Naming Nationalism: How *Iran* and *Persia* Frame the Nation and its People

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We have just received an absurd note from the Persian Government asking us to speak of "Iran" and "Iranian" as from March 21st next instead of "Persia" and "Persian." I understand the person originally responsible for this is Herodotus, who, not being able to foresee the sensitiveness of the modern Persian, was insufficiently polite in his references to this country. But, as my German colleague points out, if they make this change they practically disown all the Arab part of their dominions. And what about the Gulf? From that point of view I welcome it, as it gives us that admirable opportunity for drawing in English the distinction which hitherto only the French have been able to make. Let us continue firmly to speak of the Persian Gulf. – Letter from the British Minister in Tehran, Mr. Knatchbull-Hugessen, to George Rendel, the Head of the Eastern Department, December 28, 1934.[1]

Reza Shah Pahlavi's demand that Iran be addressed as such by the international community, as the Knatchbull-Hugessen letter reflects, was a decision in which a myriad of political, social, and cultural issues intersected with both domestic and foreign implications. Much has been written on the role the naming has played in a broader domestic nationalization project beginning with the Shah and continuing too today. This paper seeks to problematize that narrative and propose that Iranian nationalism and the naming of Iran has been as much, if not more, a foreign project in power and influence as a domestic one. In doing so, this paper will offer a literature review on the different theorizations of the development of Iranian nationalism, analyze Iranian nationalism as a foreign project, and consider the role naming has played in the identity construction of Iranians.

Defining nationalism is matched in difficulty only in identifying those sources from which it manifests. Benedict Anderson identifies three paradoxes in the concept of the "nation" that makes the attempt such a challenge for scholars: the contested temporalities of nations and national identities, the contradiction inherent to the universalization of particularities, and the political power of an altogether empty philosophy.[2] In addressing these challenges, Anderson proposes conceptualizing the nation as an imagined political community.[3]

The process by which an imagined community arises inverts the historical theories of nationalism as a natural outgrowth of shared sociological factors – language, race, or religion. Instead, these factors only become common once mediated through print-capitalism which enables a standardization of these factors – such as a fixed lexicography or print-language,[4] publications of maps and the solidification of borders,[5] and a shared set of experiences that enable a sense of connection to the "fellow-readers" who consume this same information.[6]

Anderson's model is beneficial in that it provides a framework capable of analyzing nationalism as either a consequence of institutional development or as an intended political project. Thus, it provides a way to evaluate the growth of Iranian nationalism before the Shah, as a project of the Pahlavi Dynasty, and in the various identity schemes of the post-revolutionary regime.

However, this is not to say that the imagined communities theory is sufficiently adequate. Anderson's focus on shared experience is premised on fellow-readers of the print-capitalism socio-cultural history of the West.[7] This ignores alternative sources for shared experiences from which

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[1] Juliette Despat, "From Persia to Iran, via Inglistan," *UK National Archives*, June 15, 2017, https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/persia-iran-via-inglistan/.
[2] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 5.
[3] Ibid., 6.
[4] Ibid., 44.
[5] Ibid., 188.
[6] Ibid., 44.
[7] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993), 4.

imagined communities can arise, particularly for post-colonial societies. Rather than Anderson's thesis of Western "modular" nationalisms available for adoption by African and Asian states, Partha Chatterjee suggests the shared experience of colonial exploitation and common anti-colonizer or settler identities can satisfy the same requirements for the formation of an imagined community as print-capitalism.[8]

The post-colonial alternative, however, does not account for the historical experience of Iran. From the Great Game, to the 1953 coup, to the Iran-Iraq War, Iran's experiences with European and American powers – particularly the United Kingdom and Russia and later the United States – did foster anti-imperial sentiments creating communal identities comparable to post-colonial models.[9] Yet, Iran was never wholly colonized or subsumed as India was, thus, fostering an anti-colonial community as described by Chatterjee – day-to-day life was not an experience of foreign exploitation or occupation, colonial forces did not roam the streets to offer contrasting identities, and so on. As such, the anti-imperialism model of Chatterjee is not sufficient to account for the Iran case, nor indeed is the general colonizer/colonized binary.[10]

Rather, Iranian nationalism is an outgrowth of a myriad of conflicting domestic and foreign forces contorting Iranian identity to satisfy competing interests (though not always with intent or institutionally). Several scholars have attempted to grapple with explanations for the origins and evolutions of Iranian nationalism. Many of these attempts engage with elements from *Imagined Communities* and the post-colonial critiques of Anderson while offering their own insights into the Iran case.

