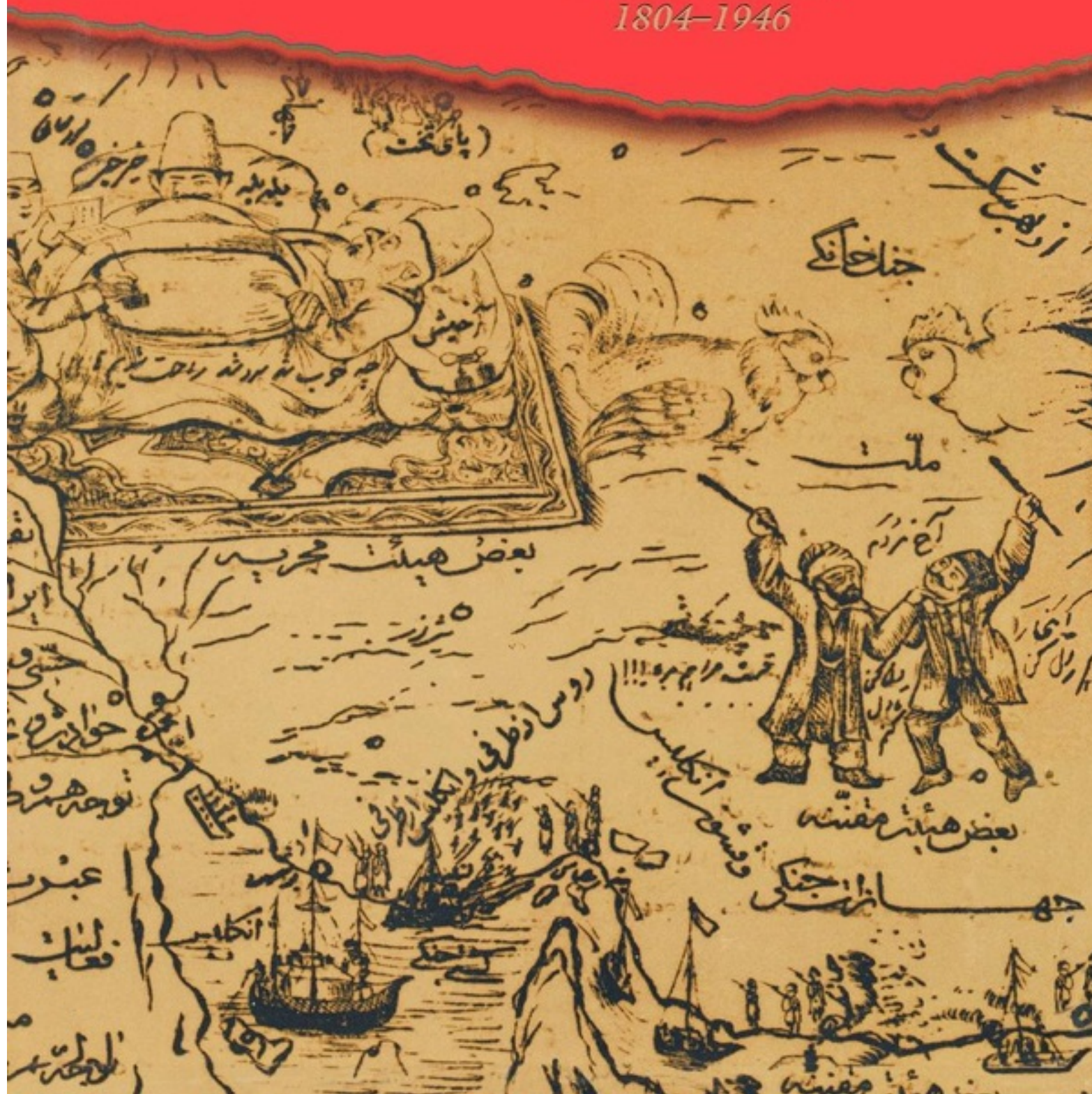


FIROOZEH KASHANI-SABET
FRONTIER FICTIONS

*Shaping the
Iranian Nation,
1804–1946*



FRONTIER FICTIONS

SHAPING THE IRANIAN NATION, 1804–1946

Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet

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To Our Mother, Fereshteh

My Brother, Mohammed

And in the Memory of Our Father,

Mohammed Hossein

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Chronology of Major Events

- 1796 Coronation of Aqa Muhammad Khan, founder of Qajar dynasty
- 1797 Accession of Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar
- 1804 Outbreak of the first Russo-Persian War
- 1813 Treaty of Gulistan ending fighting with Russia
- 1823 First Erzurum Treaty between the Ottoman Empire and Iran
- 1826 Start of second Russo-Persian War
- 1828 Treaty of Turkmanchay ending second Russo-Persian War
- 1833 Death of Crown Prince 'Abbas Mirza
- 1834 Death of Fath 'Ali Shah and accession of Muhammad Shah
- 1847 Second Erzurum Treaty to establish boundary between the Ottoman Empire and Iran
- 1848 Nasir al-Din Shah accedes to the throne
- 1851 Establishment of the Dar al-Funun
- 1856 Conflict with Great Britain over Herat
- 1857 Treaty of Paris ending conflict over Herat
- 1869 Identical Map of Ottoman-Iranian border drawn up
- 1870 Goldsmid Commission convenes to determine boundaries in eastern Iran
- 1878 Treaty of Berlin
- 1879 Establishment of the Cossack Brigade
- 1881 Khurasan Border Negotiations East of the Caspian
- 1891–92 Tobacco Protest
- 1896 Russian Boundary Commission East of the Caspian
- 1896 Perso-Baluch Boundary Commission arbitration
- 1896 Assassination of Nasir al-Din Shah and accession of Muzaffar al-Din Shah
- 1901 Regulations for citizenship established by Foreign Ministry
- 1901 William Knox D'Arcy granted Oil Concession
- 1903–5 Perso-Afghan Boundary Negotiation and the McMahon Arbitration
- 1905 Ottoman incursions into Iranian territory
- 1906 Founding of the Majlis
- 1907 Death of Muzaffar al-Din Shah

| | |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1907 | Anglo-Russian Treaty dividing Iran into spheres of influence |
| 1907 | Renewed Ottoman incursions into western Iran |
| 1908 | Discovery of oil at Masjid-i Sulayman |
