This thesis examines the Iranian state’s policies towards its ethnic minority regions. The thesis attempts to explain how categories of ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity’ are constructed as ‘mellat’ and ‘qowm’ through dominant political discourses. Afterwards, the thesis demonstrates how such categories have influenced state’s policies of economic development. The thesis argues that the state has long avoided developing ethnic minority regions, due to perceiving such regions as “unsafe”. Over decades, aversion in developing ethnic minority peripheral provinces, and prioritizing Persian-Shiite majority central parts of the country, has created an internal core-periphery pattern of economic (under)development. Finally, the thesis speculates, this pattern of economic development has influenced interprovincial migration patterns, in a way that populations migrate from underdeveloped ethnic minority periphery to developed Persian-Shiite majority core. Such migration patterns could pave the way for population mixing, and possibly cultural assimilation.
MELLAT AND QOWM
A POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF ‘NATION’ AND ‘ETHNICITY’ IN IRAN

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
In partial fulfillment of
The requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Geography
by
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Oxford, Ohio
2014

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Acknowledgements

As an international graduate student, from a different country, I have learned so much within the past two years. This amount of learning would have never been possible without the people surrounding me. So, this acknowledgment is a short, insignificant, and somewhat too generalized appreciation for those have helped me. Most important of all, and before everyone else, I would like to express my warmest gratitude and appreciations to my advisor, Dr. Carl T. Dahlman. Dr. Dahlman’s thoughtful, knowledgeable, and patient comments and guidance have been crucial in conducting this thesis. Beyond writing this thesis, and even beyond academic life, I am also deeply indebted to his kind advice and crucial assistance. I appreciate all those days that he had me in his office to discuss my thesis progress. Those discussions helped me tremendously to find the right path in the times that I felt overwhelmed by abundance or lack of data and material. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Stanley Toops and Dr. Neringa Klumbyte. Thank you for your insightful comments, and for looking at my thesis from angles that otherwise would have remained unknown. And thanks for the greater Miami Geography for such a friendly academic environment. Thank you Debbi White for ‘always having a solution’ for our many different questions/problems.

Thank you my friends in the geography grad office. Thanks for making the office such a warm, friendly and desirable place. Special thanks for teaching me so much of English language and American culture. Thank you for laughing with me, and being proud of me on the days of success, and also for supporting me on the days of hardship. Thanks for making me feel at home. And, thanks for my friends back home. Thanks for staying in touch, and remaining friends despite the physical distance.

Finally, and dearest of all, my kindest appreciations and kisses for my beloved family, whom their support dates back to far before my trip to the Unites States; to the day that I was born. Thanks for supporting me to be such a boy to cross the borders and continents in pursuit of my dreams.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis studies a political geography of nation and ethnicity in Iran by analyzing contemporary state policies that shape spatial identities. Throughout its history, Iran has been a multi-ethnic territorial unit. Different tribal-ethnic groups have seized political power, in a way that usually a change in the dominant dynasty has resulted in a geographic shift in the ethnic base of that dynasty. However, the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1907) and the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925) permanently changed how the state would relate to the many ethn-national identities in the country. These changes first transformed the historic Persian Empire into a modern state, introducing the idea of nationhood to the elite and in the longer term to the public. In fact, it was during the Constitutional Revolution that the term ‘nation of Iran’ was first heard on the streets of Tehran (Abrahamian, 1982: 81-82). The advent of the Pahlavi dynasty consolidated the Persian inhabited regions of central Iran as the center of political power through establishing prominent economic, communication, cultural, legislative and administrative infrastructures and institutions. These areas became the basis for the legitimacy of the newly established modern state of Iran. Driven from the idea of one nation, one culture, Iranian nationalism was, in essence, based on the cultural traits of Persian ethnicity, namely Persian language and Shiite religion.

In this understanding of ‘Iranian nationhood,’ the Persian-Shiite core was embodying and representing “the nation,” while, non-Persian primarily non-Shiite, periphery was symbolizing “the ethnicity,” and was subsequently excluded and alienated. Geographically, establishing Iranian nationhood on Persian-Shiite characteristics created a core-periphery layout of Iran’s population. Such a core-periphery duality of nation and ethnicity, in which the state champions the Persian-Shiite core, has marginalized non-Persian, non-Shiite ethnic areas as alien, not fully committed to the Iranian nation, and even potentially threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Simultaneously, the lack of appreciation and recognition of ethnic minority cultural rights alienated ethnic minorities from the state, further distancing them from the Persian-Shiite core.

This thesis shows how successive governments during the Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic have shaped conditions in Iran’s ethnic minority regions. For the first part, this thesis questions the very categories of “mellat” and “gown.” This thesis, stresses that such categories represent no ‘inherent’ or ‘essential’ authenticity, rather they reflect the will of dominant Persian-Shiite discourse. These categories are, instead, what Brubaker (1996) calls “situated social constructs” and “political projects” (Brubaker, 1996: 13, Brubaker, 2004: 11, Elling, 2013: 6). The Persian-Shiite-centered Iranian state has further marginalized minority regions in its economic policies by denying them equal development opportunities compared to Persian-Shiite dominated central provinces. In cultural domain, instead of pluralism, the Iranian state has

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1 Persian is the name of an ethnicity and accordingly a language in Iran, which forms an unofficial majority in the country. More colloquially, however, with increasing usage in the media, journalistic columns, as well as academic works, Fars as the ethnicity, and Farsi as the language is also synonym with Persian. While ‘Persian’ is more familiar for English-speaking academic communities, nevertheless, inside Iran the Persians are called Fars and their language is called Farsi by themselves, and almost all others.

1
attempted to assimilate ethnic minority populations through various economic, demographic, and cultural policies most notable by putting a *de facto* ban on non-Persian minority languages in educational and administrative systems.

This thesis addresses one main question that is further explained by three sub-questions as follows:

- How have Iran’s ‘ethnic policies’ shaped conditions in its ethnic minority regions?
  a. How categories of *mellat* and *qowm* have been constructed in Iranian formal and popular discourses?
  b. How state’s economic policies generally follow the geography of *mellat* and *qowm*?
  c. How patterns of core-periphery development have fuelled interprovincial migration and cultural assimilation that de-concentrates Iran’s ethnic peripheries?

To answer these questions the thesis argues that construction of *mellat* and *qowm* categories in Iranian formal and popular discourses, has not only shaped notions of ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity,’ but also has influenced economic and demographic policies of the state regarding the country’s minority regions. This influence is best represented in what is well-known in Iran as the “security view.” The security view implies that security is the state’s primary concern in ethnic minority regions (Elling, 2013: 147). Economically, the security view has made the state reluctant in investment and developing minority regions. This has resulted in perpetual underdevelopment of these regions, and widespread disparity compared to Persian dominated core region. Demographically, underdevelopment has inflicted out-migration from ethnic minority periphery to more developed cities of the core. Such migration flows function as dynamics of population mingling and potentially demographic change.

1.2 Summary of Chapters

Chapter 2 attempts to provide some introductory background information about Iran. This chapter seeks to demonstrate the importance of the country’s history, physical terrain and demography as they relate to the main arguments of this thesis. Chapter 3 sheds some light on the literature regarding nation, ethnicity, minority, economic development and internal migration, and the state as the main political agent of the modern world. The chapter discusses these concepts, their various and somewhat contradictory definitions, and their diverse relations to each other. Chapter 4 explains the validity of multi-method research and its relevance to the questions of this thesis. The chapter depicts that qualitative method of critical discourse analysis is an appropriate method to answer the first question, while second and third questions have been answered using quantitative method of descriptive statistics. Chapter 5 illustrates *mellat* and *qowm* as political discourses of ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity.’ This chapter argues *mellat* and *qowm* which are translated as ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity,’ have no natural or neutral meanings, rather they are constructs of the dominant political discourse. By demonstrating evidences from the constitution, Iranian nationalist intellectual literature and the media, the chapter contends that *mellat* and *qowm* are political constructs. Such a political discourse assigns citizens to first and second class status based on their language and religion. Chapter 6 depicts the overlap between Iran’s ethnic distribution and its provincial economic development disparities. The chapter contends that deeming the ethnic minority periphery provinces as “unsafe,” the state has been
unwilling to invest in those provinces. Subsequently, the pattern of economic development in Iran is a core-periphery pattern in which Persian-Shiite dominated provinces of the core are more developed, while ethnic minority provinces of the periphery are generally underdeveloped. Chapter 7 underscores the dominant Persian-centric discourse’s emphasis on Persian language and Shiite religion as the main components of nationhood in Iran, and its exclusionary consequences for the country’s ethnic minorities. This chapter, further speculates that interprovincial migration, in part, instigated by unequal economic development might pave the way for population mix and cultural assimilation of ethnic minorities into the Persian-Shiite majority.
Chapter 2: Study Area

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides some introductory background to Iran. Iran’s vast territory encompasses various physical landscapes, as well as diverse human communities. Providing the reader with some introductory knowledge about Iran’s history and geography would help to understand other chapters and discussions of this thesis, reducing the need to refer to other sources. In accordance with other parts of this thesis, the emphasis would be on events happened after the start of the twentieth century. However, some major political developments have also been covered that have occurred before that period. The reason is due to the significance and enduring effects of such developments.

2.2 From Empire to State; a Brief History of Iran

Throughout history, the vast land that lies between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, with frontiers that sometimes reached the Mediterranean and the Indus River, has been ruled by a series of rivaling dynasties. This section provides a short synopsis of the history of Iran to help frame our analysis of ethnicity and nation in the country. We begin with the Safavid dynasty, which many scholars consider the beginning of the history of modern Iran (Newman, 2008: 2). It was also during this time that Shiite Islam was adopted as the official religion of the empire, a decision that had grave consequences long after the Safavid rule.

2.2.1 Safavid

Numerous (geo)political, social and economic events, made the reign of the Safavid Empire a special era in the history of Iran. The declaration of Ithna-Asharia Shiite as the official religion of the empire, proved to be of significant domestic, as well as foreign consequences. In foreign domain, promoting Shiite Islam as the official religion of the empire put an ideological barrier against the Sunni Ottoman Empire’s growing power and influence. In domestic domain it marked the beginning of a gap between Iran’s Shiite majority and Sunni minority (Abisaab, 2004: 2, Savory, 2007: 29, Elling, 2013: 30). Many scholars, however, believe that prior to the rise of the Safavids, and even during the early years of Safavids, the majority of the Iranian population –ironically, including Safavid’s ancestor Safi al-Din (1334) as well- were adherents of the mainstream Sunni Islam (Abisaab, 2004: 8, Newman, 2008: 2).

The Safavid’s downfall by Afghan forces in 1722 was the beginning of an era in the history of Iran that lasted less than a century in which short-term consecutive dynasties of Hotaki, Afshar and Zand, among innumerable others, ruled small or large chunks of land. These dynasties were usually not capable of stretching their power all over the Safavid territories. As a result, this period in the history of Iran (1722-96) is defined by lack of a superior central power, and instead, regional authorities (Abrahamian, 1974: 18).

2.2.2 Qajar

A loose tribal alliance headed by Agha-Mohammad Khan with the Qajar tribe as its backbone, emerged as the triumphant force among multiple small dynasties (Abrahamian, 1974: 18). The Qajar dynasty (1796-1925) comparable with the Safavid in terms of the level of bureaucratic complexity, territory and duration, had witnessed critical events with enduring effects in Iran’s history including:
- Decentralized power with semi-autonomous regional territorial units inside the empire
- Constant rivalry with the Ottoman Empire along the western frontiers
- Challenging and ill-fated military, political and diplomatic encounters with the powerful northern neighbor, the Tsarist Russian Empire
- Unequal, mismanaged and problematic relations with European powers
- Initial signs of urban, intellectual and cultural development, and direct and indirect relations with the West
- Finally, and the most significantly, the Constitutional Revolution, the establishment of parliament and organized attempts to limit the absolute power of the monarch

During the Qajars, numerous *Iyalats* and *Welayats* were enjoying certain levels of autonomy. This decentralized political system seemed almost congruent with ethnic composition of the country. However, despotism and lack of legal/constitutional arrangements, unclear administrative divisions, and lack of bureaucratic infrastructures, did not allow proper administrative divisions (Abrahamian, 1974). The vast Qajar territories were constituted of highly diverse populations, poorly related to each other. In fact, for Georgians, Armenians and Azeris residing in the Caucasus Mountains, it was not conceivable that they were fellow countrymen with Baluchis and Arabs in the southern most parts of the Qajar territories. By 1905, a combination of local rulers’ desire for more autonomy from Tehran, along with Qajar’s constant rivalry with Ottoman, Russian, and British empires, also further transformed the territorial shape of Iran to its current form (Map 1) (Kashani-Sabet, 1998: 413-414).

2.2.3 Pahlavi

Mainly relying on his well-trained Cossak Brigade as his political base, Reza Khan emerged as an influential player in the political stage of Iran (Banani, 1974: 36). The positions of Commander-in-Chief, Ministry of War, and Prime Minister were initial steps that eventually led him to replace Ahmad Shah the last of Qajar shahs, as the shah of Persia in 1925 (Banani, 1974: 40-43). Reza Shah’s reign was not only a change in the ruling dynasty of the country, but also proved to be of great political, economic, and cultural changes that transformed the country with lasting permanent effects.

Fuelled by oil revenues, Reza Shah’s main occupation in political domain was to establish a strong centralized state. Economic development ambitions in the form of centralized industrialization, led to relative development of central provinces, while left the peripheral parts of the country impoverished. Such policies initiated massive durable regional disparities (Bharier, 1971: 181-182, Abrahamian, 1982: 449, Pesaran, 1985: 30, Amirahmadi, 1989: 93).

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2With differences in area, degree of administrative, political importance, Iyalat and Welayat were simply defined, often with indistinguishable borders and arbitrary divisions of the Qajar territory almost equivalent to today’s provinces.
Through numerous military, educational, bureaucratic, and media instruments, Pahlavi administrations backed by the Persian nationalist elites, pursued cultural homogenization. Envisioning Iran based on the idea of one nation, one culture, one language, they started a long push for cultural assimilation. Imposing Persian in schools and monopolizing the media, were attempts to undermine ethnic identities and fabricate a homogenous Persian nation-state (McDowall, 2004: 222-223, Tohidi, 2009: 307). The most flagrant disregard of regional identities from central government happened when a decision turned into a law to rename the provinces with numbers. The clear intention of such plan was to wipe off province names that referred to historical identities of ethnic minorities. Such projects, however, proved to be far from successful, and even today, the Iranian society is highly fragmented along ethno-national and religious fault-lines. While Pahlavi modernization policies changed the inefficient Qajar Empire into a modern state, nevertheless, they inflicted severe constant oppositions from various social groups.

2.2.4 The Islamic Republic

Culmination of discontent with political, economic, and cultural policies of the Pahlavi shahs, eventually, led to its downfall by a massive revolution in 1979. Although heterogeneous
in outset, however, the revolution was uniform in outcome. In fact, the revolution of 1979 was the fierce battle of disadvantaged against privileged, periphery against core, and diversity against uniformity. Ethnic minorities played a significant role in the 1979 revolution. They were motivated by not only the prospect of a better economic life, and establishing a democratic political system, but also by the desire to preserve their cultural identities (Afshar, 1985: 71, Afshar, 1985b: 220, Fazel, 1985: 92, Hooglund, and Royce, 1985: 102-103, Sharbatoghlie, 1991: 73, Bayat, 1997b: 53, Ehsani, 2009: 56). Such attempts, however, proved futile after the Islamic Republic Party monopolized the power, and started eliminating secular, liberal, and minority leaders from the formal political power structure. Mass arrests, and executions began, and Khomeini unilaterally declared massive ‘holy war’ against ethnic minorities’ demands for autonomy (Pesaran, 1985: 37, Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1990: 365, Amuzegar, 1997: 36, Moghadam, 2002: 1137, Alamdari, 2005: 1286, Halliday, 2006: 17, Haeri, 2009: 129).