For example, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet critiques Anderson's lack of focus on the role land plays as a source of identity from the relationship to land for sedentary civilizations as a "sacred space,"[11] to how frontiers and geographic boundaries foster identities.[12] Instead, Kashani-Sabet proposes that Iranian nationalism was a product of "frontier frictions" where land is the primary source of nationalist identity construction while maintaining that identity is never static or "pure' as borders change and ideas and cultural practices traverse boundaries.[13] Yet, she recognizes the role nationally mediated framings of Iranian identity led to common experiences and conceptualizations of Iran from the rising popularity of maps as a consequence of the sacralizing of Iranian space (particularly following the "Defensive Jihad")[14] to the role of schools in creating a uniformed linguistic and ideological construction of the state through the dissemination of frontier narratives.[15]

Farzin Vejdani provides a similar fusion of Andersonian and post-colonial constructions in his attempt to overcome the dichotomy through a seemingly Hegelian synthesis. For Vejdani, Iranian nationalism arises through the adoption of a Westernized professionalization of historical academic research.[16] However, prior to this professionalization, Iranian history had a variety of diverse sources and narratives. Unlike colonial histories where subject nations adopted European narratives of their ancestry and political development, Iranian history was self-created.[17]

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[8] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993), 5.
[9] Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2015), 8.
[10] Ibid., 8.
[11] Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), 6-7.
[12] Ibid., 4-5.
[13] Ibid., 9-10.
[14] Ibid., 144.
[15] Ibid., 6.
[16] Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2015), 7.
[17] Ibid., 8-9.

During the Qajar and early Pahlavi dynasties, Iranian history had been decentralized and thus an inversion to Anderson's theory of print-capitalism and its effects. While printing and lithography offered economic means to nationally distribute history and new media, at this time the lack of a professional class to gatekeep these narratives meant that these stories were regionally and ideologically diverse.[18] Lithography in particular was key to contest the Qajar Dynasty's near monopoly over printing as a cheap and more aesthetically desired alternative for competing narratives.[19]

While standardization in schooling would seem to upend this diversity, the coinciding decrease in costs associated with printing and increase in literacy led to a thriving independent publishing industry.[20] The eventual combination of professionalization and standardization under the Shah, however, led to the creation of a "scientific" history.[21] Thus, plurality succumbed to singularity to homogenize the "linguistic, religious, tribal, and ethnic diversity of Iran," integrating them into a "broader Iranian narrative."[22]

Professionalization was part of a larger modernization project that is crucial to understanding the most prevailing view of the development of Iranian nationalism, especially as it is viewed by the West, the Iranian upper-class of the Pahlavi period, and prominent figures in the diaspora. This is particularly true as much of the Western understanding of Iran and Iranian history is informed by Shah-supporting members of the diaspora due to their credentials, proximity, role in translation of Persian texts, and their domination of Iranian publishing institutions during the Pahlavi reign.

The conventional narrative of Iranian nationalism is that of a planned systemic effort throughout the Pahlavi dynasty to modernize and Westernize the nation modeled on Kemal Atatürk in Turkey.[23] This Kemalist parallel of Reza Shah as an active participant in nationalist historiography is contested by other theorists (notably Vejdani, while recognizing the Shah as having a general impact on nationalist discourse, entirely rejects the comparison to Atatürk).[24]

However, besides the outsized role of the Shah in the process, much of this modernization and development literature does parallel the process of nationalization created in Iran. Kevan Harris, for example, focuses on the impact of nationalist intellectuals on knowledge production,[25] the education system, [26] infrastructure projects such as the Trans-Iranian railway,[27] and the dynasty's control of the media.[28]