| 1908 | Bombardment of Majlis and start of Minor Despotism |
| 1909 | Anglo-Persian Oil Company formed |
| 1909 | Muhammad 'Ali Shah is deposed and Ahmad Shah is proclaimed king |
| 1911 | Morgan Shuster arrives in Iran and is made Treasurer General |
| 1911 | Russian ultimatum to Majlis and attack on Iranian provinces |
| 1913 | Boundary Protocol between the Ottoman Empire and Iran |
| 1914 | Declaration of Iran's neutrality in the Great War |
| 1915 | Creation of provisional government |
| 1917 | Start of the Jangali Revolt |
| 1918–19 | Famine in Iran |
| 1919 | Anglo-Persian Treaty signed but not ratified |
| 1919 | Iran's demands for war reparations put forth |
| 1920 | Establishment of the Soviet Socialist Republic in Iran |
| 1920 | Shaykh Muhammad Khiyabani's Revolt |
| 1921 | Treaty of Friendship signed between Iran and Soviet Union |
| 1921 | Coup d'état of Sayyid Ziya' al-Din Tabataba'i and Reza Khan |
| 1924 | Controversy over republicanism in Iran |
| 1925 | Abolition of Qajar dynasty |
| 1926 | Coronation of Reza Shah Pahlavi |
| 1927 | Iran appeals to League of Nations regarding status of Bahrayn |
| 1929 | Iran's formal recognition of Iraq |
| 1929 | Revision of Iranian Nationality Law |
| 1934 | Firdawsi Celebration |
| 1941 | Abdication of Reza Shah and accession of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi |
| 1945–46 | Azerbaijan crisis and eventual withdrawal of foreign troops from Iran |

Glossary

- ‘adalat* — justice
adamiyat — humanism
‘ajam — non-Arabs (often referred to Iranians)
azadi — freedom
dawlat — state; government
din — religion
falahat — agriculture
hubb-i vatan — love of homeland
hudud — boundaries
hudud-i tabi‘i — natural boundaries
hurriyat — liberty; freedom
istibdad — despotism; tyranny
ittifaq — agreement
ittihad — unity
jumhuri — republic
khak — soil
khak-i pak — pure soil; pure land
ma‘arif — culture; education
millat — nation; citizenry
majlis — parliament
mamalik-i mahrusah — guarded domains
mamlakat — country
marz — frontier; border
mashrutiyat — constitutionalism
mulk — kingdom
namus — honor
naqshih — map
ra‘iyat — subject
saltanat — monarchy
sarhad — borderland
taba‘iyat — citizenship
tamaddun — civilization
tarikh — history
tazkira — identity card
vatan — homeland
zaban — language
zulm — oppression