More than three decades after the revolution, while the Islamic Republic acknowledges ethnic minorities’ existence as cultural realities, yet it is reluctant in granting their cultural rights, let alone regional autonomy (Tohidi, 2009: 301). For instance, the article 15 of the constitution ‘allows’ using ‘local languages’ along with Persian in education, as well as mass media in minority regions. In practice, however, this, and similar articles of the constitution pose no implementation obligations over the state (Elling, 2013: 52). From economic perspective also, core-periphery regional disparity yet exists and has even deepened. A core-periphery pattern in which, provinces primarily home to ethnic minorities are disadvantaged the most (Gheissari and Sanandaji, 2009: 290, Tohidi, 2009: 316).

2.3 Physical Terrain

Iran is home to several ethnic groups that have historically lived in relatively separate and distinct regions (Aghajanian, 1983: 211, Gheissari and Sanandaji, 2009: 290). Many scholars trace ethnic composition of Iran to even long before the advent of Islam in 600s (Tohidi, 2009: 299). Major topographic features of Iran the Alborz and the Zagros mountain ranges have divided the territory of Iran west to east and northwest to southeast respectively. Historically, northern slopes of the Alborz and western and southwestern slopes of the Zagros have been home to numerous ethnic groups and have separated them from central plains and basins that have mainly been dominated by Persian communities. The southeastern part of the country which is the home of the Baluchis has also been further separated from the rest of the country by vast deserts of Kavir and Lut (Map 2).

The topography of the country has reinforced the geographic distinction of ethnic groups in Iran, and has hindered the central authorities’ accessibility and influence as well (Banani, 1961: 155, Abrahamian, 1974: 14-28). Iran’s complex topography is also coupled with unequal shares of power and economic development between center and periphery of the country. Accumulation of political power in the center, which is under demographic dominance of the Persian population, has led to imbalance in economic development and infrastructure in favor of the central regions. This unequal economic development has resulted in a divide between the Persian populations in the center, versus other ethnic groups in periphery, and has prevented a harmonious spread of sense of nationhood in Iran (Abrahamian, 1982: 249). As a result, ethnic minorities generally feel marginalized and stigmatized as second-class citizens.
2.4 Ethnic Minorities of Iran; an Overview

Iran is a multi-ethnic country, with Persian ethnic group having a slender majority. Numerous scholars, activists and politicians provide different numbers for Iran’s different ethnic groups. Nevertheless, a thorough account of ethnic composition of the population of Iran has never existed and most numbers and percentages in this regard are based on estimates. The first of such estimates seems to belong to Lord Curzon the British statesman and viceroy to British India in 1913.

Due to the lack of reliable data on the exact number of different ethnic groups, scholars and institutions engaged in Iranian studies have made several, somewhat different and even contradictory, estimations. For instance, some of these studies suggest that more than 60 percent of the Iranian population speak Persian as their first language. Other studies, however, contend that this number is roughly 50 percent. Back in 1978, Halliday describes the Persians as one of several linguistic minorities (though the largest one) in Iran constituting roughly 50 percent of the country’s population (Halliday, 1978: 12). According to Tohidi (2009) estimated percentages for various ethnic groups of the country are as follows: Persian 51, Azeri 24, Gilaki and
Mazandarani 8, Kurd 7, Arab 3, Lur 2, Baluch 2, Turkmen 2, and other groups including Armenian, Jew, Assyrian, Qashqai, Shahsavan and others 1 (Tohidi, 2009: 300).

Given this short introduction and considering the limited scope of this thesis, four ethnic groups of Azeri, Kurd, Arab and Baluch limited to four respective provinces of East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchistan have been chosen. Multiple reasons have affected this choice including:

- Forming the highest percentages of population of ethnic minority groups in Iran
- Inhabiting more or less constantly in sizeable pieces of land for a considerable amount of time
- Regionalism and effective ethnic political mobilization throughout modern history.

In what follows, these three main contributing factors have been explained for each ethnic minority group. Besides, and prior to that, an introduction has also been provided for each ethnic group that would (ideally) help the reader to understand their political dynamism within the
country. Moreover, special attention has been paid to ethnic minorities’ regionalism, its roots, elements and different spectrums. There are two major sets of factors that bolster regionalism. The first group is a combination of cultural, historical and political similarity that provides the region with a relative perceived homogeneity. The second set of factors, primarily relies on unevenness in economic development between one region and surrounding regions (Dahlman, 2009: 215). Whether encouraged by cultural and historical or economic factors, regionalism can generate a challenge to the ‘formal identity discourse’ put forward by the state (Paasi, 2003: 477). Each of the four provinces of East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchistan, encompass different cultural components, and vary greatly in their economic development. However, when compared to Persian-Shiite central provinces of the country, they are distinguished both in terms of cultural factors as well as the levels of economic development.

Cultural differences and unique historical experiences, along with generally lower levels of economic development has generated and, fuelled a sense of regionalism form the side of Iran’s ethnic minorities. Such regionalism has informed the members of ethnic minorities of Iran’s peripheries of their status of ‘lower class citizenship.’ Ethnic minorities often blame the Persian-based administrations in Tehran for their misfortunes. The levels of misfortunes, as well as the blames derived from them, however, never project an even topography (Elling, 2013: 44). In other words, these provinces as regions of analysis in this thesis, never present a holistic homogeneity. Instead, there are considerable degrees of cultural differences and levels of economic development. Such intra-regional differences, accordingly, influence ethnic minorities’ regionalism. The diversity in the levels of regionalist sentiments are so prevalent that could decay the basis of any categorizations, and subsequently endanger the soundness on any analysis, unless a level of generalization is negotiated.

2.4.1 Azeri

Azeris are a linguistic-cultural group in northwestern Iran and form the largest ethnic minority of the country, and the second largest ethnic group after the Persians. In its first meaning ‘Azeri’ refers to inhabitants of a region called Azerbaijan. Linguistically, Azeris speak a dialect of Oghuz or Western Turkic of Altaic family. Due to this linguistic affiliation they are often called Turk by themselves, as well as other Iranians. Linguistic and cultural characteristics, while making a distinction between them and other Iranians also generates a relatively strong bond with the Republic of Azerbaijan and a looser connection with Turkey and republics of Central Asia. Religiously an overwhelming majority of Azeri population in Iran adhere to Ihnna-Ashari Shiite, which creates a connection with the majority of the Iranian population (Elling, 2013: 28).

Like other ethnic groups in Iran, there is no agreement over the exact number of Azeris living inside the international borders of Iran. The lack of reliable data, has led to extreme and contradictory claims by Azeri, as well as Persian-Iranian nationalists. Such claims, generally, vary between 9 and 30, and even up to 50 percent of the population. More reliable estimations, however, give numbers usually ranging between 16-24 percent, which comprises 12-18 million of the country’s roughly 75 million population (Elling, 2013: 28).

3 ‘Tork,’ the way it is pronounced in Iran

4 Tajikistan with its Tajik Persian-speaking majority is an exception.
In terms of geographic distribution and territory, Azeris comprise almost the entire East Azerbaijan, Ardebil, and Zanjan provinces along with considerable portions of West Azerbaijan, Qazvin and Hamadan provinces. Moreover, significant percentages of Azeris live as diaspora in large, mainly industrial or Shiite holly cities including Tehran, Arak, Karaj, Mashhad and Qom. Considering the fact that East Azerbaijan has always been the top migrant sender in the country since the first census of 1956 (Javan, 2001: 331, Statistical Center of Iran), some Azeri diaspora have lived in those cities for generations (Bayat, 1997a: 30). Due to disconnection from Azerbaijan, and the absence of functioning Azeri cultural institutions, sizeable portions of Azeri diaspora in Tehran and other cities have lost their Azeri linguistic characteristics in favor of Persian\textsuperscript{5}. Amid social stigma about being a tork\textsuperscript{6} in Iranian society, however, a considerable part of Azeri diaspora still identify themselves as Azeri or in Iranian context as “torks” (Elling, 2013: 29, 64-65).

Like many other ethnic minority regions, Azerbaijan in Iran has also witnessed regionalist political expressions. Again, similar to its counterparts within and outside Iran, Azeri regionalism in Iran, has been a reaction to (perceived) monopolization of political power by the dominant ethnic group, Persians (Dahlman, 2009: 210-211). In general, Azeri regionalism in Iran could be categorized into four specific trends. The first, and perhaps the most radical trend, sees the entire populations of minor Asia, Iran and central Asia that speak one of very diverse dialects of Turkic languages as a nation (Elling, 2013: 64). The second trend in Azeri regionalism in Iran is Baku-oriented. This group of Azeri nationalists are devoted to a more geographically limited, however, culturally cohesive, definition of nation compared with the first group. This perspective of Azeri nationalism draws an entirely ethnic-based image of nation. They address Azerbaijan of Iran as “South Azerbaijan” which is of clear implication to the Republic of Azerbaijan as the “North” (Shaffer, 2002: 1, Elling, 2013: 29, 64). This stance was consolidated after the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan in October 1991 (Shaffer, 2002: 2).

The third trend of Azeri regionalism is autonomist. While political demands of this regional nationalism may vary from broad federalism to limited autonomy, this group aims at gaining a degree of regional autonomy from the central government in Tehran. This group of Azeri nationalists point to political movements such as those of Sheikh Mohammad Khiyabani and Abolqasem Lahuti in early twentieth century as well as Azerbaijan’s Provincial Government 1945-46 in Tabriz, as historical examples of Azeri regionalist movements aiming at gaining cultural-linguistic rights and a level of regional self-rule (Elling, 2013: 30-31).

The last trend seems to reduce Azeri ethno-national traits to mere cultural differences. This group does not make any identity-based regional political claim. In its political background mainly refers to a long history of shared authority with the Persian center, primarily through

\textsuperscript{5} In this sense, “Iranian” vaguely implies “Persian.” For instance it is not uncommon to encounter second and third generations of Azeri diaspora saying “my (grand)parents are (were) torks”

\textsuperscript{6} There are a wide range of social stigma from humorous jokes to humiliating and abusive labels and expressions that target torks. There is no consensus about when and how conscious such a stigma started and developed. Its social implication, however, is to belittle torks and making it hard for individuals to admit their tork-Azeri identity in public sphere.
Azeri dynasties and individuals who have ruled the country. In its religious or secular form, this trend spiritually and intellectually is supported by higher class Azeris residing in large Iranian cities primarily out of Azerbaijan (Abrahamian, 1982: 125, Elling, 2013: 31). However, a large number of center-oriented Azeri sentiments could also be found in Azerbaijan, especially in Tabriz. This, obviously, is in stark contrast with the more dominant perception of Tabriz as the headquarters of Azeri ethnic regionalism in Iran.

Ethno-nationalist orientation and the level of regionalism among Iranian Azeris represent a much more diverse spectrum than what just mentioned above. However, any analysis of the Azeri political situation in Iran, would require heeding through attention to some facts. Demographically, Azeris are the largest ethnic minority group in Iran. This, would give them a considerable weight in different aspects of life within the country. Moreover, as mentioned above, there are Azeri populations outside of Azerbaijan in major Iranian cities such as Tehran and Mashhad. This would not only give Azeri populations a considerable potential for political mobilization, but also creates a strong connection between Azerbaijan and the political center of Iran. Besides, Azeris are in relatively better socio-economic position compared to other ethnic minorities in Iran (Elling, 2013: 30). Unlike Kurds and Baluchis who are Sunnis and hence, different in both language and religion from the Persian majority, Azeris in Iran are predominantly Shiites, and share the same religion as the Persians. The ‘Shiite factor,’ not only makes Azeris similar to the Majority of Persians, but also puts them in a position of power within the administrative structure of the Islamic Republic. In fact, since the 1979 revolution the Azeris have participated in different levels of political structure of the Islamic Republic.

In recent decades, it seems that Azeri ethno-nationalism has generally found expression in social and cultural forms. Such expressions have emphasized the Azeri ethnic-national identity around topics such as language, environment and sport events. For instance, as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with not being allowed to study in mother tongue, Azeris have refrained from sending their children to schools in the first day of school year. The tremendous public support expressed for Teraktorsazi football team in Tabriz is well beyond simple chanting of fans for their team, rather it is more a way of voicing ethnically framed identity through sports. A final example could be the environmental crisis over Lake Orumiyeh. In several occasions street rallies initially inspired by environmental reasons have easily and quickly transformed into expressing ethno-national collective identity (Elling, 2013: 194).

2.4.2 Kurd

Often referred to as ‘the largest stateless nation,’ Kurds form minorities in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Due to these countries’ reluctance to conduct censuses that would show precise numbers of their Kurdish populations and, massive fluxes of forced, as well as voluntary migration of the Kurds and their subsequent settlement out of Kurdistan, no reliable data is available. As the result of years of migration and expulsion of the Kurds in the twentieth century, cities such as Tehran, Damascus, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir are home to considerable Kurdish populations (McDowall, 2004: 8). Sometimes the Kurdish populations of these cities are far larger than many medium-sized and even large cities in Kurdistan. A striking example is Istanbul which many scholars agree that is the largest Kurdish city in the world. Author’s observations in Istanbul also support the argument in which almost half of the city’s residents that he

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7 Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran (among several others) is an ethnic Azeri as well (Elling, 2013: 31).

8 As the result of years of migration and expulsion of the Kurds in the twentieth century, cities such as Tehran, Damascus, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir are home to considerable Kurdish populations (McDowall, 2004: 8). Sometimes the Kurdish populations of these cities are far larger than many medium-sized and even large cities in Kurdistan. A striking example is Istanbul which many scholars agree that is the largest Kurdish city in the world. Author’s observations in Istanbul also support the argument in which almost half of the city’s residents that he
available expressing the population of the Kurds. Close to correct estimates, however, consider the Kurdish population between 23 to 36 million. Around 5 to 11 million of this population lives inside the borders of Iran, which constitutes 7 to 15 percent of the country’s population (McDowall, 2004: 3, Tohidi, 2009: 301, Elling, 2013: 32).

Kurds in Iran form almost the entire population of Kurdistan and Kermanshah provinces along with a strong majority in Ilam province and also around half of West Azerbaijan province. Outside Kurdish heartland in western and northwestern Iran, considerable Kurdish populations also live in North Khurasan and to a lesser degree Razavi Khurasan provinces (McDowall, 2004: 5, Elling, 2013: 32). Khurasi Kurds were expelled to northeastern Iran during Safavid reign (van Bruinessen, 2002, Yildiz and Taysi, 2007: 4). Over generations, although many Khurasani Kurds have converted to Shiite Islam and speak Persian, they still have preserved their sense of Kurdishness, identify themselves as “Kurds,” and call their region ‘Kurdistan’ (Madih, 2007: 11-12).