Within this conventional narrative, the naming of Iran takes a prominent role. From this perspective, the naming of Iran was an attempt to organize society on a shared Aryan identity[29] – a

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[18] Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2015), 10-11.
[19] Ibid., 11-2.
[20] Ibid., 11.
[21] Ibid., 12-3.
[22] Ibid., 12-3.
[23] Kevan Harris, *A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 52.; Michel Foucault, "The Shah is a Hundred Years Behind the Times," in Janet Afary & Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 196-7.
[24] Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2015), 8.
[25] Kevan Harris, *A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 51.
[26] Ibid., 70-1.
[27] Ibid., 51.
[28] Ibid., 47.
[29] Michel Foucault, "The Shah is a Hundred Years Behind the Times," in Janet Afary & Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 196.

notion imported from European racial theories.[30] Such theorists propose that this Aryan identity enable Iranian nationalists to accomplish three goals. First, highlighting Iran's Aryan-ness created an ethnically universalizable identity in Iran – one tied to its land and heritage.[31] This is emphasized by the linkage by Orientalist scholars of the name *Iran* to the use of *Arya* in the Zarathustrian, *Avesta*, in an attempt to foster an ethnic and geographical identity from which a direct connection can be made to the ancient Achaemenid empire.[32]

Second, the tying of the international designation to the ethnic identity allows for racial and tribal distinctions from other Middle Eastern groups such as the Turks and, in particular, the Semitic Arab nations.[33] Finally, it offers an ethnic, linguistic, and cultural connection between Iran and Europe,[34] something particularly desired for the political ambitions of Westernization.[35]

The Aryan myth, besides its historical problems with racial identity construction and its disastrous ethical implications, faces a unique challenge in the Iranian context. Mostafa Vaziri offers a philological analysis of the terms *Iran* and *Persia* that reveals the ahistorical ascription of Aryan identity to the word, land, and the people.[36]

Beginning with the ancestral and geographic connection, Vaziri argues that the use of *Arya* in the *Avesta* is not used as a designation for the peoples that would come to form ancient Persia. Specifically, the *Avesta* never mentions the Medes or Persians and any geographical or ethnic association of those peoples with the term's usage is dubious.[37]

Furthermore, the connection of these people to conceptions of Aryan-ness at the time was entirely a pragmatic falsification to contort the cultivated ethnic identity to the peoples. This is evidenced by the Orientalist reconceptualization of the Medians, previously considered to be either Aramaic or Semitic peoples, into Aryans so as to create a historically "pure" ancient Persian-Aryan identity to which it would be possible to trace back the modern Iranian ehtnicity.[38]

Finally, this attempt nullifies how the Achaemenid dynasty conceptualized its empire and the various ethnic identities within. Orientalists attempt to show linguistic, architectural, and religious homogenization to validate a theorization that ancient Persia was an empire by and for Aryans whose spread was an act of dominance, subjugation, and erasure of other neighboring cultures and ethnicities.[39] In the context of its naming (and the tying of the empire to the etymological and geo-political roots of an Iranian nation), this was propagated by E. Herzfeld who claimed that Achaemenid inscriptions used the name *Aryanam Khshathram* (the Empire of the Aryans).[40] However, not only do these inscriptions not exists, there is no evidence of any encompassing official name of the empire ever used by the Achaemenids (even the term "empire" is never used in any inscription).[41] Even those terms such as *Parsa* and *Achaemenid*, typically understood as ethnically-

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[30] Firoozeh's argument is a critique of this conception of the formation of Iranian nationalism not an endorsement.; Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), 207.

[31] Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), 6-7.

[32] Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 76-7.

[33] Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2015), 86.

[34] Ibid., 86.

[35] Michel Foucault, "The Shah is a Hundred Years Behind the Times," in Janet Afary & Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 196-7.

[36] Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 73-83.

[37] Ibid., 76-7.

[38] Ibid., 74.

[39] Ibid., 78-9.

[40] Ibid., 78.