Introduction

Frontier Fictions

The Journey Begins

On a brisk winter day Muhammad Riza Pahlavi, the “king of kings,” stared bleakly at the Alburz Mountains before ascending his private jet. With his wife at his side, the king bid his small but loyal entourage a terse farewell. As the monarch took one more look at the scenery that had once embraced him warmly, a doleful attendant bent down to kiss his feet. It was January 1979. The sick shah, privately combating cancer, had weathered the rioters’ rising storm for several long months, yet his political fight, like his personal one, proved a losing battle. That gaze would become the shah’s final glimpse of the nation he had once ruled.¹

Around the capital Iranians eagerly awaited the shah’s departure, wasting little time before tearing down his courtly statues when the news finally reached the streets. Officials had cast the shah’s journey as “a vacation,” but the public knew better. Just thirty-seven years earlier, the shah’s father, Riza, had been forced to abdicate his throne under increasing Allied pressure. He, too, had volunteered a feeble excuse for his expulsion. Like his son, Riza was unceremoniously driven out of the capital in order to spend his remaining days in exile. The country appreciated this irony. Both father and son, realizing that their days in Iran were numbered, had reportedly departed with a box of Iranian soil tucked away in their belongings.

What was the symbolic value of this simple gesture? It was more than a maudlin display on the part of two deposed monarchs. A painful memento of the past, the soil connected the exiles to a homeland that no longer welcomed them. By carrying with them the most immediate and powerful embodiment of the nation—its land—Riza Shah and Muhammad Riza hoped to preserve a link to a people and a place that had shaped their experiences. Even if they no longer belonged on Iranian soil, they could still forge a connection to the homeland by saving its essence in a transportable box. Land—the nationalists’ lure—made the psychological link possible.

Like the two shahs, Iranian nationalists expressed a patriotism rooted in the land, or “*Iranzamin*,” as they celebrated the nation. Land carried solemn connotations in a world of empires. It symbolized the monarch’s might and verified illusions of grandeur and superiority. Qajar kings, hoping to emulate their forebears, strove to expand their sovereignty over neighboring territories. However, they confronted vigorous opposition from competing imperial powers that sought to restrict Iranian expansion. The conflicts with Russia, Great Britain, and the Ottoman Empire began the process of defining the frontiers of modern Iran. The sketching of exact boundaries forged a new image of the “Guarded Domains” (*mamalik-i mahrusah*), and therefore of what the Iranian territories comprised.

The narrative of Iranian nationalism unfurled as a tale of territorial desire and disenchantment in the nineteenth century. When the Qajars assumed the throne, Iran

enthusiasts regarded the new kings as heirs to previous emperors. They dreamed of reconquest and the genesis of a new Persian empire. Nostalgia for ancient glory brought language and geography to the forefront of the patriotic debate. Preoccupation with preserving the boundaries of Iran, and occasionally with expanding them, honed such yearnings. Even when Iran's territorial intrigues in the Caucasus as well as its claims to Bahrayn and Herat foundered, the pursuits nonetheless attuned Iranians to the necessity of learning about the territory that embodied their identity.

To improve conditions, Iranian intellectuals advocated the study of the sciences. New scientific knowledge and technology, they believed, would restore the "dormant" ingenuity that had once made Iran a great empire. If only Iran could halt the downward spiral by acquiring science (*ilm*) as it had in the past, the country would reclaim its glorious heritage. Qajar statesmen championed military reforms as well as sciences that better insured the security of the land and its inhabitants. For this reason fields such as geography, cartography, archeology, and astronomy, because of their connection to the land and the physical environment, gained popularity.