During the reign of the Qajars, Kurdish Iyalats like other Iyalats and Welayats of the empire were in an unofficial semi-autonomous condition. After the advent of the Pahlavis and establishment of the centralized modern state, however, the quasi autonomous status of Kurdish Iyalats was demolished (Elling, 2013: 35). This new level of administrative centralization along with other measures taken by Pahlavis, such as contempt for local tribal/ethnic traditions provoked serious discontent and major rebellions in Kurdistan (McDowall, 2004: 222-223). The revolt of Simko after World War I and the establishment of the autonomous Mahabad Republic, right after World War II were two major incidents through which the Kurds expressed their dissatisfaction with the central government in Iran, as well as their desire for self-rule and self-determination. The suppression of these uprisings by the central government, showed the central authorities’ opposition to recognize any form of regional autonomy based on ethno-national identities. Although the Kurds were militarily defeated, the declaration of the Kurdistan Republic was an example of the Kurds’ political-administrative as well as cultural requests which had long been ignored by the central government. Kurds made use of that opportunity to show their political, administrative and cultural mobilization capacities such as: holding local elections, governing affairs of (parts of) of Kurdistan by themselves, and applying Kurdish in regional education and administration (McDowall, 2004: 245, Elling, 2013: 35).

Another major resurgent of Kurdish demands was ignited with the advent of the anti-Shah protests which eventually led to the 1979 revolution. Along with the rest of Iran, Kurds were pursuing democracy, economic improvement, ending corruption and despotism, as well as extending individual and communal freedoms through the downfall of the Pahlavi monarchy (Yildiz and Taysi, 2007: 22). Gaining ethno-national rights through devolution of power and regional autonomy for Kurdistan was also inseparable part of Kurdish participation in the 1979 revolution. At the beginning, the 1979 revolution promised political opening, pluralism and more inclusive political atmosphere (Natali, 2005: 141-142). However, as time passed and the Islamists tightened their grip on power, the Islamic Republic proved increasingly intolerant towards ethno-national demands for autonomy, and Khomeini ruled out the agreement promising the Kurds limited regional autonomy (Yildiz and Taysi, 2007: 23). Later, Khomeini went on randomly came across, and had small talks with, were either introducing themselves as Kurdish or were speaking Kurdish (By that time, June 2010, speaking Kurdish in public places was no longer a felony in Turkey).
calling Kurdish leaders “Mohareb⁹” and “Mofsed-e Fil-Arz¹⁰.” In fact, this was Khomeini’s declaration of Jihad¹¹ against the Kurds.

In the years after the consolidation of the Islamic Republic’s rule, Kurdistan have witnessed impoverishment and lack of development opportunities which along with political motivations have resulted in constant street protest and border clashes of Kurdish peshmerge forces with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards. In spite of numerous natural and human resources Kurdish regions in general, and Kurdistan province in particular have been in the lower most spots of development ranking among other provinces in the past three decades. This low rate of development have further deteriorated political situation by making the Kurds aware of discriminatory aspects of their underdevelopment.

The Kurds form a relatively cohesive ethno-national minority in Iran. Nevertheless, they should not be viewed as totally homogeneous. In fact, Kurdish community in Iran is a mixture of different religious, ideological, tribal, dialectical, and socio-economic affiliations. Such differences influence Kurds’ perceptions of Kurdishness, their interactions with the central governments, and eventually their regionalism. For instance, there are considerable differences in levels of regionalism between eastern, compared to more central and western parts of Kurdistan province. The eastern strip of the province constitutes a ‘transition region’ with a mixed population. While Azeris exist in considerable numbers, the Kurdish population in this sub-region is also mixed Sunnis and Shiites. It is estimated that Shiite Kurds, especially in urban areas and, also rural areas of the eastern-most parts of the province, outnumber Sunni Kurds. When combined with Shiite Azeri populations, Shiite Islam becomes a robust factor in social and political life of the sub-region. Besides, Persianization is in process in this sub-region, and it is supposed to be more intense compared to more deep areas of Kurdish or Azeri heartlands. The intricate combination of these factors gives the sub-region a more ‘center-oriented’ tendency. This sub-regional political orientation finds expression in local elections, as well as in provincial politics. Perceived favorable attention from the central government towards the ‘Shiite eastern strip’ is a major reason of frustration and grievance form the Sunni Kurd majority of the province.

Regardless of their class, dialectical, and regional differences, a sense of Kurdish identity that the Kurds call it kurdayeti, binds them together in the face of the “outsiders.” Kurdayeti is simultaneously a perceived common identity and destiny, as well as strive for betterment of the Kurds’ political, cultural and economic life. As a form of ‘defensive nationalism¹²,’ kurdayeti is internally, a response to exclusion of the Kurds from the formal power structure in Iran. Internationally, kurdayeti has appeared to be the Kurds’ reaction to division of Kurdistan into four countries.

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2.4.3 Arab

Like other ethnic minorities in Iran, there is no official census data available stating the number of the Arab population. Estimates, however, suggest that with a population of 1.5 to 2.5 million, Arab minority forms roughly 2 to 3 percent of Iran’s population. Much bolder claims estimate the population of Arabs even up to 5 million. This ethnic-linguistic minority have historically been settled in Khuzestan province except for the province’s northeastern strip which has been predominantly inhabited by Lur tribes (Elling, 2013: 57). Other than Khuzestan, scattered Arab communities are also found along the Persian Gulf coasts and islands in Bushehr and Hormozgan provinces, as well as south and southeastern corners of Fars province (Map 3).

According to the census carried out by the Statistical Center of Iran, in 2006 Khuzestan’s population is about 4,200,000, which suggests Arabs form roughly half of the province’s population. Aside from Lur inhabitants of the province, migration of Persian population into Khuzestan has further decreased Arab demographic dominance in the province (Elling, 2013: 36). Based on the census, Khuzestan has constantly been among top three migration destinations since the first national census in 1956. Simultaneously, Khuzestan has also been among top sources of migration in the country (Javan, 2001: 329-333, Statistical Center of Iran). High rates of in and out-migration in Khuzestan is in part the synthesis of oil extraction industries as well as social and regional disparities within the province. Such conditions make disenfranchised, marginalized and less literate populations of the province migrate in search of daily waged manual labor elsewhere in the country.

As a result of decades of migration, Khuzestan and its capital Ahwaz have a mixed population of Arab, Persian and Lur communities. In one of the earliest descriptions of Ahwaz, Sir Austen Henry Layard (1846) characterizes Ahwaz as an Arab-inhabited town (Layard, 1846). At that time, Khuzestan was called Arabistan13 and along with Luristan, Gurjistan and Kurdistan, was among semi-independent Wilayats of the Qajars (Layard, 1846: 33-34, 50).

Like other parts of Iran, the borders of Khuzestan with Iraq is the result of constant power dynamics between Iran and its western neighbor(s) with blatant presence of imperial powers, most notably Great Britain. Making the situation more complicated, the borders of Iran were finalized around mid-nineteenth century, while Persian and Arab national awareness materialized in early twentieth century. Although Persian nationalism was a state-led nationalism, Arab nationalism in Iran, was a reaction to monopolization of power by the centralist modern state and cultural hegemony of the Persians14. The Sheikh Khaz’al revolt 1916-24 could be aptly described as such nationalist inspired insurgents (Elling, 2013: 37-38). In fact, for many Arabs in Iran, the Sheikh Khaz’al revolt represents a nation’s desire for self-determination (Elling, 2013: 105). At the time that their Arab brethren in the Greater Middle East were hopelessly allured by the Ottoman Turks to remain loyal to the Islamic Caliphate, Arab tribes in Khuzestan15 were

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13 The land of Arabs

14 Vali (2011) makes a similar argument in relation to Kurdish nationalism in Iran, stating that it was aggressive state-led Persian nationalism that politicized Kurdish tribal-ethnic identity into Kurdish nationalism.

15 By then was still called Arabistan
attempting to maintain their local traditional authority, which was being undermined by the newly established modern state in Tehran.

Similar to other ethnic minorities of the country, Arabs of Iran participated actively in anti-Shah demonstrations. Events after the 1979 Revolution were another episode of Arab ethnic nationalist attempting to gain cultural and political rights. Appointing local Arabs to provincial administrative positions along with recognizing Arabic as an official language in education and the media were among most prominent demands of various Arab movements. Before Khomeini and the Islamic Republic Party monopolized political power, Arabs were hoping to negotiate a level of regional autonomy to guarantee such rights. Facing the denial from Khomeini and the suppression from the Revolutionary Guard and their local loyalists, however, the events took a violent path. The incidents ended with arrest and execution of ethnic minority leaders and activists (Elling, 2013: 49).

The Arab minority in Iran has long experienced an uneasy relation with the Persian center. Persian/Shiite-based national identity in Iran has, at times, been defined and oriented in comparison with –if not necessarily against- Arab identity in the Middle East. This is in part, due to racial interpretations of Iran as an “Aryan nation,” and also the perceived centuries-long competition with Arabs in the region. Arabs –along with Turks- have been defined as the “others” of the “Aryan Iran” (Elling, 2013: 125). This understanding of Iran’s national identity, and Iranianness has functioned as a major impediment in accommodating Arabs into an Iranian nation. In fact, Persian-centered nationalism has long been reluctant in adopting a more civil definition of national identity that would have the capacity to include Arabs –as non-Aryans- as well. While the dominant Iranian nationalist discourse has a strong emphasis on territorial dimensions of Iranian identity16, nevertheless, it is not willing to consider Arabs as “natural” members of this territory. As a result, more radical factions of Iranian nationalism consider Iranian Arabs as “guests” or remnants of the Arab invaders that brought Islam to Iran. Such branches of Iranian nationalist discourse, often consider Arabs as the “newcomers” that have arrived to Iran only in ‘recent centuries’ (Elling, 2013: 37).

Despite its richness in agriculture, and most notably, immense oil and gas resources, poverty is a very common feature of people’s lives in Khuzestan. Poverty also is coincided with other related economic and social issues such as unemployment, urban slums, poor sanitation and drug abuse. More notable regarding these issues, however, is the fact that they affect various populations unequally. Generally, it is believed that Arabs of Khuzestan are in much less favorable socioeconomic condition compared to the Persian population of the province (Elling, 2013: 70). Harsh socioeconomic conditions has added another layer to the Arabs’ ethnically-grounded dissatisfaction with the central authorities. Both socioeconomic grievances, as well as ethno-national resentment has fuelled an increase in Arab regionalism in post-revolutionary Iran (Elling, 2013: 70).

2.4.4 Baluch

With a population of around 1.6 million, the Baluch constitute about 2 percent of Iran’s population. Common religion and language, as well as a history including numerous encounters with Mongol, Hindu, Persian and British powers form elements of Baluch ethno-national

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16 Often symbolized in the quote: “the sitting cat on the wall of Asia”
identity. The main concentration of the Baluch in Iran is in Sistan and Baluchistan province. Smaller enclaves and scattered Baluch communities also exist in neighboring provinces of Kerman, Hormozgan and South Khurasan (Elling, 2013: 38). In regional terms, the Baluch of Iran are the integral part of the Baluch nation with its larger portion\(^\text{17}\) in southwest Pakistan and a much smaller part\(^\text{18}\) in southern Afghanistan.

Baluchistan in Iran was first combined with Kerman and later with Sistan\(^\text{19}\) to form a larger province. Such administrative division, and incorporating the Baluch with Sistanis reduced the percentage of the Baluch in a single province, and thus influenced electoral outcomes. Moreover, due to remoteness of Baluchistan, combining Baluchistan with Sistan in one province, offered lower level administrative positions to the “locals,” which often happened to be Sistanis (Elling, 2013: 57). Although Sistan and Baluchistan was first introduced by Reza Shah’s administration, the policy has been pursued both before, and after the 1979 revolution (Elling, 2013: 40).

During the Qajar the Goldsmith line officially divided Baluchistan between West under Qajar rule, and East under the British India in 1863 and 1872. However, Baluch tribes were enjoying a level of self-rule in the form of local Khanats. In order to establish a centralized modern state, Reza Shah dissolved the semi-autonomous status of the Baluch tribes, and embarked on a project of Persianization of the region by exerting pressure on local tribes and their force settlement, nationalizing pastures, incarcerating and executing Baluch religious and political leaders, putting restrictions on Baluch language and culture, and most radically replacing local place names with Persian ones (Elling, 2013: 40-41).

During 1950s the tribal leader, Dad Shah revolted against the central government. After almost a decade and causing real torment for the government, Dad Shah was eventually defeated. Suppression of Baluch revolts and protests by Reza Shah and forceful extension of central authority over Baluchistan, while artificially pacified the region, never succeeded in drawing loyalty of the Baluch and their accommodation into the political life of the country.

According to numerous socio-economic indices\(^\text{20}\), Sistan and Baluchistan has continually been among the least developed provinces in Iran, if not the least developed one. Poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, drugs abuse and smuggling are among constant features of the province’s life. While many of Baluchs’ lamentations have roots in lack of development in the region, nonetheless it would be misleading to discuss such underdevelopment without considering cultural and political grievances. Being both linguistically and religiously different from the Persian-Shiite center, the Baluchis feel double discrimination by the state. Constant ban of Baluch cultural and religious institutions has radicalized the atmosphere, and have paved the way for radical activities from Sunni militants. Sporadic attempts of the state to

\(^{17}\) about 9 million

\(^{18}\) close to 0.5 million

\(^{19}\) Sistanis speak a dialect of Persian, and adhere to Shiite religion

\(^{20}\) In chapter 6 on economic development the underdevelopment of Sistan and Baluchistan will be discussed in more detail.
‘pacify’ the region often prove incompetent and face failure. The Iranian state often attempts to apply the influence of some local dignitaries and religious figures. Such attempts, however, have not been effective enough to overcome misunderstandings.

2.5 Conclusion

In this section a brief description regarding political history of Iran and its ethnic minorities was provided. While far from complete, this section is ideally written to help the reader better understand the wider discussion throughout the thesis. Clearly, any extensive study of country’s political geography and history would require reference to extra resources. This chapter has also attempted to put forward a concise account of political identity orientation of various ethnic groups in Iran. Any level of affiliation towards national or regional identities among Iran’s various ethnic groups would be a complex outcome of numerous social, political, economic, and psychological determinants. Such elements could include, social class and economic status, position within urban or rural environments, level of education, age, sex and gender. Any random cut across such various factors could result in very different outcomes. Moreover, due to the fact that each of Iran’s ethnic minorities have ethnic counterparts across the borders, any major political development would inevitably effect their status in Iran as well.
Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

3.1. Introduction

State, nation, ethnicities, minorities, and their complex relation with each other, constitute an enormous portion of modern political studies literature. Modern political studies have glorified “nation-state” as the ideal congruence between territorial boundaries of the state with those of the nation. However, few nation-states exist on the political map of the world and, quite the contrary, most states encompass more than one national group (Connor, 1972: 320, Smith, 1986: 228-229, Eriksen, 2002: 109, Brubaker, 1994: 49, Elling, 2013: 7). Making matters even more complicated, the notion of nationhood, its components, and relations to other forms of identity such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity is diverse, complex, and at times contradictory. This complexity primarily stems from unequal flows of power between ethno-national groups inside state territories, as well as diverse meanings of nation, ethnicity, and such in each society.