[41] Ibid., 78.

based etymological roots, were used contexts to refer to politically organized regions and particular tribal groups within the overarching empire.[42]

Such histories attempt to erase the cosmopolitan political and ethnic structures of the Persian empire. In cases where inscriptions do identify ties between the political leadership and the term *Arya*, such as with Darius, the term is in reference to religious piety rather than ethnic identification or political legitimacy.[43] In fact, these inscriptions evidence the opposite of an Empire of the Aryans in that Darius refers to himself as the king of numerous communities.[44]

The lack of any singular self-referential name for ancient Persia, is perhaps, why it was so susceptible to the ascription of its commonly used exonym, *Persia*. Persia, a construction of Herodotus from *Parsa*, and its later Roman derivative, *Parthia*,[45] have been the names used by those outside Iran (particularly the Greco-Roman influenced West), for millennia.[46] This is even despite the internal use of the name *Iran* for centuries. As far back as the third century CE, the Sassanian empire used the term *Iranshahr* rather than *Pars* or *Fars* to refer to the geographic territory under their domain.[47]

Usage of *Iran* by Western scholars, including the famous French traveler Sir John Chardin, was initially treated as insignificant or secondary with little thought or recognition of its meaning with primacy given to the use of *Perse* or *Persia*.[48] Over time, and particularly after the work of Silvestre de Sacy, the terms *Iran* and *Persia* became interchangeable within the Western academy.[49] However, this led to confusion between the relationship assigning primacy of one term over the other in various ethnic, political, or geographical applications (for example, Iran as a region within Persia).[50] Vaziri references a statement by J. Malcolm in the 19th century to highlight this confused conflation, "Iran has been from the most ancient times to the present day, the term by which the Persians call their country."[51]

From this confusion arises the attempt to isolate the terms in their application – assigning them distinctions based on geography, politics, culture, or ethnicity.[52] However, such attempts falsely homogenized the various groups (Kurds, Turks, Arabs, and so on) within the country that were not only in fact distinct but were recognized as so by the various political regimes.[53] It was this attempt to provide distinction between *Iran* and *Persia* and universalize it to all peoples in the region that enabled the aforementioned Aryan racialization of the term and its historical application.[54]

Why past Iranian governments never sought to specify a preferred nomenclature for use by Europeans is probably born of a lack of significant political engagement with those powers. With increased engagement, primarily during the contests over Iran between Britain and Russia, the matter of designation began to increase in importance.

When Reza Pahlavi took control over Iran and deposed the Qajar dynasty, several domestic and international factors served as catalysts for the demand for *Iran* to gain international recognition as the name of the state. As described earlier, many Western theorists consider this as a component

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[42] Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 78.
[43] Ibid., 78-9.
[44] Ibid., 79.
[45] Ibid., 78.
[46] Ibid., 60.
[47] Ibid., 61.
[48] Ibid., 61-2.
[49] Ibid., 61-2.
[50] Ibid., 61-2.
[51] Ibid., 62.
[52] Ibid., 62-3.
[53] Ibid., 62-4.
[54] Ibid., 66-7.

to foster a unified Aryan identity to nationalize the country.[55] Certainly some element of this is accurate in the usage by the Shah to tie his dynasty back to the Achaemenid Empire.[56] However, the efficacy of this as a domestic question is dubious. As mentioned, the Iranian national project arose from a multitude of factors and the first Shah's role is largely overstated.[57]

Considering the context in which the Shah chose to act on changing Iran's official designation provides a different, and perhaps more accurate, insight into the motivations. First, the use of *Iran* as a geographical and national identifier within Iran predated the Shah by centuries.[58] Secondly, the Shah's political ambitions were largely an attempt to overcome British and Russian interference that had plagued Iran for the past century. In doing so, he sought to modernize the nation's economy yet faced challenges in securing capital and expertise for his development projects.

Of note was the Trans-Iranian Railway, for which, the Shah found his engineering expertise in German firms.[59] The use of German engineers throughout Iran led to increased relations between the two nations. As this was also the 1930s interwar period, this meant that the relationship was with a nation heavily influenced by the Aryan myth.