It therefore seems appropriate that the story of Iran's journey toward nationhood should commence with the first Russo-Persian war of 1804—an episode that resulted in the loss of territory for Iran. This defeat altered the geographic contours of the country and ignited the spirited discourse that advocated political reform and patriotism (*vatan parasti*). The contraction of frontiers forced a reconsideration of the country's political institutions. Intellectuals considered the reasons for the country's troubles and proposed revolutionary alternatives that transformed the nation's political panorama. Just as the geographic boundaries had proved precarious, so too did the country's economic frontiers. The influx of foreign goods provided competition for the indigenous market, forging a new political discourse that embraced economic self-sufficiency, liberty, and patriotism. Iran's frontier experience also manufactured the myth of unity. The constitution validated and propagated the Persian and Shi'i attributes of Iran at the expense of its other regional and religious characteristics. Whereas before these ideas had primarily circulated among intellectuals and members of the Qajar court, the revolution of 1906 accorded them legal status.

In 1910 the historian E. G. Browne had prophetically noted, "Dissension is, indeed, one of the greatest dangers which threatens Persia."² This imposed unity, rather than bringing harmony, fueled ethnic strife. Tensions became manifest in the public sphere as schools and other cultural agencies promoted Persianization. The Iranian homeland, though still formally the birthplace of Armenians, Kurds, and Baluchis, as well as Farsis and others, increasingly came to represent the *vatan* of Shi'i Persians through the persistent efforts of the state to extirpate competing cultures. Ethnic strains, like political ones, expressed themselves in territorial terms. As World War I unfolded, the rival nationalist ambitions of the Kurds, Khuzistanis, and Azerbaijanis exposed the fissures in this delicate national fresco. The frontiers of Iran, as well as its "territorial integrity," proved just as precarious then as they had a century earlier when the boundary delimitation efforts had first begun to sketch the nation's contour. Iran managed to cohere as a territorial unity by emphasizing the shared experiences of its diverse populace through a rereading of geography and history as well as the suppression of cultural difference.

The Great War contributed to the militarization of Iranian political culture. The separation

movements that erupted after the war reinforced the critical connection between political empowerment and territorial autonomy. To meet these frontier challenges, Iran's postwar patriotic discourse bridged territorial ruptures by forging a political environment that reinforced the traditional patriarchy as well as the military—the institution through which Riza Khan rose to power. Riza Khan's military successes in the crucial years before his coronation in 1926 won him nationalist support from various quarters. Iran held on to its fiction of territorial unity through the military-backed imposition of central authority during the turbulent years between 1921 and 1926. These victories also created the archetype of the military hero as the quintessential protector of national territory.

Religious discourse also shaped Iran's frontier narrative. Since the Russo-Persian wars, the 'ulama had sanctioned the jihad in defense of the lands of Islam. Jihad literature—prompted by Iran's specific historical circumstances and territorial troubles—also endorsed the protection of the Iranian homeland. Though jihad remained fundamentally a religious doctrine, its appropriation by Iranian patriots during the Great War led to the secularization of jihad in the national context. While defense of the frontiers brought about an alliance between religious and secular politicians, other conflicts, manifested in the struggle to write the Iranian constitution (and after 1925, the military conscription law), undermined that cooperation. Ideological frictions also threatened the nation's boundaries, and although the state appropriated Shi'ism as another unifying fiction, this trait did not factor strongly in the official nationalism of the early Pahlavi years.

Competing identities, from tribal to regional, posed challenges to the larger Iranian identity. To insure the territorial unity of the Iranian nation, the state attempted to bridge these differences through the homogenization of national culture. Schoolbooks inculcated the virtues of patriotism and patriarchy and drew a parallel between the family and the national community. As mothers and educators, women assumed an important function in managing the frontier family and, by extension, in forging a uniform and obedient national society committed to the ideologies disseminated by the state. These beliefs centered on achieving geographic unity through a shared understanding of history and mythology as well as through the dominance of the Persian language. Concerted efforts to rename provinces, villages, and cities attested to the significance of territorial nomenclature in forging frontier narratives and furthering nationalist objectives.

Despite these cultural projects, Iranian national unity proved spurious. The discontent of minority groups remained relatively latent until the abdication of Riza Shah in 1941. Its manifestation after the downfall of the king, however, illustrated the shortcomings of the nationalist agenda. Contradictions and rivalries again expressed themselves in territorial terms during World War II, and the ensuing Azerbaijan crisis manifested the persistence of territorial conflicts. Iranian nationalists, abetted in their efforts by diplomatic considerations, managed to secure the frontiers of the nation and keep its fictions alive. Although this study of Iranian nationalism ends in 1946—coinciding with the departure of Soviet troops from Azerbaijan—it does so with the knowledge that frontier disputes did not vanish suddenly with the assertion of central authority. The Musaddiq crisis of 1951–53 and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–98) attest to both the centrality of land and frontiers in Iranian nationalism and the regularity of frontier disturbances.³