In its modern form, nation emerged in the eighteenth century Europe to provide an umbrella for the population inside states’ Westphalian territory (Anderson, 1991). The assumption was that creating these so called “imagined communities” in which every individual knew their place and responsibilities would help to create a more stable geopolitical order (Agnew and Muscarà, 2012: 68). The homogeneity of these societies was taken for granted. As a result, in many cases, no place was left for cultural differences within the new boundaries of the modern state (Anderson, 1991; Agnew and Muscarà, 2012: 68). This view of nation claims that the territorial body run by members of a nation is hence a nation-state and, its boundaries should coincide with those of the nation (Eriksen, 2002: 109, Elling, 2013: 7). In reality, however, such congruence is rare, and generally the territorial distribution of the homogeneous nation is not congruent with the territorial dimensions of the state. Instead, states’ populations are often far from homogeneous, and belong to different ethno-national groups.

Moreover, varied elements that define and influence nationhood and, its diverse meanings in different societies have presented serious challenges for conceptualizing overarching theories. Such challenges have caused modern social science fail to prescribe persuasive all-encompassing formulae capable of dealing with different contexts within a common theoretical framework (Flint and Taylor, 2000: 6-7). As a response to such failure, in recent years, especially after 1990s, social science has witnessed multiplication of theories and methodologies dealing with particularities of certain societies. In line with the ‘methodological turn’ in social science, this thesis attempts to address the ethno-national issue in Iran with specific ontology suited for the country’s particular context. Accordingly, while this thesis finds the existing contemporary literature on ethnicity and nation useful, however it primarily relies on specific terminology of mellat and qowm. In this thesis, mellat and qowm are keywords that represent dominant political discourse that categorize Iran’s population into different classes based on their ethnic affiliation. In this context, the thesis contends that mellat meaning nation is assumed and confused with Persian ethnicity, while qowm meaning ethnicity is predominantly used to refer to numerous ethnic minorities of the country.

As a modern state, Iran has always had a diverse population. Adding more to the diversity of the population of Iran is the vague categorization of nation and ethnicity within the context of the country. At the first glance, the terms “mellat” and “qowm” are the equivalents for “nation” and “ethnicity” respectively. When put in the Iranian context, however, it is not clear to
distinguish what is *mellat*, and what is *qowm*. Based on cultural and demographic elements, Persian is one of several *qowms* (ethnic groups) in Iran, and *mellat* (nation) refers to every Iranian citizen. However, the main characteristics of nationhood in Iran, namely Persian Language and Shiite religion, are primarily driven from cultural traits of Persian ethnicity. This not only elevates Persian ethnicity to the *de facto* status of *mellat*, but also relegates non-Persian ethnicities, that lack either or both Persian language and Shiite religion, to the position of second-class citizens. This fact has also been demonstrated and consolidated in the Iranian constitution by restricting minorities from employment to chief administrative positions (Boroujerdi, 1998, Elling, 2013: 26).

This thesis emphasizes and applies ontology and epistemology specific to the Iranian context. However, it is still framed within the larger framework that deals with concepts such as minority, majority, ethnicity and nation. More precisely, in order to have a more accurate grasp on the issues of ethnicity and nationhood in Iran, this thesis utilizes *mellat* and *qowm* as somehow different ontologies from the way ethnicity and nation are debated in Anglophone literature. Accordingly, a special epistemology is being used to address the differences between ethnicity and nationality in Iranian context.

### 3.2 Minority, Ethnicity, Nation and State

In a basic definition, being minority means having comparatively smaller numbers of population and being a part of a larger group while sharing attributes or having characteristics that are different and distinguishable from those of the larger group (Eriksen, 2002: 121-122). Minority and majority have relative meanings as well. Minority exists when there is (or perceived) majority and vice versa. Moreover, an ethnic group that forms a minority in a country, may form a majority in another (most of the time neighboring) country (Eriksen, 2002: 121-122). Quite often the minority-majority relationship is also accompanied by unequal shares of power, as well as unbalanced levels of socioeconomic development (Wellhofer, 1995). Different characteristics bind minority members together, while also distinguishing them from ‘others’ and primarily from the majority. Such characteristics could be one or a combination of language, religion, custom, costume, cuisine, etc. The word ‘ethnicity’ is often a broad label that represents these differences under a single banner. Accordingly, ethnic minority refers to populations that are smaller in number than the majority, and are more or less coherent cultural communities with common cultural traits.

More recently under the influence of post-structuralism, anti-essentialism and deconstructionism, ethnicity (like nation or race) is viewed as a situated social construct, and political project rather than a concrete reality ‘out in the world’ (Brubaker, 1996: 13, Brubaker, 2004: 11, Elling, 2013: 6). In this perspective, ethnicity is not a concrete collectivity that influences events and individuals’ actions, rather it is the result of individual and collective actions and events. In other words, it is not ethnicity that instigates social, cultural, or political events and processes, instead it is these events and processes that ‘create’ and ‘frame’ ethnicity. Events, rituals, and institutions that happen differently within different settings give significant, to mute category of ethnicity (Brubaker, 2004: 12)

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21Arabs in Iran and Iraq are an appropriate example of such situation.
The states representing and backed by the majority22 ‘deal with’ the ‘issue’ of diverse populations in different ways. They may devise a ‘trans-ethnic’ national identity that does not emphasize, privilege or prefer any ethnic identity over other(s). This form of managing diversity is often the characteristics of democratic societies and, may also have territorial manifestations in the form of federal or autonomous sub-state units with certain levels of authority concession. Another way that states manage diverse populations is blatant confrontation with the minority population(s). Such policies involve implementing physical force and in most brutal cases lead to massive displacement, extermination, and genocide of minority populations. This type of policies, however, is more historical, and due to global awareness and international responses is not very common any more. Finally, the last policy type that the state apply to ‘deal with’ diversity ‘problem’ is assimilation (Eriksen, 2002: 122-124).

Assimilation involves a wide array of nuance actions and mechanisms by which states attempt to spread their formal national identity over different ethnic minorities. Thus, assimilation is a systematic state-led program to eradicate the cultural integrity of ethnic groups in favor of a mainstream national identity.23 (Alba and Nee, 1997: 827). Assimilatory measures often occur over long periods of time and have both historical and contemporary importance. Assimilation takes place at the expense of ‘other’ ethnic minorities that are presumed as ‘different’ and, harms or in some cases totally eliminates cultural attributes of target populations (Penrose and Mole, 2008: 275). As a reaction, members of ethnic minorities attempt to preserve their distinctiveness and are often reluctant to accept the ‘formal national identity’ introduced by the state (Penrose and Mole, 2008: 278). Resistance, however, is not always the case. In some situations minority populations voluntarily get involved in assimilation, and this is due to benefits that come with assimilation. Many different elements play a role in voluntary assimilation, and it generally depends on the level of desirability of assimilating culture.

Due to the uneven balance of decision-making and political power, majority and minority relationship quite often demonstrates unequal spatial development as well. Such spatial inequalities shape an intra-state geopolitics, in which the dominant ethnic group has more and easier access to resources and development opportunities, while minorities are dragged into impoverishment (Flint and Taylor, 2000). The politically dominant ethnic groups, also tend to reside in the countries’ economic core, while ethnic minorities are politically subordinate, and tend to live in undeveloped peripheral regions of the country (Wellhofer, 1995). In other words, internal development fault-lines overlap those of ethno-national division.

While proponents of status quo try to explain its ‘inherent hierarchical nature’ and unequal development through modernization, opponents attempt to apply more critical approaches such as world-system theory. The world-system theory was framed partly in

22 The state may or may not be the result of a democratic process, but in either case would act under the name of “nation,” and national security also rigidly tied to territorial integrity to suppress ethnic minorities. In such cases even if the masses of the majority community do not approve the state and its rise to power, would still back the state’s actions of suppressing minorities.

23 Another perspective on assimilation which is more neutral and less disapproving, describes assimilation as the ‘social process’ of dialectic between majority and minority populations in a society. This description of assimilation, however, more applies to societies in which minority groups are immigrants (Alba and Nee, 1997: 827).
response to the ‘modernization theory,’ and posed serious questions on modernist optimistic stance on societies’ “path” to development (Chirot and Hall, 1982). Modernization theory assumes that societies are in “different stages” of development, and implies that if applying ‘right policies’ all societies will eventually reach development. The world-system theory, however, contends that societies are not necessarily moving towards development. Besides, the world-system theory argues that societies have not started their move to development under equal conditions, and subsequently, less developed societies had to compete with more developed and more powerful societies. The world-system theory analyzes different societies of the world in one integrated and interrelated system, in which profit of one group occurs at the expense of another group and vice-versa (Rostow, 1960, Wallerstein, 1974: 389, Chirot and Hall, 1982, Taylor, 1992a).

Within a world-system framework, intra-state core-periphery ‘ethnic tensions’ are the result of unequal flows of surplus value. In such a model, peripheral regions of countries are simultaneously culturally different and economically disadvantaged compared to the core. Impoverished ethnic peripheries are also politically subordinated to the powerful core, and have little influence in ‘decision making arenas’ of the political center (Hechter, 1999).

3.3 Development and Core-Periphery

Theories that have attempted to explain the unequal topography of economic development around the world could be categorized into two main groups. The first of such theories is the modernist model of economic development primarily elaborated by Rostow (1960) and the second is the world-systems approach formulated by Wallerstein (1987). Rostow’s model draws a linear trend of development. Rostow divides the process of economic development into five stages of the traditional society, the preconditions for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption (Rostow, 1960: 4, Flint and Taylor, 2000: 10). He contends that all societies start their process of development from the first level of traditional society and if each follows the “right path,” they will reach the final stage of high mass-consumption.

After World War II optimistic modernist theories came to prominence and older dualities such as mechanical/organic, Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaf, and traditional/rational-legal were simply replaced by traditional/modern. Conceptualization of ‘development’ also enabled social scientists to put different countries in ‘universal’ categories based on their level of development. By implication, if an ‘underdeveloped’ country applied the ‘developed’ countries’ wisdom, it would eventually be able to develop and catch up with the developed world (Taylor, 1992a). Rostow’s model and similar models had the notion of ‘modernization’ implied in them, and as a result, suggest a holistic approach toward economic development.

While Rostow calls his theory the ‘universal stages’ in economic growth, critics argue that his theory is a (mis)interpretation of seventeenth century British history (Wallerstein, 1974: 389, Taylor, 1992a, Flint and Taylor, 2000: 10). Modernist models take development for granted, and assume that all societies are in ‘different stages’ of ‘development.’ According to critics such an assumption overlooks the stagnation and economic deterioration of undeveloped countries. Besides, modernist approaches presume that societies ‘start’ their ‘development path’ under comparatively similar conditions. In reality, however, poor countries entered the global stage
when it was already set mainly by wealthy prosperous countries, and they had to deal with their domination over the world-system (Taylor, 1992a, Flint and Taylor, 2000: 9-10).

By introducing a world-systems approach, Wallerstein challenged modernist theories of development to explain uneven development. According to Wallerstein, development is a fabrication of the mid-twentieth century social science tightly related to ‘modernization.’ The world-systems approach criticizes the modernist approach that perceives development as a linear, universal trajectory of different countries falling into different “stages” (Wallerstien, 1987: 311, Taylor, 1992a). By rejecting linear models of development in the world economy, Wallerstein instead introduces a tri-layer dynamic system which consists of core, semi-periphery and periphery. The decisive factor in locating core, semi-peripheral and peripheral entities is the unequal ‘flow of surplus-value’. In the modern world-system, politically powerful regions have monopolized the production of specific core-like products which allows them to establish an unequal relationship with semi-peripheral and peripheral regions. This unequal relationship influences the direction of flow of surplus-value in core countries’ favor leaving areas of value-extraction without significant improvement in human development (Taylor, 1992a, Wallerstein, 2004: 28).

In Wallerstein’s world-system, peripheral countries are the receivers of products and technologies. They do not have enough power to influence the global division of labor in their own favor, and mostly provide the world economy with raw materials, as well as a small portion of production. Semi-peripheral countries by contrast, have a crucial role in both dynamism of the system and also defusing the frictions within the system. While suffering from unequal relations with core countries, semi-peripheral countries simultaneously have the leverage in their relations with peripheral countries (Flint and Taylor, 2000: 20-21). Semi-peripheral countries attempt to attract new factories, production lines and technologies from the core. Accordingly, their main rivals are other semi-peripheral countries which are vying for limited opportunities. Entangled between core and periphery, the semi-periphery is by no means a comfortable situation in world-system. Semi-peripheral countries are firstly concerned with preventing their decline into the peripheral condition while then attempting to promote their situation to those of core countries (Wallerstein, 2004: 29-30).

The theoretical and analytical potentials that the core-periphery framework offers has allowed scholars in different disciplines to apply the framework to various scales. More recently, core-periphery analysis has put together a combination of economic, political, and cultural elements that influence relations between cores and peripheries. In such relations, cores are economically developed, politically powerful, and culturally homogenous, while peripheries are economically underdeveloped, politically weak, and culturally disintegrate (Wellhofer, 1995: 503-504). Economic impoverishment creates a sense of cross-class solidarity in countries’ peripheries that Wellhofer aptly calls it “peripheral nationalism” (Wellhofer, 1995: 504). If economic inequality coincide with majority-minority fault lines, such nationalism could also be called minority nationalism (Flint and Taylor, 2000: 30). This peripheral-minority nationalism, adds an economic aspect to ethnic nationalism, which otherwise is primarily based on (perceived) cultural cohesion of ethnic communities.

Occurring within any given scale, and analyzed through any theoretical framework, spatial inequality has an undeniable role in displacing populations and migration. In the world-systems language, the unequal ‘flow of surplus-value’ is not only about flow of material capital,
but also about human capital as well. Emigration of skilled and non-skilled labor from the periphery seeking job opportunities in the core, deprives the periphery of its productive workforce. However, while skilled individuals absorb in the structures of the new destination for a long term, the unskilled workers often return to their origin periphery after they have lost ability to work. In this unequal exchange the core constantly benefits from labor capital, while the periphery experiences continuous loss of labor value.

In ethnically diverse societies, periphery-core migration could also function as a mechanism of population mix and cultural assimilation. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, due to ethnic groups’ unequal share of power, dominant ethnic groups quite often also reside in economically core areas. Relative economic prosperity of the core draws populations from the ‘ethnic periphery’ to seek job opportunities. Being in their young ages, migrants tend to marry, have children, and reside in the new destination for a long time. Quite often, the identity of the children born in the new ‘locale’ is under the influence of their immediate social environment rather than those of their parents (Wallerstein, 1997). This mechanism facilitate cultural assimilation, and subsequently, in the long run, core areas also function as ‘melting pots’ of the majority’s dominant culture.

3.4 Internal Migration, State and Minorities

In its most basic definition, migration refers to any permanent movement of individuals and groups across space for a certain period of time. Zelinsky (1971) defines migration as “any permanent or semi-permanent change of residence” (Zelinsky, 1971: 225). Migration studies thus faces some definitional challenges because, unlike birth or death, migration is not a clear physiological change that can be counted. Moreover, there is no agreement on the scope of temporal and spatial movement of individuals to be considered as migration (Zelinsky, 1971: 223-226, Newbold, 2010: 126). The amount of distance and spatial separation are two important factors in distinguishing migration from other more temporary movements such as urban commuting. In fact, a considerable number of migration cases remain undiscovered unless they cross a significant spatial or temporal boundary. If the border crossed by migrants is within a country migration is categorized as internal, otherwise it would be international yet the distance could be the same (Clark, 1986, Newbold, 2010: 126).