While there is no authoritative source for why the Shah proposed the name change, it is this relationship that is frequently cited as an explanation. It is widely believed that the change was a proposal brough to the Shah by his ambassador to Berlin at the suggestion of German officials.[60] For the Germans, this would not only foster an idea of ethnic kinship furthering their influence but may also have helped to isolate Iran from British and Russian influence.

For their part, the British did not seem to give much significance to the designation initially.[61] As the Knatchbull-Hugessen letter indicates, it was mostly viewed as an example of Persian sensitivity (itself an indication of their Orientalist attitudes towards the issue) and a potential opportunity to serve British imperial interests through ethnic and geographical fracturing.[62] However, during World War II, the issue was raised again by Winston Churchill for the spectacularly amusing and absurd conundrum born of British imperialism in the Middle East that the usage of *Iran* may lead to confusion with Iraq.[63]

While the British would eventually return to the usage of *Iran* in any official capacity, several incidences during World War II and its immediate aftermath led to several international incidents.[64] Officially, the decision to revert to *Persia* during the War was supposed to be for purely internal usage, while *Iran* continued to be used externally and in official publications.[65] However, there were several cases in which this custom was ignored or forgotten.[66]

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[55] Michel Foucault, "The Shah is a Hundred Years Behind the Times," in Janet Afary & Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 196.

[56] Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 7.

[57] Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2015), 8.

[58] Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 61.

[59] Szczepan Lemańczyk, "The Transiranian Railway – History, Context and Consequence," *Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 2 (2013): 240-1.

[60] Juliette Despat, "From Persia to Iran, via Inglistan," *UK National Archives*, June 15, 2017, https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/persia-iran-via-inglistan/.; Hooman Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ: The Paradox of Modern Iran* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 160-1.; Iran Chamber Society, *Geography of Iran*, https://www.iranchamber.com/geography/articles/persia_became_iran.php.

[61] Juliette Despat, "From Persia to Iran, via Inglistan," *UK National Archives*, June 15, 2017, https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/persia-iran-via-inglistan/.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

Ultimately, the decision by the Shah to change the name and the significance of the official designation seems to have been a political tool for Iranian foreign policy more than a domestic matter of national identity construction. Even some who view the Shah as a prominent figure in fostering Iranian nationalism,[67] believe that the change in designation was a German proposal rather than the manifestation of the Shah or his professional class' strategy.[68]

Following the revolution in 1979, the nationalization strategy of Iran and the role of its international designation shifted. While this paper is primarily concerned with the initial development of Iranian nationalism, the post-revolutionary period saw its own changes to nationalization strategies and the implications of the *Persia* to *Iran* name change.

In various ways, the Revolution was a response to the nationalization project of the Shah. Some outright claim Khomeinism to be a direct rejection of nationalism, particularly the fostering of a pre-Islamic Persian or Iranian identity.[69] There is evidence to support this theory such as the attempt to downplay pre-Islamic holidays such as Nowruz.[70] However, this would be too simplistic a reading of the Revolution and its aftermath. Harris, for example, describes the Revolution as a competition between two nationalism – the Shah's emanating from the top in contestation against a bottom-up nationalism of the Revolution.[71]

A more accurate description would be to identify the Revolution as a shift in the methodology and pretexts by which Iranian identity was to be constructed. Rather than an ethnic or historiographic identifier, Iranian nationalism in the new regime was oriented around Islamic identity[72] (with contested views on how sectarian that identity ought to be, particularly prior to the Iran-Iraq War).

The renaming of Iran to the Islamic Republic of Iran was an attempt to restructure Iranian national identity on Islamic grounds.[73] However, divisions in the aftermath of the Revolution led many to see this reorientation as an erasure of their national identity and its historical legacy. As such many sought out pre-Islamic identifiers to signify a distinct Persian heritage as a political statement against the new regime.[74]

Following the 2009 Green Movement, many within the regime realized the failure of this strategy to secure popular support and attempted to overhaul the government's media strategies to focus on classic nationalist tropes.[75] Of particular interest was an attempt to frame the Islamic Republic as the defenders of Iranian territory in contrast to prior regimes who had successively surrender land since the fall of the Persian empire.[76] The Iran-Iraq War became central to this new relatively secular, nationalist, and anti-imperial messaging campaign that took over Iranian museums,[77] social media,[78] and cultural media (cinema, music, and so on).[79]

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[67] Hooman Majd being someone who would fit within this group along with the aforementioned Western theorists such as Foucault and Harris.