Theoretical Considerations

Scholars have focused on politics or identified language, history, and religion as themes in Iranian self-definition. Territory, too, has been mentioned as a source of Iranian identity. The present study centers the debate on this particular cultural construct: land. Without it, Iranian intellectuals feared that the homeland and all its cultural offshoots would cease to exist. Protecting this sacred space (*Iran-i minu nishan*), in turn, spurred interest in geography and cartography. Theorists have expatiated on the salience of historiography and anthropology in “inventing” nations but have overlooked their equally relevant counterpart: geography. While some have argued that politics, religion, history, or language sparked the nationalist debate, I contend that the idea of frontiers and land, as presented in geographical works and maps as well as in historical and political treatises, provided the primary impetus for Iranian nationalist discourse.⁵ Iran’s major wars and conflicts under the Qajars concerned land, not history or language, despite the salient roles of these two factors in nationalist discourse. The Defense of the homeland (*vatan*) prompted its citizenry (*millat*) to seek reforms and to promote disciplines that taught Iranians about their country and the need to cultivate it.

In his engaging work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson advanced “in an anthropological spirit” a crafty expression that steered the political parleys on nations into a cultural sphere. “Imagined communities”—now almost a cliché in theoretical circles—suggested that a nation is imagined because its members “will never know most of their fellow-members.” The nation was perceived as “limited” because even the most expansive nations had boundaries touching other nations, and “sovereign” because this phenomenon appeared as dynasties began to fade. Finally, the nation was understood as a “community” because of the “deep, horizontal comradeship” embedded in it.⁶ Imagination—Anderson’s cultural corrective—offered a welcome epistemological framework for unraveling this historical curiosity, yet it created new pitfalls for scholars of nationalism.

By making nationhood primarily a creation of the modern mind, “imagined communities” undermined the long-standing tendency of societies to define territories that set themselves apart from others. This is not to suggest that “nations,” like other cultural constructs, were not in some way conceived or contrived. However, imagination alone did not account for their endurance or widespread acceptance. What made people imagine themselves a “deep, horizontal comradeship”? Surely, not just that they believed they ought to belong to something that would identify them with others. That “something,” I argue, is a palpable entity: land.

A necessary component of nation formation concerned the ability to see the physical. If a nation was “imagined” because its members did not know one another, or in other words could not see one another, then its members’ reliance on tangible visual elements in defining and constructing the nation lent a certain materiality to it. These perceptible objects included land, archeological reliefs, texts, and maps. People saw the objects that enabled them to create their national community. This visual experience also allowed them to imagine the invisible, such as expanded frontiers or new historical texts and maps, while offering an occasion to reinterpret past representations. A visibility and materiality then undergirded the imagined community, and this *duality*—the blending of the imagined and the material—helped to forge nations. Land, an object with material and invented properties, shaped the

polemics of patriotism.

Nations were thus conceived in recognizable ways because of geographic and historical precedents. Moreover, the differences they mapped out were real. The Turks, Chinese, and Armenians do not speak the same language, nor do they share the same climate or religion. Political communities, unlike religious ones, thrive on differences among human beings, not on similarities. As Anderson has asserted, “No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind.”⁷ Nations do not perceive themselves as such because they cannot. Nations, like dynasties or empires, cannot (and in many cases do not want to) accommodate everybody. Nations are “limited” not just because they have finite frontiers but also because land is finite and claimed by competing and varying societies.

Imperial rivalry helped to redefine borders in the nineteenth century. While Iran's boundaries, like those of Siam and other countries in Africa, Asia, and America, were to some extent “colonially determined,” they remained contested and often altered after the departure of the colonial powers. Placing the mapping and frontier enterprises in the context of colonial preoccupations, as Anderson does, subverts the agency of those countries involved in the spatial delineation. Colonial powers were often dependent upon indigenous texts and people to chart the terra incognita they crossed. Moreover, Thongchai Winichakul's notion that “a map was a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent” tells only half the story.⁸ Maps were also models of reality, however flawed or improvised, for otherwise such spatial classifications would have proved superfluous and effete. Reality provided some kind of fodder for the mapping imagination, which then manipulated such knowledge to forge new spatial interpretations. Anderson has correctly identified maps and the census as important developments in the national process. Yet such geographic tools were esteemed because of their very real connection to lands and frontiers, and, therefore, their use in claiming national territory. Ironically, Anderson ignores the rise of the academic discipline of geography as an expedient in irredentist drives for land. The nation's past could not be narrated without geographic references. Institutions of power—schools, the court, the military—encouraged the academic study of geography because of its nationalist application.