Migration flows are both effects, as well as causes of spatial inequalities, and thus could be understood in relation to other economic, cultural, and political processes. While various factors influence migration flows, the classic literature on migration ranks economic factor as most important (Ravenstein, 1889, Newbold, 2010: 129-130). Unequal economic development of different regions drives populations into, or out of those regions. By generating unequal regional development, economic factors induce populations to leave less developed regions for more developed regions in search of employment and better living conditions. In most theories that have sought to explain inter-regional migration, factors such as differences in wage, employment and access to facilities (Clark, 1986). Culturally, migration creates a semi-permanent barrier between migrants and their origin community, making it costly and time-consuming to return. Due to individuals’ disconnection with their community, in many cases a change in the residential status has immense cultural implications as well (Clark, 1986). Cultural assimilation, especially in the long run, is one of the most notable of such cultural implications.
Cultural assimilation occurs when immigrants acquire various levels of the ‘cultural attributes’ special to their ‘host society.’ Cultural assimilation includes changes in language, dress, food, way of behavior, and more generally, life style. Depending on the level of assimilation, immigrants, especially in first generations, would acquire a fluid hybrid identity, in which their lifestyle simultaneously belong to their host, as well as origin societies. However, immigrants’ everyday life and, major life events, such as marriage and employment within their new society, increasingly weave them to the fabrics of their host society. The assimilatory processes could continue until the immigrants develop identities entirely based on their host society. Wallendorf and Reilly (1983) call this stage *identificational assimilation* (Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983).

3.4.1 Migration and Modernization

As described above, modernization is an overarching label that describe the major progressive transformation in formerly traditional societies. Such transformations include, but are not limited to industrialization, urbanization, improvement of transportation, changing land ownership regulations, mechanization of agriculture, and subsequently shifting away the labor concentration from agriculture. As far as it is related to internal migration, modernization provides a set of material and mental impetus, which drive waves of rural migrants toward urban areas (Zelinsky, 1971: 236, Clark, 1986: 24-25, Javan, 2001: 315-317). Modernization is in fact, not just the material infrastructure that encourages populations to seek new opportunities in urban areas it is also the mentality that perceives urban places as new centers of economic opportunity and social progress. While migration occurs primarily from rural areas to urban centers because of their different levels of economic development, different urban centers provide unequal opportunities, which subsequently draw uneven numbers of migrants (Zelinsky, 1971: 243).

This, in part, explains unequal flows of interprovincial migration between more developed central versus underdeveloped peripheral provinces in Iran. In recent decades, close to 30 percent of internal migrations in Iran have taken place between provinces. Larger industrialized cities of core provinces have attracted considerable chunks of populations primarily from underdeveloped peripheral provinces. Capital cities of peripheral provinces have functioned as decent poles for attracting migrants inside their respective provinces. Simultaneously, such cities have acted as major migrant senders on the national level (Javan, 2001: 321-323).

3.4.2 State, Minorities and Migration

States encourage, discourage, influence, and shape a wide range of demographic policies and practices, including birth control, anti or pro-abortion, and stimulating or restricting migration flows, to and from specific regions in different ways. The underlying reason for such policies, however, is not always development but is quite often security (Weiner and Teitelbaum, 2001: 54-55). In another words, by influencing and (often) manipulating demographic composition and migration flows states implement a vast set of policies to make their territories ‘more secure’. Governments affect demographic composition of their territories by moving, removing and replacing populations. Weiner and Teitelbaum (2001) have called this intentional action of the government *demographic engineering*. In fact, in demographic engineering, the movement of population is not only the result of uneven economic, social or environmental phenomena. Instead, the movement itself is the main objective of the political authority to
change the demographic composition of specific (often minority) regions (Weiner and Teitelbaum, 2001: 55-63).

In such instances, under the auspices of the central government, members of the dominant group (majority) flow into the region of a subordinate group (minority) and ‘settle’ there. The lack of environmental and economic resources in the destination is not often a matter of concern for the settlers as their movement is planned, supported and even funded by the government. The central government often facilitates such influx by providing the settlers with plots of land in specific areas, loans and subsidies (McGarry, 1998: 619, Weiner and Teitelbaum, 2001: 63). Originating from regions with higher levels of economic development, even without government support, these settlers tend to have the upper hand compared to the native populations in the destination minority region. Simultaneously, a counter flux of out migration by members from the minority population further completes this process of demographic engineering. Emigration of the minority population is primarily the result of lower level of economic development of the region which is also further intensified by discrimination in employment and access to resources.

In their project to manipulate ethnic diversity, states use numerous tools. These tools could be categorized under two main types of actions: a) settling members of the majority (functioning as agents of the state) in peripheral minority regions, and b) relocating members of minorities (perceived as others of the state) form their region and moving them to other parts of the state’s territory or expelling them completely (McGarry, 1998: 613). The difference between the movement of agents and others of the state is that while the former’s movement is facilitated with loans and livelihood materials in the destination, the movement of others normally takes place under tough conditions with the least certainty about what to expect in the destination region (McGarry, 1998: 614).

While there is a long history of rulers moving their subject populations all over their territories, what makes these types of purposive population movements specific to the era of modern state is their relationship with nationalism. In other words, ethnicized states which are governed by one specific ethnic group (often the majority), tend to view their ethnic periphery as others of the state, and therefore untrustworthy (McGarry, 1998: 615). Such states, especially when under control of far right nationalists, tend to view ethnic minorities as threats to security or even the existence of the state. These perceptions are strengthened when legitimacy of state rule is questioned by an assertive ethnic based nationalism in minority regions or the state is at war with a foreign enemy (McGarry, 1998).
Chapter 4: Methods

4.1 Introduction to Methods

This thesis addresses one main question that has been further explained by three sub-questions as follow:

- How have Iran’s ‘ethnic policies’ shaped conditions in its ethnic minority regions?
  d. How categories of *mellat* and *qowm* have been constructed in Iranian formal and popular discourses?
  
  e. How state’s economic policies generally follow the geography of *mellat* and *qowm*?
  
  c. How patterns of core-periphery development have fuelled interprovincial migration and cultural assimilation that de-concentrates Iran’s ethnic margins?

Due to multi-dimensional aspect of main question, multi-method research is appropriate. A combination of qualitative method of critical discourse analysis, and quantitative method of descriptive statistics, has been utilized to address the main question. Besides in the last two decades a new emerging body of literature has suggested the application of mix methods (McKendrick, 1999, Graham, 2000 and 2004, White and Lindstrom, 2005). For instance, McKendrick (1999) argues that due to complexity and multi-dimensional characteristic of topics, and also the complementary effect of quantitative and qualitative methods, it is recommended to use the two methods alongside each other. He further elaborates the fact that although quantitative and qualitative methods have roots in different epistemologies, this does not limit scholars in applying both simultaneously, because ‘epistemology informs methodology rather than dictates it’ (McKendrick, 1999: 43).

Furthermore, qualitative and quantitative methods have misguidedly been assumed as ‘opposites’ and hence associated with antipodal dualities (Winchester, 2000: 12). Hammersley (1992) has provided a table that demonstrates some of these dualities (Table 1). Quantitative methods have usually been misrepresented by critical geographers and hence associated with positivism and conforming to status quo. Quite the contrary, any effort to combine quantitative and qualitative methods would help to alleviate hostilities against the former and make (human) geographical studies more tolerant to hybrid methodologies (Sheppard, 2001: 548).

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<th>Qualitative methods</th>
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<td>Qualitative data</td>
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<td>Natural settings</td>
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<td>Search for meaning</td>
<td>Identification of behavior</td>
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<td>Rejection of natural science</td>
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<td>Inductive approaches</td>
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<td>Identification of cultural patterns</td>
<td>Pursuance of scientific laws</td>
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<td>Idealist perspective</td>
<td>Realist perspective</td>
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Table 1: Dualisms identified between qualitative and quantitative methods. Source: Mostyn (1985); Hammersley (1992); and Winchester (2000)
Other than theoretical concerns that suggest and support the application of multi-method research, the subject of this thesis provides more reasons to use multi-method methodology. In fact, while it is pertinent to use quantitative methods to provide an understanding of issues like economic development and internal migration, these processes are often heavily affected by political perceptions, identities and discourses of power. Such discourses, however, are not innocent in their functioning. Rather they have immense legislative and executive implications for Iran’s political geography (Sharbatoghlie, 1991: xvii).

The main question: how have Iran’s ‘ethnic policies’ shaped conditions in its ethnic minority regions, is concerned with policies of the Iranian state towards its minority regions. This broad question has been illustrated by three sub-questions.

The first sub-question: how categories of mellat and qowm have been constructed in Iranian formal and popular discourses, deals with discourses of nation and ethnicity in Iran as mellat and qowm. This sub-question attempts to examine broader political discourses that classify Iranian population into categories of mellat and qowm. Critical discourse analysis is applied to answer the first sub-question. In this part the constitution, governmental decrees, intellectual production and the media statements have been analyzed.

The second sub-question: how state’s economic policies generally follow the geography of mellat and qowm, examines the developmental consequences of the categorization of Iran’s population into mellat and qowm. Descriptive statistics has been used to demonstrate and analyze unequal economic development between Iran’s more developed core and its underdeveloped periphery.

The third sub-question: how patterns of core-periphery development have fuelled interprovincial migration and cultural assimilation that deconcentrates Iran’s ethnic margins, investigates potential demographic changes instigated by unequal development between core and periphery within the country. The thesis concludes by initiating a debate on potential cultural implications of interprovincial migration. This part argues, in the long run, accelerated interprovincial migration has a tendency to encourage and facilitate cultural assimilation in favor of the Fars majority (Elling, 2013).

4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

In its primary and simplest meaning, discourse means a continual piece of writing or speech that intends to communicate meaning (Preble, 1959: 364; Hajer, 1997: 44; Hall, 2001: 72). As the most dominant theoretical approach in critical human geography, discourse refers to the poststructuralist notion of the term and does not reflect the facts of the world, rather it explains the ways in which ‘the regimes of truth’ are constructed and by using them how things are defined and categorized and questions are identified and answered. In fact, discourse forms the logic by which thinking is done and topics are understood and approached (Hall, 2001: 72; Lees, 2004: 102-103). Power is the backbone of any social discourse which through its bilateral relations with knowledge produces and forms things and categories (Boyle and Rogerson, 2001: 407; Lees, 2004).

Based on this understanding of discourse, to answer its first sub-question, this thesis will analyze the discourse under which qowm and mellat are defined, distinguished. By choosing this method, the thesis contends that a thorough explanation of incorporation or marginalization of
Iran’s minority regions could be first achieved by applying critical discourse analysis (Dixon, 2010). Incorporation or marginalization of Iran’s minority regions lies in deep historical, political, legislative, and cultural structures. As a result, the best way to give a thorough answer to the first sub-question is to critically analyze these complex structures. In this part ethnic (Farsi) roots of the formation of the modern state in Iran will be addressed from an historical perspective. Continual unitary form of the state and its political-economic centralism will be explained from the political aspect. The exclusion of marginal minorities by putting official language and religion in the constitution will be elaborated from the legislative aspect. Finally, the domination of Farsi in educational system as well as the media will be discussed from a cultural perspective (Aghajanian, 1983).

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

By using numerical data and showing the results in the form of charts and other visualization tools, descriptive statistics makes it possible to provide a clear picture of spatial patterns (Visser, and Jones III, 2010). In this part, books and papers regarding economic development, governments’ policies and regional inequalities in Iran that have already been published will be examined. Official data in the form of censuses released by the Statistical Center of Iran, and the Planning and Budget Organization of Iran will be used. Tools of visualization including maps and charts will also be utilized to further illustrate the spatial patterns and distribution of major industrial units. The initial hypothesis of this part is that the spatial patterns of economic development have a center-periphery shape that overlaps the countries majority-minority regions. It is also necessary to mention, while the Iranian census does not include ethnic factors and in the lack of personal data as Aghajanian (1983) suggests, provincial data is used to show the disparities in economic development between different ethnic groups, especially comparing to the Fars (Aghajanian, 1983: 214).

4.4 Research Focus

The thesis will address Iran as a country to answer the first sub-question to discuss the relationship between qowm and mellat. In this part the thesis will suggest a core-periphery perspective in which the Fars are located in the core and ethnic minorities including Azeris, Kurds, Arabs and Baluchis in the periphery. In addressing the second and the third sub-questions the focus would be on the level of economic development and interprovincial migration patterns of East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan, and Sistan/Baluchistan provinces and their relationship with the center. These provinces are considered as historical headquarter of Azeri, Kurd, Arab, and Baluch ethnic minorities.

As Sanasarian (2000), however, on a somewhat different topic puts it “it would have been easier but intellectually less challenging to focus on one community with greater detail” (Sanasarian, 2000: xii), but because of similar events and patterns (such as the very establishment of the modern state in Iran, and its centralist political, economic and cultural consequences, the 1979 revolution, etc.) that influenced different ethnic minorities, it would provide a more complete picture to consider different ethnic minorities together. For this purpose, four ethnic groups of Azeri, Kurd, Arab and Baluch limited to four respective provinces
of East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan and Sistan/Baluchistan have been chosen. Multiple reasons support such a choice including, however, not limited to 24:

- Forming the highest percentages of population of ethnic minority groups in Iran
- Inhabiting more or less constantly in sizeable pieces of land for a considerable amount of time
- Regionalism and effective ethnic political mobilization throughout modern history.

4.5 Data Sources

To answer the first sub-question first hand and second hand sources will be used to analyze the condition under which different ethnic groups of Iran (also among them the Fars) have been categorized as qowm and mellat. In doing so, the constitution will primarily be used as a first hand source, and other books and papers that help to explain the categorization of Iranian population will also be used.

Second and third sub-questions will be answered by using data respectively on economic and demographic sections of Iranian censuses and statistical yearbooks. Data will be gathered directly from the official website of the Statistical Center of Iran. In cases that the required data could not be found on the website, published booklets about Iranian censuses will be used.

4.7 Conclusion to Methods

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate the validity and viability of multi-method methodology to approach and answer my thesis questions. According to McKendrick (1999) and Graham (2000 and 2004), epistemology informs methodology rather than precluding it. As a result, the application of multi-method methodology is not only without any problem, but also highly recommended. To answer the first sub-question of this thesis, applying the qualitative method of critical discourse analysis would allow explain the historical conditions under which qowm and mellat have been defined and subsequently entitled to or deprived from sovereignty.

In a different manner, to answer second and third sub-questions of this thesis, quantitative method of descriptive statistics would offer the possibility of analyzing and mapping numerical economic and demographic data. In these chapters, different maps could help to visualize various unequal spatial flows and processes of economic (under)development across the country.

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24 See also chapter 2.
Chapter 5: Mellat and Qowm: ‘Nation’ and ‘Ethnicity’ through Iranian Lens

5.1 Mellat and Qowm: a Vague Categorization

In contemporary Iranian polity, ‘qowm’ and ‘mellat’ are commonly used to refer to ‘ethnicity’ and ‘nation’ respectively. While this thesis and specifically this chapter stays committed to this vocabulary, it seeks to answer this question: How have categories of mellat and qowm been constructed in Iranian formal and popular discourses? In what follows, mellat and qowm are found to be neither ‘neutral,’ nor ‘authentic’ terms. Rather they are manifestations of social constructs of Persian-centered Iranian nationalist discourse that have ambiguously categorized Iranian populations, and serve certain political projects.