[68] Hooman Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ: The Paradox of Modern Iran* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 160-1.

[69] David Donaldson, "Hamas and Iran: Nationalism and Islam," *E-International Relations* (2012): 5.

[70] Narges Bajoghli, *Iran Re-Framed: Anxieties of Power in the Islamic Republic*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2019), 101.

[71] Kevan Harris, *A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 12.

[72] Ludwig Paul, "'Iranian Nation' and Iranian-Islamic Revolutionary Ideology," *Die Welt des Islams* 39, no. 2 (1999): 205.

[73] Ibid., 186.

[74] Narges Bajoghli, *Iran Re-Framed: Anxieties of Power in the Islamic Republic*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2019), 101.

[75] Ibid., 100-2.

[76] Ibid., 100 & 103.

[77] Ibid., 102-4.

[78] Ibid., 109-11.

[79] Ibid., 100-12.

Internationally, particularly in America, the redefining of Iranian identity both as an Islamic and nationalist construct has been perceived as inherently rooted in anti-Western and anti-American sentiment. This is not without merit as both framings are grounded in anti-imperialism.[80]

Edward Said provides an exemplary analysis of how hostilities in the aftermath of the Revolution, and the Hostage Crisis in particular, played a critical role in how the U.S. views Iran and Islam.[81] Interestingly, the role of Iran's name is significant in this conception, in two ways.

First, the connection between *Iran* and *Aryan* has been reintroduced as an indicator of Iranian allegiance to the Nazi regime. Exemplifying this was conservative radio host, Glenn Beck, who described the name change from Persia to Iran as a "gift" to the Führer due to Nazi sympathies – entirely ignoring that Persia was an exonym, the role of orientalist scholars in promoting the Aryan mythology and etymology, and Iranian economic and geopolitical considerations at the time.[82]

Secondly, an irony arises in the lack of historical memory of the Persian-Iran connection in the American mainstream.[83] As mentioned, within Iran many use Persian identifiers as a means to politically distance themselves from the regime. The same is true with the diaspora community, particularly in the West.[84] However, an additional benefit of identifying oneself as Persian instead of Iranian is that the lack of historical awareness of the relationship allows many diaspora members to escape negative associations with the modern Iranian government and its actions.[85] Perhaps ironically, this form of political action through counter-naming provides an interesting inversion of the derisive imperialist attitudes depicted in the Knatchbull-Hugessen letter. By reframing themselves as Persians, many Iranians can avoid Western animosity by exploiting the historical ignorance that fostered the misidentification in the first place.

Iranian nationalism is a highly contested field both in how academics study its formation as well as its role as a political project. The combination of foreign interests, the desire for self-determination, and highly divisive domestic politics has only exacerbated the challenges in identifying how Iranian nationalism developed. The very name has been a site of domestic and international contention in which Orientalist, racial, and religious tropes have all competed to define what it means to be "Iranian." No singular approach is capable of explaining the Iranian experience but the ongoing project and the historiography of Iran's name remains central to the framing of the narrative of the state and its people both internationally and within the Iranian government.

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[80] Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2015), 8.

[81] Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Random House, 1997), 81-3.

[82] Glenn Beck, quoted in Matthew Pulver, "Glenn Beck's Paranoid History Lesson: Why His Theories About Iran & Anti-Semitism are Completely Wrong," *Salon*, May 10, 2015, https://www.salon.com/2015/05/10/glenn_becks_paranoid_history_lesson_why_his_theories_about_iran_anti_semitism_are_competely_wrong/.

[83] Hooman Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ: The Paradox of Modern Iran* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 161-2.

[84] Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2017), 69-70.

[85] Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2017), 69-71.; Hooman Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ: The Paradox of Modern Iran* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 161-2.