Nationalism demonstrates a modern effort to classify peoples and territories—or to borrow another oft-cited trope—to separate the “Other.” Nation-states, like other geographic bodies, used land to delineate cultural and political boundaries, sometimes acting against environmental dictates. This practice preceded the advent of nation-states; however, the convention, mingled with the transformations inaugurated by modernity, made way for nations. While premodern frontiers lacked the political connotations of today's borders, they nonetheless pointed to an impulse to assign territorial designations to different peoples and states. Identifying precedents, however, does not deny the uniqueness of nationalism. The historical circumstances that distinguished this particular form of territorial (as well as cultural and political) delineation in late-eighteenth-century Europe was not the same as those in other eras. After all, the notion of political citizenship had little backing before the French Revolution. Modernity, however, not only spread nationalist ideas through print culture, it also sanctified frontiers. Hitherto recognized, yet altering, frontiers acquired a veneer of permanence because of their increasingly political thrust. Lord Curzon, an expert on political borders who had organized five boundary commissions during his service, appreciated the frontier phenomenon. “Frontiers,” he declared, “are indeed the razor's edge

on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace, of life or death to nations. Just as the protection of the home is the most vital care of the private citizen, so the integrity of her borders is the condition of existence of the State.”⁹ The current conflicts in the Middle East, Bosnia, and the former Soviet Union have lent credence to this dictum.

An Alternative Framework

“Frontier fictions” pictures a volatile landscape of nationalism by emphasizing the dual force of cohesion and dissent implicit in frontier polemics. It considers the *fictions* that unify land as well as the *frictions* along the frontiers that threaten to cleave geographic entities. By tracing frontier fluctuations over time, it refutes the notion of rigid or stable boundaries. Instead, this framework necessarily regards frontiers as zones of *friction* and *fluctuation* because no country, empire, or nation has impenetrable borders, whether internal or external, cultural or geographic. The capacity for fluctuation always exists, and the possibility makes frontier settlements inherently “frictional” and “precarious.” In this schema, land emerges as the dominant cultural component distinguishing nations from social groupings such as tribes and families that are not necessarily signified by territories. It is worth noting, however, that in the Iranian context both tribes and families also partly expressed their existence in territorial terms. Theorists have tended to underrate the centrality of language in the national debate. Yet there has never been a war fought exclusively over language, literature, or history, despite their relevance to wartime propaganda. Even religious warfare is defined partly in territorial terms. This study directs nationalist debate to land as the visceral catalyst for such conflicts. The delimitation of boundaries and the shaping of national territory necessitated intellectual forays into the historical geography of the land. This schema thus regards the national process primarily, though not exclusively, as a geographic one, but a geographic operation with distinct cultural and political proclivities.

“Frontier fictions” chronicles the myths that imbue territories in irredentist drives for land. By tracking continuities and subtleties in territorial nomenclature, it unearths the lore that tinted the nationalist landscape. Territorial fictions adjusted to frontier shifts and frictions, and the land acquired distinct characteristics deriving from its unique political culture. “Frontier fictions” explores the myths that shaped frontier narratives while identifying the material and visual elements that sustained these territorial mythologies. In the Iranian context, this framework advances the scholarly discourse by tracing the land-based origins of Iranian nationalism in the nineteenth century and pursuing the theme in the following decades when the Iranian nation, once recognized, grew aware of its vulnerable borders as it confronted separatist movements from within. The process of shaping boundaries focused attention on territory as the source of Iranian, as opposed to Persian, identity. It promoted land and geography as compelling criteria for Iranianness and brought new political perspectives on the homeland.

This schema offers an alternative prism for observing the national process. By reviewing the history of modern Iran, it argues that land-based conceptions of countries such as Iran existed before the advent of modernity, and that nation-states, including Iran, were not only linked to their historical definitions but took shape through cultural reinterpretations of the land resulting from political conflicts and frontier fluctuations.¹⁰ Although this work observ

the frontier process primarily through the historical circumstances of Iran, it devotes some attention to parallel debates in Iran's neighboring countries. The methodological approach offered here then serves as a theoretical tool for the study not just of Iranian nationalism but others as well, including Turkish and Iraqi (Arab) nationalism.

