reign. Mossadegh used these themes when there were foreign troops in the country, when economic hardship had created burdens on Iranians, and when there were crucial differences between the living standards of the Iranians and foreigners. Therefore, it was not the content of Pahlavi nationalism but the content of Mossadegh’s nationalism that provided the conceptual map for the Iranian people to “relate their particular material and moral interests to a broader

66 The Mossadegh Project, <http://www.mohammadmossadegh.com/biography/> (Accessed 25 July 2020).

67 See Afshin Shahi, “Iranian Nationalism: A Theoretical Dilemma,” 2009. <http://www.e-ir.info/?p=605>.

68 In conventional nationalist history the Turks and the Arabs were portrayed as the yellow and green hazards. “Europeans resemble neither barefoot, hungry and nomad Arabs, nor bloodthirsty and drunken Turks and Mongols who come off their horses and rest a while after their incursions and massacres and are amazed by our carpet motifs and garden festivals.” Atabaki, *Agency and Subjectivity in Iranian National Historiography*, p. 134.

terrain of actions.”⁶⁹ While the politics of nationalism during the Mossadegh era was conditioned by the previous era of Reza Shah’s reign, it conditioned the politics of nationalism of Mohammed Reza Shah. Mohammed Reza Shah struggled to contain and deconstruct Mossadegh’s definition of Iranian-ness, and strived for reconstructing and nationalizing his version of Iranian identity in his efforts to legitimize his rule, until his overthrow with the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Conclusion

Despite the increasing application of HSIR literature, which discusses the merits and potential of HSIR for social sciences and IR scholarship in a detailed manner, there is a significant gap in the application of HSIR’s theoretical discussions especially to nationalism studies. Although there are studies on nationalism in Iran, almost none of them problematizes the interaction of international dynamics with the domestic conditions in the formulation of nationalistic policies and politics. This study addressed these gaps in IR as well as nationalism studies and attempted to demonstrate what the theoretical tools of HSIR offer in the Iranian context.

This article was a call for IR scholars to engage in a historical sociological analysis in the study of nationalism. Without locating Iranian nationalism in its historical and international context, Reza Shah would look as an omnipotent figure that awakened and crowned the sleeping beauty called the Iranian nation overnight or Mossadegh as a hero that restored the hitherto eroded dignity of the Iranian nation. Without investigating different realms of political life around the globe and in Iran, the politics of nationalism would look natural and simple: the battle of those who are for or against the nation. However, the Iranian nation-state and Iranian nationalism were modern constructs, products of a longer transformation that was conditioned by global politics, and involved several actors rather than lonely heroes. This particular state formation and ideology were in the middle of intricate political relations that went beyond the immediate content of nationalism.

By discussing the merits of HSIR in studying Iranian nationalism, this article underscored the constitutive role of the international level on an issue that is mostly considered as domestic. The study also showed that the international milieu is not simply a restraint on domestic agency. On the contrary, it possesses at times a great enabling effect for the rise of new ideologies or actors. As such, this article contributed to the disciplines of IR, area studies, and nationalism studies by showing that a thorough and theoretical understanding of international politics is indispensable for explaining not only nationalism(s) but also social changes in countries.

⁶⁹ Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, p. 13.