The multi-ethnic characteristic of the Iranian polity and, questions of “nationality” and “ethnicity” have been the subject of numerous academic works. However, these generally overlooked the critical contextuality of ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity’ in Iran. While the conceptual definitions and real equivalents of nation and ethnicity are complicated enough, putting them in the Iranian context makes them even more perplexing. In Iranian political discourse mellat represents nation, and symbolizes cultural and political superiority, while qowm represents ethnicity, and embodies cultural and political inferiority to mellat. Moreover, while mellat is politically cherished as the embodiment of political independence of Iran, qowm is viewed as essentially cultural, politically non-legitimate, and potentially a threat to territorial integrity of the country.

In his voluminous Persian dictionary, Dehkhoda mentions two major meanings for the word ‘qowm.’ According to Dehkhoda, qowm refers to a group of people that either have close familial relations, or think they have common (real or fictional) ancestries and origins. When qowm means a group of people with same origins, it is also further supported and reinforced by cultural bounds. In this meaning, qowm is most similar to what in English is called ‘ethnic group’ (Elling, 2013: 17). With its roots in Quranic Arabic, mellat historically refers to religion. In modern era, the term has been politically loaded with a meaning more similar to the European equivalent, nation (Elling, 2013: 121). The fact that mellat implies a certain level of cultural similarity among a group of people, makes it akin to qowm. While historically the term mellat has always had the religion factor embedded, Persian-centered intellectuals also added Persian language to it. According to nationalist-minded intellectuals, it was and still is necessary to have an official language for a nation (Elling, 2013: 122, Boroujerdi, 1998).

In dominant political discourse of Iran, the term qowm is perceived as “sub-culture,” smaller division of a larger culture, and a less potent category of identity. From an opposite perspective, mellat is understood as culturally capable of encompassing numerous ethnic groups, and politically sovereign ((Elling, 2013: 28). Qowm is depicted as opposite, and concurrently inferior to mellat. Such renderings imply that mellat stands higher above qowm both in terms of political legitimacy, as well as cultural capacity. However, qowm and mellat are not ‘neutral’ categories with ‘authentic’ meanings. Rather, as Brubaker (1996) puts it regarding ethnicity and nation, they are ‘ascribed statuses’ or ‘social categories’ codified by the state and dominant social discourse (Brubaker, 1996). In this discourse, while mellat is glorified as a unifying force that would result in progress, peace and stability, any political referral to qowm is associated with backwardness, disintegration, and destabilization (Kashani-Sabet, 1999: 216, Elling, 2013: 120).
Historically, *qowm* is much older than *mellat*. *Qowm* could be traced in numerous pieces of Persian literature, as in the poems of the 11th century poet Omar Khayam. Such applications of the term either, refer to a specific ethnic group such as Persian, Arab, Turk, etc., or to a group of people regardless of their cultural affiliation. Many scholars argue that an “Iranian nation” was constructed at the same time that a “modern Iranian state” was founded, in the early twentieth century. The term “*mellat-e Iran*” (nation of Iran) was heard first on the streets of Tehran during a protest rally in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 (Abrahamian, 1982: 81-82). Prior to this, there is little evidence that the term *mellat* has ever been used, especially with its current connotation, rather terms such as *ummat* were used that referred to the collective faith of (Shiite) Islam.

As a newly framed collective identity, *mellat* was constructed by the emergent Persian intelligentsia based on Persian language and Shiite religion. In fact, the old collective identity of *ummat*, put Iran among the larger Islamic community of believers. After the Constitutional Revolution, however, European educated elites attempted to ‘refashion’ the Iranian collective identity based on one language and one culture (Elling, 2013: 27). Such an idea was in accordance with transforming Iran from the remnants of an old empire to a modern nation-state (Tavakoli-Targhi, 1990). This intellectual fabrication was also slowly but steadily introduced to the populace.

5.1.1 Who Are *Mellat* and *Qowm*?

As the equivalent of nation, ‘*mellat*’ at the first sight, refers to each and every individual living in the country as an Iranian national. Besides, Iranian statesmen insist that *mellat* does not exclusively refer to any ethnic group (Elling, 2013: 61). In practice, however, this intricate narrative of *mellat* includes and serves those that share Persian language and Shiite religion (Elling, 2013: 26). In quite the same fashion, literally the term *qowm* refers to numerous ethno-national groups inside Iran including the Persians. However, the Persians are exempted from being referred to as *qowm*, and in practice this term is applied to Iran’s ethnic minorities. Accordingly in Iranian political discourse, an “ethnic issue” does not have to do with the Persian community directly, and in return points to one of several ethno-national minorities in the peripheries of the country.

An *étatiste* interpretation of nation based on Persian ethnicity has resulted in the elaboration of the term ‘*mellat*,’ which *de facto* refers to Persian ethnicity (McDowall, 2004: 2). The unilateral narrative of *mellat*, takes the Persianness of ‘nation’ for granted and does not tolerate any reference to other ethnic identities of Iran (Vali, 1998: 90). Considering Persian as the only valid language of the country, Persian-Shiite Iranian nationalism has showed no tolerance towards any manifestation of minority languages and religions inside the country, and regarded linguistic and religious diversity as a source of “harm” and “disorder” (Kashani-Sabet, 1999: 216).

5.1.2 *Mellat* and *Qowm* within Formal and Popular Discourses

The formal and popular political discourses in Iran have long downplayed the multi-ethnic reality of the country. Such discourses have not ignored the existence of ethnic minorities, rather they have attempted to represent ethnic minorities as less important or valid than the Persians. As Halliday (1978) argues, Iranian officials have long attempted to represent Iran as a linguistically homogeneous country (Halliday, 1978: 12). Fabricating the term *mellat* with an
entirely Persian-centric interpretation, has played an important role in neglecting particular ethnic identities and legitimizing the domination of the Persians (Boroujerdi, 1998). For decades, Persian language and, accordingly, Persian ethnicity, has been presented as the embodiment of a mono-ethnic narrative of the nation amid undeniable diversity (Farhi, 2005: 18).

Persian nationalists belittle minority languages such as Kurdish and Azeri as mere dialects of Persian, while these minority languages show significant differences with Persian and with each other as well (McDowall, 2004: 3). Accordingly any claim for autonomy based on distinct culture and language from ethnic minorities have not only been rejected, but also been equated with secessionism and separatism by paranoid Persian/Shiite nationalist discourse. To facilitate mobilization against and suppression of autonomy-seeking movements, Persian nationalist discourse has commonly portrayed minorities as potential traitors, highly susceptible of plotting against the state and cooperating with foreign enemies (Fazel, 1985: 84, Elling, 2013). Such propaganda proved quite effective when autonomy-seeking movements were suppressed in Turkmensahra and Kurdistan in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution.

5.1.2.1 The Constitution

Iran’s constitution has always been a primary source of categorization of the populations, and subsequently ‘ethnic discrimination’. From the Constitutional Revolution to the Islamic Republic, the constitution has elevated Persian populations as the backbone of the “Iranian nation” and Persian as the sole legitimate culture. Vali (1998) argues the contradiction in the 1906 constitution that sovereignty is based on the collective will of the Iranian nation, while citizenship is derived from the constituents of one of the country’s several ethnic groups; the Persians. Vali further argues that in order for non-Persian ethnic groups of the country to be considered as first class citizens, they have to deny certain aspects of their collective identity (Vali, 1998: 84-86, Farhi, 2005: 13-14). This is a duality between the meaning of citizenship and ‘sovereign identity’ that Vali (2011) explains about the relationship between the Kurds and the state in Iran25. Vali argues while the concept of citizenship applies to all the population of Iran regardless of their ethnic affiliation, the ‘sovereign identity’ as it is described in the constitution is derived from traits of Persian ethnicity (Vali, 2011: 84-86).

Article 1 of the 1906 constitution, states “the official religion of Iran is Islam of the true sect of Ja’fariyah Ithna-Asharia [Twelver Shiism]. The Shah must protect and profess this faith” (Banani, 1961: 17). This article remained in the post-revolutionary constitution in which article 12 declares that “the official religion of Iran is Islam and the sect followed is Twelver Shiism” (Zonis, 1985: 91). All educational institutions are required to use only Persian as the sole language of official educational system. At the same time, article 15 in the Constitution “allows” the application of “local languages” in their respective regions, but in practice, this article has never been (fully) implemented. More importantly, the term “allow” is not obligatory, meaning that the state and the official educational system have no obligation to implement it (Keddie, 2006: 332, Tohidi, 2009: 302-303). The monopolization of the educational system by Persian, and not allowing other Iranian minority languages to be taught, has long raised contentious debates. From one side, the state, and Persian nationalist elite and intellectuals claim that teaching minority languages would weaken Persian language and subsequently, “national unity

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25This explanation could also be applied to other ethnic minorities in Iran.
and security,” and also encourages separatism. From another side, minority intellectuals and activists contend that state ban on their languages to be taught is part of a larger mechanism of cultural assimilation.

Based on the constitution, the country not only has one official religion and one official language but also only individuals adherent to the official religion of the country are eligible for holding major political-legal positions such as presidency (Zonis, 1985: 93, Keddie, 2006: 332, Tohidi, 2009: 303, Iranian Constitution, articles 115 and 121). Accordingly, citizens that belong to non-Muslim populations, and also Sunni Muslims as the largest religious minority of the country are automatically and systematically excluded and barred from top political and administrative positions such as leadership, presidency, or head of the judiciary branch. Such exclusion even goes further down to lower levels of governmental positions. As a result, it is rare, if not impossible to see non-Muslims or Sunni Muslims in positions such as ministries, governorship, and the high ranks of the armed forces (Elling, 2013: 53).

5.1.2.2 Nationalist Intellectuals

Nationalist intellectuals of the core have formulated an exclusive discourse of nationhood based on overwhelmingly Persian-centered interpretation of Iranianness. By assuming and representing Persian domination as essential and natural, such a discourse gives a biased privilege to Persian as the backbone of the Iranian national identity, and ignores all other Iranian languages. In a rather different context, Kuus (2004) aptly names such a discourse “internal orientalism.” Although “Orientalism” was introduced by Said (1978) in reference to the Middle East, the process of binary othering, has also been used in different places at various scales (Kuus, 2004: 483, Elling, 2013: 5). This internal orientalism allows the Persian to construct “others” within the international boundaries of the country. Over subsequent decades, politicians, as well as intellectuals belonging to the mainstream Persian discourse, have tended to neglect the multiethnic (let alone multinational) reality of the Iranian society. There have been several explanations for the causes of this neglect. Prejudice and contempt for non-Persian ethnicities, ultra-nationalism, suspicion and fear of separatism are among those reasons most commonly stated (Tohidi, 2009: 299, Elling, 2013: 4). By taking “Persian” and “Iranian” as synonyms and relying on Persian-centered narratives of Iranian history and identity, many scholars and “Iranologists” have (un)consciously contributed to negligence of non-Persian minorities in Iran. In their arguments, Iranian nationalists often try to represent it as the language of the entire territory of Iran. For these Iranian nationalists, Persian language is equal to “the Iranian language\(^{26}\)” (Boroujerdi, 1998: 43, Elling, 2013: 43). While discussing [the importance of] language, such scholars often refer to ethnic minority languages of Iran as “dialect\(^{27}\)” The (c)overintention of such debates is to depict Persian as “the language” and accordingly, more important, compared to “ethnic dialects” which are not as important (Elling, 2013: 152-153). Early nationalist intellectuals gave an entirely linguistic narrative of mellat based on Persian language (Tavakoli-Targhi, 1990: 92).

In Iran, the internal division of “us” versus “others” has been the direct result of gowm-mellat categorization. Such a mindset has eventually led to the formation of a unitary state based

\(^{26}\) zabān-e Irānī

\(^{27}\) guyesh, lahje
on Persian attributes that presumes peripheral ethnic regions of the country as threats to national security and territorial integrity (Afshar, 1985d: 178, Tohidi, 2009: 299, Elling, 2013). As a result, the Persian-dominated state has avoided any change in the power sharing system that would grant status to minorities, per se. This governmentality is also reflected in the constitution of Iran. Prior to the 1979 revolution, the Persian-centric interpretation of Iranian national identity to a great extent was also shared by the Pahlavi monarchy. The Persian-Iranian nationalist discourse of the Pahlavi was excessively embellished with racial rhetoric and metaphors. Iran was depicted as the main stronghold of the ‘Aryan Race,’ and in numerous occasions Mohammad Reza Shah referred to the Aryan Iranians as the “chosen people.” In such a discourse the very existence of minorities was out of the question and cultural-linguistic homogenization was pursued vigorously (Elling, 2013: 95).

Although the Persian nationalist intelligentsia have been alternately supported and suppressed by the state, the desire by numerous consecutive governments to homogenize various ethnic-linguistic groups of the country has been accompanied by the support from a considerable number of intellectuals. Abrahamian (1982) provides an example of such aspirations from M. Afshar in the monthly Ayandeh in the 1920s:

“Our ideal is to develop and strengthen national unity… What do we mean by “national unity”? We mean the formation of cultural, social, and political solidarity among all the people who live within the borders of Iran. How will we attain national unity? We will attain it by extending the Persian language throughout the provinces; eliminating regional costumes… and removing the traditional differences between Kurds, Lurs, Qashqayis, Arabs, Turks, Turkomans, and other communities that reside within Iran. Our nation will continue to live in danger as long as we have no schools to teach Persian and Iranian history to the masses… no books, journals and newspapers to inform the people of their rich Iranian heritage; and no Persian equivalents to replace the many non-Persian place names in Iran. Unless we achieve national unity, nothing will remain of Iran” (Abrahamian, 1982: 124-125).

M. Afshar28 in later issues of the monthly advises a “strong centralized state” to spread Persian among non-Persian ethnicities and to ‘manipulate demographic composition of minority regions’ to abate their dominance in peripheral border regions of the country (Abrahamian, 1982: 125). The modern state in contemporary Iran has always had a tendency toward centralized power, and over time has tied this centralism to the ideas of national security and national integrity (Abrahamian, 1982, Farhi, 2005: 14). In other words, the Persian-Shiite nationalist agenda of the Iranian state has always been centralist to construct a homogenized national identity, through disseminating one language and one religion (Farhi, 2005: 12).

Due to the internalization and naturalization of the terms gowm and mellat and spreading secession-phobia within the country’s population, non-governmental organizations (often human rights activists) are also hesitant to defend cultural-political rights of minorities and through playing with words like Kurds residing in Iran, Iranian Azeris, gowm-e Arab, etc. try to avoid using the term ‘mellat’ about them (Tohidi, 2009: 309). Accordingly, the Persian nationalist discourse have opted for definitions of nationhood that emphasize the legal connections that

binds populations to their respective state. The ultimate goal of providing such definitions is to downplay inter-state cultural differences, and to imply that all populations living inside a country belong to a homogenous nation (Ghasemi Kermanshahi, 2008).