Historiography

Historians have regarded nationalism as an important component in modern Iranian history, yet few monographs have actually addressed its development. Studies of the Constitutional period have generally focused on the political debate between the liberal secularists and the religious traditionalists. Hamid Algar's study of Qajar rule sets the stage for this controversy by emphasizing the stark separation between the monarchy and the 'ulama during the Qajar years and casting the 'ulama as the "natural leaders" of the Constitutional Revolution. Algar notes that this leadership was possible because the 'ulama, not the monarch, possessed legitimate temporal authority for the community in the absence of the Twelfth Imam. According to Algar, throughout the nineteenth century the 'ulama had asserted themselves as the champions of Islam and justice against the sometimes corrupt practices of the Qajar king. Citing 'ulama involvement in the Russo-Persian wars as well as the Tobacco Protest of 1891-92, Algar emphasizes the leadership of the religious class in fomenting popular uprising and forcing change upon the government. This experience, in turn, prepared the 'ulama for assuming the leadership of the community during the Constitutional Revolution when intellectuals, merchants, and the other classes turned to the 'ulama for guidance.¹¹ Recent scholarship has contested Algar's assertion, arguing instead that intellectuals and religious dissidents, rather than the high-ranking 'ulama, provided the ideological framework and impetus for the creation of an Iranian constitution.¹² Mangol Bayat's study of the Constitutional Revolution reinforces the idea that the 'ulama and the state were not mutually exclusive, but rather dependent, upon each other. Despite the 'ulama's visible participation in the Constitutional Revolution, Bayat notes that they "were in fact the least important agents of constitutional change in society."¹³

Iranian historiography on the Constitutional Revolution appears no less contentious than its Western counterpart. As Reza Afshari has noted the debate between the secularists and the traditionalists has also permeated the Iranian historiography of the Constitutional Revolution.¹⁴ Ahmad Kasravi's classic account, which draws heavily on the observations of fellow patriot Nazim al-Islam Kirmani, emphasizes the nationalist and liberal motifs of the constitutional struggle. Similarly, the works of Mahdi Malikzadah and Firdun Adamiy stress the liberal ideals of progressive reformers in the political movement, without fully probing the nationalist component.¹⁵ Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the role of the 'ulama in the Constitutional movement has gained prominence in recent Persian historiography.¹⁶ Western historiography, with its stress on the secularist tradition, responds partly to the works of those historians working within the confines of the Islamic Republic and who thus underscore the Islamic, rather than the secular nationalist, character of the Constitutional movement.

While the Constitutional Revolution has piqued scholarly curiosity, the years between World War I and the abdication of Riza Shah have received little scholarly attention, part

because of the censorship of the Pahlavi period. The meager existing historiography on Riza Shah's reign tends to depict the monarch either as a hero or a villain and Riza Khan's program of reforms as either beneficial or detrimental to the long-term interests of Iran.¹⁷ Political and diplomatic concerns as well as the trend toward modernization concern the majority of works, while Riza Shah's nationalism remains largely unexplored.

Studies of Iranian nationalism focus primarily on Musaddiq's struggle in the nationalization of Iranian oil, though a spate of recent articles has investigated the evolution of nationalism under the Qajars. Richard Cottam's *Nationalism in Iran* attempts to address this lacuna, although he, too, is more concerned with Musaddiq's travails. Cottam considers the effects of history and economics among the larger population while outlining the major divisive forces in Iran, from ethnicity to tribalism. He neglects, however, to provide an analytical framework for his narrative, sketching the contours of Iranian nationalism without offering substantive discussion of its evolution. This oversight results partly from Cottam's use of few primary documents in either Persian or English—a shortcoming that invites a historical approach to the subject.¹⁸

Mostafa Vaziri traces the philological and cultural roots of Iranian nationalism, relying on the textual interpretation of the work of Orientalists and Iranian historians influenced by Orientalist scholarship. Borrowing from Benedict Anderson, Vaziri asserts that the notion of Iranian nationhood has been an "imaginary" construct, conditioned by European Orientalism and adopted by Iranian historians and intellectuals seeking to glorify Iran's past.¹⁹ Just as discussions of racial theories had dominated European intellectual discourse in the nineteenth century, the Aryan myth became fashionable in twentieth-century Iran.²⁰ While the connection between Iranian intellectuals and Orientalists remains valuable in tracing the ideas of race in Iran, Vaziri does not sufficiently evaluate the internal reasons for the receptivity of these ideas in the political and cultural sphere. Nor does he address the foundations of racialist discourse in the Persian literary canon.