It was during the Reza shah period that by seeing Persian ethnicity as essentially similar to other ethnicities of the country such as Turks, Kurds, Arabs and Baluchis, state-centered Persian nationalist discourse fabricated a new name for the country as “Iran.” The covert intention of such renaming from “Persia” to “Iran” was to refashion the country beyond ethnic affiliations. The dominant nationalist discourse attempts to relate “Iran” with the racial category of “Aryan”. However, many scholars of ancient history, linguistics, and historical geography cast serious doubts on the soundness of such interpretation (Vaziri, 1993). As Zia Ebrahimi (2011) argues no historical and terminological finding proves the affiliation between the words ‘Iran’ and ‘Aryan.’ Rather, it seems that such a connection is the result of “conceptual and semantic confusion.” In fact, highly racialized Iranian nationalist discourse has adopted the ancient Aryan ‘ethnonym’ to a much broader racial category to incorporate not only the current day Iranians, but also their “imagined European brethren” (Zia Ebrahimi, 2011). Although the country’s name was changed, the identifying perimeters of Iran still remained those of Persia which were derived from Persian ethnic attributes. Accordingly, the objective of choosing the ultra-ethnic name of “Iran” was not to create an all-inclusive political identity, rather it was an attempt to “mute the rival territorial claims of Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis and others” (Kashani-Sabet, 1999: 217).

5.2 Post-revolutionary Era

After the 1979 Revolution, many revolutionary leaders, among them religious figures who later emerged as the leaders of the new Islamic Republic, initially showed considerable acknowledgement of the minority issue in Iran. On numerous occasions figures such as Ayatollah Taleqani, reiterated that the post-revolutionary government will not continue the “fascist policies” of the Pahlavi monarchy and will not require ethnic-religious minorities to become Persian and Shiite. This was in part a response to the participation of minority leaders and activists in the 1979 Revolution. Minorities were primarily pursuing two interrelated objectives namely overthrowing a monarchial dictatorship as well as decentralizing a highly centralized state. In the outcome, however, while they managed to achieve the first goal, the second objective proved far-reaching. Indeed, while post-revolutionary Islamist authorities were hasty in bringing about political, cultural and institutional changes, they were reluctant to implement structural changes and devolve power to ethnic minority regions (Ansari, 2012: 295). The newly consolidated Islamic Republic continued the Pahlavi centralization and just changed “Aryan” slogans with “Islamic” ones (Elling, 2013: 83).

As the practical way of materializing decentralization and devolution of power to minorities the idea of a federal Iran was introduced to the post-revolutionary political arena. A federal solution was rejected and instead the solution to the minorities’ issues was decreased to the “Council of Peoples” (majles-e khalq-ha) and later to the “Council of Provinces” (majles-e iyalat). For Khomeini and the dominant discourse within the Islamic Republic, Islam was creating an egalitarian society in which all members of Iranian society were equal and, as a result, questions of ethnicity had no appeal (Elling, 2013: 50). Khomeini declared Jihad to suppress the autonomy-seeking movements in minority regions. Shortly after, armed clashes and civil wars in Khuzestan, Baluchistan, Turkmensahra and Kurdistan broke out between Khomeini’s Islamic forces and minority movements seeking autonomy (Amuzegar, 1997: 36,
Eventually, by marginalizing liberal and minority leaders, the Islamic Republic did not even live up to its initial commitments to grant limited local autonomy to minority regions. Unlike the initial post-revolutionary optimism, the solution for minority rights was lost in intense social distrust, constitutional contradiction, legislative ambiguity, political animosity, and military clashes.

During the Pahlavi monarchy public referral or affiliation to ethnic groups was at best rejected if not suppressed to preserve “Iranianness.” In a slightly more moderate manner, the Islamic Republic recognizes the existence and even cultural differences of ethnic minorities, but it has never accepted them as entitled to the same political and cultural rights as the Persians have. In fact, it is not uncommon for members of the Majles29 to wear traditional ethnic clothes, proudly express ethnic affiliation of their electorate and cite their achievements and sacrifices (often in protecting the borders of the country as their duty). Such rhetoric, however, turns a blind eye over legislative and practical inequalities between the Persians and ethnic minorities (Vali, 1998: 91, Tohidi, 2009: 301-302). In other words, after the 1979 revolution the egalitarian principle of Islam was to create an all-encompassing Iranian identity yet in practice the Islamic theocracy identifies itself with Shiism by religion and Persian by language (Keddie, 2006: 332).

The principle doctrine of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution also stresses on “the strengthening of national and religious unity with attention to ethnic and religious aspects.” Quite contrary to the country’s constitution, the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution does not even refer to minority languages and instead only emphasizes ‘promoting’ and ‘disseminating’ Persian (Elling, 2013: 52). In fact, as Fazeli (2006) argues the Supreme Court for Cultural Revolution has been functioning as the most influential governmental office regarding the cultural issues of the country. This organization has been fundamentally nationalistic, and has attempted to finely blend “Iranian” and “Islamic” elements in its principles and policies. The Council’s emphasis on “Iranian-Islamic” elements is best manifested in its main document Principle of Cultural Policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1991. This document that functions as the organization’s primary guideline, emphasizes principle such as: historical and national traditions, Islamic and Iranian national culture, Persian language and literature, religious and national identity (Fazeli, 2006: 167-168). Such blatant preferences of Persian over all other languages of Iran, have been one of the main sources of lamentation and collective frustration of minorities.

Apart from the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, there are numerous other institutions and organizations that function to disseminate Persian, with media being the most important one. Being exclusively run by the state, television, radio, and most newspapers have attempted to institutionalize and naturalize qowm and mellat. By introducing and emphasizing on (the importance of) Persian as the “national language” and the “common heritage of all Iranians.” For many scholar associating ‘Persian’ with ‘national’ is the turning point of qowm-mellat distinction (Borouherdi, 1998).

Generally, it is much more difficult to get “state official permission” to publish journals in minority languages. Even in rare cases that succeed in getting permission to publish, editors must deal with highly restrictive surveillance by the state on a daily basis (Elling, 2013: 52).

29 The parliament of the Islamic republic
Moreover, all radio and television stations, including the so called “local” ones, are owned and controlled by the state. Such provincial radios and televisions not only do not promote minority languages and cultures, but serve as assimilation mechanisms for Persian-Shiite culture. In recent years the so called “local channels” have been introduced to the Iranian population. Generally, these channels lack popularity, especially among the younger audience. Besides, their primary function is to disseminate Persian language and culture, as well as Shiite values in ethnic minority regions. For example, their children programs and cartoon are exclusively and entirely Persian, while the target audience of such programs are elementary and even pre-elementary children who can barely understand or speak Persian. During religious occasions, such as the martyrdom of Imams, local channels like in Kurdistan province start broadcasting mourning rituals special to Moharram even much earlier than nationwide channels.

Due to the dissatisfaction with domestic televisions, many citizens tend to watch satellite televisions. In minority regions, watching satellite channels have a tremendous cultural and political implication. Various satellite channels broadcast in Arabic, Azeri, and Kurdish specifically for their respective audience inside Iran. The ethnic minority audience of satellite channels, generally find such channels more entertaining, more trustable, and more importantly, more similar to their language and culture (Barraclough, 2001, Elling, 2013: 59-81).

5.3 Conclusion

Seemingly the term mellat refers to all Iranian citizenry, in reality however, by having Persian and Shiism as its main pillars, it exclusively refers to the Persian ethnicity. In other words, the ‘supra-ethnic’ label of Iranian-ness legitimizes the domination of the Persians over other ethnic groups of Iran (Elling, 2013: 44). The term qowm as it is used in contemporary Iran, strips minority populations of their right of having a degree of control over their territories let alone sovereignty (Farhi, 2005: 14). According to the Persian-centered Iranian nationalist discourse, it is only ‘mellat’ that has the right to govern and to be sovereign. The “Iranian nationalist discourse” considers (non-Persian) qowms as purely “cultural” and, hence without any form of political identity, legitimacy, and rights (Vali, 1998: 91). By depicting Iran as a “garden,” in which different qowms symbolize its various colorful flowers, the state-run Iranian TV often exhibits romantic geographies of peace, harmony, multi-culturalism and ‘cultural richness’ of the country (Elling, 2013: 79). In such programs scenic views of natural beauty of minority regions, embellished with folkloric elements of the ethnic groups’ traditional lifestyle, such as costume and cuisine are utilized. Such depictions of minority regions are more commonly seen shortly before and during the elections (Elling, 2013: 189). The ultimate and, implied goal of such representations, however, is to depict the qowms as ‘absolute sub-cultures’ of the “greater Iranian culture.” Such cultural interpretations would allow to nullify and de-legitimize political aspects of various ethno-national minorities in Iran (Elling, 2013: 101).

According to the constitution all citizens are equal before state laws. However, this progressive principle is nullified by articles that allocate certain privileges to those citizens who adhere to Ithna-Ashari Shiite (Arjomand, 2009: 251). Minority struggles against the Persianization policies of subsequent central governments, have emerged as a persistent theme in

30 This “greater Iranian culture” quite often extends much beyond the current borders of the country, and provides a justifiable geopolitical code of propaganda.
the country’s political geography. Since its establishment, the modern Iranian state has tried to prevent and suppress demands for cultural recognition and political decentralization based on distinct identities of minority regions (Elling, 2013). In doing so, the dominant political discourse has attempted to construct an “Iranian national identity” which has inherently been derived from Persian ethnic attributes of Persian language and Shiite religion. By formalizing these attributes in the constitution, central governments have effectively marginalized minority populations within formal political sphere of the country. Besides, protecting Persian language and Shiite religion have been tied to national sovereignty and security.

Persian nationalist intellectuals try to not only represent Persian as the main and superior culture of the country, but also as a form of mega-culture that has the ability to supersede all other “micro-cultures” of the country. These intellectuals transcend one ethnic group of Iranian population, the Persian majority, onto the position of nationhood and ignore “ethnic differences” of Iran’s diverse populations. By using nationalistic and patriarchic metaphors, Iranian nationalist discourse depicts diverse Iranian populations as members of the “larger Iranian family.” From this perspective, distinct characteristics of different ethnic groups are ‘mere sub-cultural differences’ within a larger cultural compound. For instance, minority languages are portrayed as “dialects of Persian.” By taking Persian and Iranian as synonyms, this discourse elevates Persian as the language of the entire country and calls it “the Iranian language” (Boroujerdi, 1998). The modern political history of Iran, as it is related to questions of ethnicity and nationality, however, portrays a different image of the country’s population and their diverse identities.

Regardless of dominant discourse of scholars and their position on questions of ethnicity and nationality in Iran, generally, they have neglected the very conceptualization of nation and ethnicity as “mellat” and “qowm.” What this thesis has brought into attention, hence, is the conceptualization of mellat and qowm in Iran. From a discursive perspective, this thesis argues, mellat and qowm are not sheer vernacular Persian terms with inherent meanings that refer to ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity.’ Rather, it contends, they are discursive constructs that reflect certain mechanisms of power and dominance between Iran’s Persian majority and its ethnic minorities. Thus, mellat and qowm are reflections of a dominant discourse that defines ethnic groups’ political positions, and their access to power. Such a discourse is initiated and reinvigorated by vague and dubious definitions and articles in the constitution. This discourse has also been consolidated by an extensive bulk of nationalist scholarly research. Moreover, the state and its media have disseminated and perpetuated this discourse by metaphors and flattery.

Seemingly mellat refers to any Iranian national, regardless of their ethnic, religious affiliations. In practice, however, claiming official position for Shiite Islam and Persian as the country’s official religion and language, categorizes Iranian populations into first and second classes of citizens (Elling, 2013: 79). Besides, this categorization creates a rift in the Iranian society. Since Persian language and Shiite religion are primarily the cultural elements shared by the Persian ethnic majority, they have been put in the de facto position of nationhood and are considered as mellat. Moreover, promoting Persian and Shiism to official position has effectively marginalized cultural characteristics of non-Persian, non-Shiite ethnic minorities in Iran. The Persian-centered notion of mellat is a constructed term that legitimizes political, and subsequently, cultural and economic dominance of the Persian majority. Persian nationalist discourse selectively ‘prefers’ Persian culture over other cultures of different ethnic groups in
Iran. The famous slogan of the Persian Academy “preserve Persian” is a typical example of such a mindset maintained by the (often state-backed) nationalist intelligentsia. From a counter-discourse perspective, this thesis argues, why shouldn’t non-Persian languages in Iran be preserved? Especially, considering the fact that these languages are ‘Iranian’ too. Moreover, these languages are spoken by millions of Iranians within the borders of the Iranian territory.

Finally, in answering the first sub-question of this thesis, it is necessary to emphasize that the terms mellat and qowm are manufactured products of a political discourse in Iran rather than reflecting inherent meanings or significance. In other words, through the constitution, intellectual practices and education, the media and everyday life of individuals, the will of power has elevated Persian language and Shiite religion to the official position. Giving Persian and Shiite religion formal position not only narrows and blurs the definition and understanding of mellat (especially from the ethnic minorities’ part), but also disenfranchises and alienates ethnic minority populations that do not share one or both of those characteristics.
Chapter 6: Uneven Economic Development

6.1. Introduction

Unequal regional economic development in Iran has been the topic of several books and articles (Aghajanian, 1983, Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987, Sharbatoghlie, 1991, Gheissari and Sanandaji, 2009, etc.) Such an unequal economic development has generally formed a core-periphery pattern, in which, central provinces of the core are more developed, and marginal provinces of the periphery are underdeveloped. Almost since the establishment of the modern state in Iran, the central provinces have been privileged in economic development policies, and peripheral provinces have been neglected (Aghajanian, 1983, Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987). State as the primary, and quite often, the sole economic agent, has played a significant role in development policies in the country. The state development policies have primarily been influenced by two distinguishable, yet interrelated factors, namely modernization and the governmentality of mellat and qowm. The ethnic affiliation of minorities in Iran has played a significant role in state economic policies toward their respective regions. According to this common view of the state, ethnic minorities are not trustworthy parts of the country and are highly susceptible to plotting designed and directed by “foreign enemies.” In many cases the existence of such enemy is taken for granted and, the state even sees no necessity to clarify the enemy’s identity. Such perspective that has generally been known as the “security view” perceives ethnic minorities as the equation of threats and opportunities. From this view point the very existence of ethnic minorities in the “sensitive border areas” is a threat in itself which could easily be exploited by enemies (Elling, 2013: 147).

From a modernization point of view, the state has embarked on modernization, and the immediate attention toward the core has been deemed as necessary and inevitable. In fact, it is presumed that developing central parts of the country (the core) not only facilitates and expedites modernization, but also in the long run, acts as the country’s ‘engine of development.’ Accordingly, an overwhelming portion of state investment in major economic projects and infrastructures is allocated to central Persian-Shiite provinces, and the ethnic periphery is left underdeveloped. The second factor that this thesis emphasizes its importance, and according to many scholars (Aghajanian, 1983, Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987, Amirahmadi, 1989, Elling 2013) accounts for a great deal of unequal economic development in Iran, is the state’s perception of minority regions of the periphery as not secure enough for investment. In this thesis, the state’s perception of the country’s peripheries that accordingly influences its economic policies in ethnic minority periphery is defined as governmentality of mellat and qowm.