This survey of the relevant literature points to the absence of a systematic study of nationalism, particularly from the perspective of land and frontiers, during the Qajar and Pahlavi years. In 1962, when the revolutionary ideologue Jalal al-i Ahmad published his famous work, *Westoxication*, he noted that while Iranian intellectuals—or "homegrown Montesquieus" as he termed them—"had an instinctive feeling that our ancient society and tradition could not withstand the onslaught of Western technology ... [they] all went astray in opting for 'adoption of European civilization without Iranian adaptation.'"²¹ Only a thorough analysis of Iran's nationalist exploits will confirm the validity of this claim. No more than ever, as Iran grapples with its frontier dilemmas, these historical concerns warrant scholarly scrutiny.

Methodology

"Frontier fictions" explores historical questions within a diverse cultural milieu to challenge the monolithic notion of nationhood expounded by Iranian patriots. Because the evolution of Iranian nationalism impinged on political debates and developments, this narrative will address relevant political matters but will not confine itself to politics. Nationalism is a field of discourse in which complex power relations are played out. In Iran, this power play will

manifest in the national institutions molded by the government. These establishments—the army, schools, the language academy, and youth organizations—provided the means to create the “Nizam Jadid,” or the new order, to which the regime aspired. Homogeneity, or its representation, would be achieved through the control of political and social organizations as well as through cultural output. Even as the government attempted to establish uniformity, however, it encountered resistance. Any survey of the institutions of nationalism in Iran therefore must also include a strong analysis of the elements that deviated from the Nizam Jadid. For, as Foucault has noted, “[T]here is nothing more tentative ... than the process of establishing an order among things.”²² Finally, this frontier narrative is “emplotted” to privilege the cultural discourse on land and borders because of its centrality to the nationalist debate.²³

While this study traces the voices of dissent in Iranian nationalism, it is nevertheless an analysis of “Iranians”: that is, what made the Shirazis, Tehranis, Bakhtiyaris, and others think of themselves as Iranians, why they adopted this identity, and what they did to promote it. By doing so, it does not deny the existence of other loyalties. As Linda Colley has noted in her study of British nationalism, “Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time.”²⁴ This was certainly true in Iran, but a common Iranian identity—whether civic or cultural—also came about. This study will attempt to understand how this identity was forged, and later modified and promoted, through a self-conscious program of nation building.

Nationalism, a complex and wide-ranging phenomenon, requires a multifaceted approach for its study. The social structures and political events that spawned this ideology in Iran cannot be examined in isolation from one another. Only an analysis revealing the interaction can shed light on the nature and range of change caused by nationalism in modern Iranian society. Substantial archival work, journals, newspapers, travelogues, and personal memoirs have informed this study. Official documents, despite their obvious biases, will prove useful in analyzing pertinent political and social issues. Although the “new history” has brought historians no closer to agreement on the objectives of their discipline, recent debates have nonetheless underscored the importance of writing history from a multiplicity of perspectives: from above as well as from below and about everyday lives as well as about momentous events—an approach adopted in this study.²⁵

The frontiers of Iran remained in flux for many years after the Azerbaijan crisis—a point poignantly illustrated in the eight-year frontier warfare between Iran and Iraq. Despite territorial uncertainties, the burgeoning debates about land, frontiers, and geography, which had flourished under the Qajars and continued under the Pahlavis, initiated the process of nation formation in the modern period. Iran, like other nation-states, came into existence as a result of frontier f(r)ictions and fluctuations. This development went in tandem with cultural reinterpretations of the land. While recent debates have featured politics or cultural expedients like race and language in nationalism, this study focuses on another source: land. By doing so, it does not deny the role of other cultural constructs in nationalist discourse, yet it considers land—construed in its material, cultural, and political contexts—the primary agent of change. Nation-states took shape through a realignment of territorial frontiers. Diminished and politicized, this modern space has become the mainstay of nations.

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