Understood as discourses of ethnicity versus nation, governmentality of mellat and qowm explains the state’s aversion in improving the economic condition in minority regions. By demonstrating data on variables of economic development such as the level of industrialization, HDI, and households’ average income in different provinces, this chapter argues that categorizing the population of Iran in ethnic and national classes has influenced state economic development policies. Ethnic peripheries are perceived by the state as non-secure, not committed to the integrity of the country, and as a result, not worthy of investment (Aghajanian, 1983, Elling, 2013: 54). In what follows, modernization and governmentality of qowm and mellat, and their role in unequal spatial development in Iran will be discussed.
6.2 Iran as a Modernizing State

Modernization and, the desire to refashion what was deemed as overwhelmingly traditional remnants of an old empire to a modern country was the main driving force of development policies of the modern Iranian state. The first steps towards modernization were taken in the early years of the Pahlavi dynasty. The apparatus of the modern state was being established, the modern state was increasingly attempting to stretch its influence over the country’s territory, and modernizing projects were being implemented. Building major roads, railroads, and bridges, industries, broadcasting stations, unified army, countrywide judiciary, educational and monetary systems, and other social institutions were notable examples (Aghajanian, 1983: 218-220).

The economic development policies that were applied during the Pahlavi era had two main characteristics. First, they put a strong emphasis on ‘big development projects’ such as large industrial units, and second, the ultimate goal of such economic plans was to reach the same level of economic development as the developed industrial countries. Some scholars have attempted to explain such economic policies by the theoretical framework suggested by Rostow in 1960 (Katouzian, 1981: 203). However, like many other countries of the ‘developing world’ Iran never followed ‘the path’ suggested by Rostow. Even during periods of economic boom and high rates of import-export (mainly import), the country was caught in the ‘transition’ stage and never reached to ‘maturity’ or ‘high mass consumption’ (Katouzian, 1981: 207).

Agriculture which was employing the overwhelming majority of the workforce, was overlooked in major plans of economic development. As a result, vast majorities of the population were disconnected from such plans (Bharier, 1971: 88-100, Daftary, 1973: 179-180, Katouzian, 1981: 203). Urban-centered modernization policies subsequently resulted in
dramatically lower levels of living quality in rural areas, and accordingly resulted in massive waves of rural-urban migrations (Sharbatoglie, 1991: 88-90, Bayat, 1997a: 29).

No matter how deficient the state-led modernization in Iran has been, from a spatial perspective it has caused an imbalanced landscape of economic (under)development throughout the country. The state’s centralist modernization efforts, provided the core with a moderate level of communication and industrial infrastructures, and created a wide gap between core and periphery (Aghajanian, 1983). At the end of 1947 the two provinces of Markazi (at that time, including Tehran) and Esfahan combined, had 42 and 40 percent of large factories and total factories of the country respectively. While those percentages for Kurdistan and Sistan and Baluchistan combined were only 1 and 1 percent (Table 3) (Bharier, 1971: 181-182). In 1975 Tehran was producing roughly half of the country’s total manufacturing products, employing close to one quarter of the total industrial labor. Human aspects of development were also highly imbalanced. At the same time, the literacy rate in Tehran was 62 percent, while it was only 27 percent in East Azerbaijan, 26 percent in Sistan and Baluchistan, and 25 percent in Kurdistan (Abrahamian, 1982: 449, Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987: 159).

Primarily ethnic minority regions of Iran’s peripheries were ignored in projects of economic development. Instead, the state attempted to integrate the ethnic minority periphery through bureaucracy, rather than answering its demands for economic development (Aghajanian, 1983). In achieving this objective, state demolished the local self-sustained socioeconomic structures of ethnic minority communities. In so doing, Reza shah’s modern state, deprived the local traditional nobility from their positions of power. Besides, the disruption of traditional agricultural structures also affected the country’s ethnic minority peripheries the most. In such regions, communities were mainly depending on agriculture. Negligence of agriculture, and tribal-rural life also increased rural-urban exodus in the long term (Bayat, 1997a: 29, Javan, 2001: 318).

Oil revenues played a significant role in state’s growing centralization, providing the state with enough leeway in its development policies. Oil dollars made the state grow independent and detached from the public (Katouzian, 1981, Aghajanian, 1983: 221, Moghadam, 1984: 231). Moreover, due to relying on oil revenues, the state did not need to collect taxes from its subject-citizens, which in return reduced their mutual relationship, and made the state free to apply centralized economic policies (Skocpol, 1982: 269).

With economic discontent playing a major role in bringing minority populations to the streets in 1979, after the revolution, the Islamic Republic pledged to attend to the grievances of the demonstrators. Egalitarian distribution of wealth throughout the country was one of the main promises of the post-revolutionary government. However, the main characteristics of the Pahlavi’s economic system including centralization, state’s strong role and drive toward modernization remained intact (Pesaran2012: 42).
6.2.1 Central Planning and Economic Centralization

Centralization has been an integral aspect of economic life of the modern Iranian state. Economic centralization, to a great extent, has been the result of the unitary-centralized political system of the country (Amirahmadi, 1989: 112). The system itself, has deep historical, as well as (geo)political roots and rationalizations. In such a system, central government has possessed almost total regulatory powers, and has implemented highly centralized top-down planning programs. Since 1949 the Plan and Budget Organization (PBO)\textsuperscript{31} has functioned as the main apparatus of the state to distinguish and determine the ‘needs’ and ‘potentials’ of different provinces, formulate a detailed development plan, and allocate certain amounts of budget to each province. The PBO also oversees Planning Councils of Province, which function as its regional branches (Razavi and Vakil, 1984: 119, Amirahmadi, 1989: 111-112). In most cases, provincial councils have few to no decisions-making power, and need the approval of Tehran initiate local projects (Amirahmadi, 1989: 111)

Negligence of the underdeveloped periphery of the country has been one of the main characteristics of centralized planning. In the first two Development Plans (1949-62) a considerable emphasis was put on large scale agricultural, industrial, transportation and infrastructural projects, which in effect benefited central provinces with bigger cities and higher numbers of urban residents compared to the peripheral provinces with higher rural populations and much smaller cities and towns. These plans spent much of their foreseen expenditures in agriculture on building large dams while only allocating a scanty amount to loans for small scale irrigation. As a result, these plans and in a similar way, following plans, had very few, to no effect on improving the livelihoods of poor villagers and residents of small, mostly agricultural towns in remote parts of the country’s peripheries (Katouzian, 1981: 204, Afshar, 1985: 61-62, Pesaran, 1985: 27). Facing the excessive centralization of the prerevolutionary planning, the post-revolutionary state initiated a ‘special attention’ to underdeveloped areas under the banner of ‘neglected regions\textsuperscript{32}.’ Nevertheless, such attentions were mostly superficial and centralization was still going on faster than before (Amirahmadi, 1989: 113)

\textsuperscript{31} Later in 1997 the PBO was merged into the newly established Management and Planning Organization (MPO).

\textsuperscript{32} ‘Neglected regions’ and similar terms are various English translations for the Persian term manategh-e mahroom. This term refers to the least developed provinces and areas of Iran. Sistan and Baluchistan, Kurdistan, Kohkilouyeh and Boyerahmad, Ilam and Bushehr are some classic examples.
In the industrial sector most of the expenditures went to a limited number of large-scale industries such as textiles. In 1947 three provinces of Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchistan and Kurdistan altogether, had only one percent of large factories in Iran, while it was 49 percent for Markazi (including Tehran), Esfahan and Khurasan (Table 3). In the same manner, in transportation and infrastructure a big portion was devoted to developing a network of railways and roads that primarily connected central industrialized regions to export ports of the country on northern and southern shores (Bharier, 1971: 88-94, Pesaran, 1985: 20, Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987: 170-171). This trend more or less persisted in the third and fourth development plans with an immense emphasis on projects such as dams and transportation infrastructures (Bharier, 1971: 99).

Under the Islamic Republic, a more equitable distribution of budget and resources in favor of ‘neglected regions’ was one of the main qualitative goals of the first five-year plan (1982-1987) (Amirahmadi, 1989: 110-114, Amuzegar, 1997: 126). ‘Special attention’ towards ‘neglected regions’ was an inevitable response to inordinate centralization, and thus, underdevelopment of the country’s periphery. More than three decades after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, however, provinces of the so called ‘neglected regions’ are still among the least developed parts of the country. More recently, in 2006 a new law was implemented that allowed the ‘deprived provinces’ to receive 1 percent of annual gas revenues. Quite surprisingly, Sistan and Baluchistan and Kurdistan were not included to benefit from the plan (Sabermahani et al., 2013: 154).

![Table 3: Location of Factories in Operation at End of 1947. Source: Bharier, 1971: 182](image)

Proponents of the current spatial economic layout argue that over time the socioeconomic condition of the peripheral provinces would improve. However, long term data show that interprovincial disparities tend to deteriorate rather than alleviate (Aghajanian 1983, Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987). A cursory look at provinces and their position shifts over time demonstrates
that those provinces that have experienced highest improvement belong to central parts of the country and generally are not home to significant numbers of ethnic minorities. Contrary to that, those provinces that underwent the most severe deterioration in their positions in the hierarchy are all peripheral provinces and generally home to ethnic minority populations (Maps 5, 6 and 7).

In a matter of about two decades from 1966 to 1985, ethnic peripheral provinces such as Sistan and Baluchistan and Kurdistan have remained in the lower-most sections of the ranking. During the same period, other ethnic peripheral provinces such as East Azerbaijan and Khuzestan have also experienced relegation in their positions. However, the trend of development for core provinces has continued, and more provinces in the center are highlighted in dark blue, which shows more centralization of development and peripheralization of underdevelopment.
Map 6: Provinces Human Development Ranking – 1976 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)

Map 7: Provinces Human Development Ranking – 1985 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)
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Table 4: Mobility of provinces within provincial hierarchy 1966-76 Source: Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987: 168
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Table 5: Mobility of provinces within provincial hierarchy 1976-85. Source: Sharbatoghlie, 1991: 133
The tables 4 and 5 also show the main trends in the country. Predominantly central provinces such as Markazi (including Tehran), and Esfahan generally have maintained their superior positions. In the opposite way, East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzistan, and Sistan and Baluchistan have mainly either fallen to lower positions or kept their inferior spots (Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987: 168). In 1976-85 decade Markazi (including Tehran) constantly remains unchallenged at the top-most spot of the provincial hierarchy. Esfahan has also made considerable improvement by ascending three spots from seventh to fourth position. In the bottom of the hierarchy there are Sistan and Baluchistan and Kurdistan, with Sistan and Baluchistan consistently occupying the lower-most spot and Kurdistan descending one position staying twenty second. East Azerbaijan and Khuzistan lost their previous spots falling to lower positions (Sharbatoghlie, 1991: 133). In the same period, West Azerbaijan underwent the most drastic downfall (Sharbatoghlie, 1991: 133). Possible explanations for these trends could be the fact that unlike disadvantaged provinces, favored provinces remained unharmed from post-revolutionary turmoil and war against Iraq, while receiving favorable attentions from the ‘religious factor’ in the Islamic Republic (Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987: 176). The economic degradation of peripheral provinces did not abate after the 1979 revolution. Since then, ethnic peripheral provinces have made “insignificant progress” in many socioeconomic aspects (Elling, 2013: 56).

6.2.2 Negligence of Agriculture and Rural Areas

If from a core-periphery perspective, the state-led modernization in Iran betrayed the peripheral provinces in favor of the core, from an urban-rural point of view, it betrayed rural areas in a more severe manner. Since its commencement, modernization has been taken synonym with urbanization, and rural areas have been forgotten, if not ignored. Even rare development projects that have dealt with rural areas have been impractical and alien to rural populations. Quite often, such projects are too grandiose, and as a result, hard to relate to local populations. Consequently, these plans have had very few to no effect on improving the livelihoods of poor villagers, especially in remote parts of the country’s periphery (Katouzian, 1981: 204, Afshar, 1985: 61-68, Pesaran, 1985: 27, Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987: 171). Since agriculture and rural activities have played a significant role in livelihoods of Iran’s ethnic minorities, ignoring agricultural sector has also been, to a large extend, ignoring ethnic minority regions (Aghajanian, 1983: 221-222).

The Land Reform Law, which in part was implemented under the so called Shah’s ‘White Revolution’ further contributed to socio-economic polarization of the country’s rural population by dividing rural populations into ‘landed’ and ‘landless’ peasants. Although the initial intention of the Land Reforms was to enable all the peasants to work on their own lands, the plan, however, was presumed too radical by some statesmen (Afshar, 1985: 62-64, Pesaran, 1985: 86).

Sistan and Baluchistan is an exception ascending only one spot from the lower most position to second lowest

34 Also known as ‘Shah and People Revolution’ in 1962 introduced a series of social, political and economic reforms including land reform and nationalization of pastures and forests, expanding educational system (especially to remote villages) by the means of the so called knowledge corps, and enlarging judiciary and bureaucratic apparatus of the state (Pesaran, 1985: 86).

35 known as khoshneshinan
The landless rural class saw almost no chance but to migrate to urban centers to join the booming construction sector as unskilled daily-waged workers. Rural-urban migration increased 78 percent in 1966-76 compared to 1956-66. This flow of migrants contributed significantly to explosive urban population growth (Pesaran, 1985: 28-29, Noorbakhsh, 2002: 4). Such influx caused acute problems in destination by increasing urban squatters and depletion of urban services. Besides, it also created a shortage of workers during harvest season in rural areas.

Rural underdevelopment could be explained in a larger picture of neglecting agriculture, which used to employ the largest chunk of Iran’s workforce (Afshar, 1981: 60-61, Afshar, 1985: 60). Food subsidies were also among factors that contributed greatly to degradation of rural life. During late 1960s and early 1970s, thanks to a drastic increase in oil revenues, the government was spending on food subsidies quite generously. By artificially keeping the prices of agricultural products low, such subsidies had a deteriorating influence on livelihoods of rural farmers (Hetherington, 1982:370-371, Afshar, 1985: 69-70). Besides, the psychological effect of this process further expedited rural-urban migrations when poor peasants were comparing their hard labor and low income, with fairly easier activities with relatively better wages of their already migrated fellows (Byat, 1997a: 29).

Unequal centralized modernization policies of subsequent Pahlavi and Islamic Republic administrations have led to tremendous regional disparities between more developed Persian-dominated core, and less developed ethnic minority periphery in Iran (Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987: 172, Amirrahmadi, 1989: 93-94). In what follows a general historical background of spatiality of interprovincial inequality is provided. Afterwards, data on size and location of industrial units, income and expenditure, and HDI will be presented to demonstrate the core-periphery interprovincial inequality. In doing so, the emphasis would be on four provinces of East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan, and Sistan and Baluchistan, which are home to major ethnic minorities in Iran.

6.3 Iran’s Uneven Economic Development

Since the establishment of Iran as a modern state, economic modernization and industrialization have been significantly biased; favoring the Persian-Shiite core over the ethnic periphery (Abrahamian, 1982: 448, Aghajanian, 1983: 221). As an early example of such a bias, during 1930s, from about twenty five textile industries, nine of them were in Esfahan and others in Tehran and Mazandaran (Aghajanian, 1983: 221). Almost all provinces that are geographically located in the peripheries and are home to various ethnic minorities also, happen to be economically underdeveloped. In other words, regional disparity fault lines in Iran, to a great extent, coincide with those of ethnic minorities versus Persian majority (Aghajanian, 1983; Sharbatoghlie, 1991, Gheissari and Sanandaji, 2009: 290). This acute and persistent regional inequality is even in stark conflict with the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. Article 48 asserts:

“There must be no discrimination among the various provinces and regions with regard to the exploitation of natural resources, utilization of public revenues, and distribution of economic activities of the country. Thereby ensuring that every region has access to the necessary capital and facilities in accordance with its needs and capacity for growth” (The Constitution, Article 48, Amirahmadi, 1989: 104).
Amirahmadi and Atash (1987) and Amirahmadi (1989) categorize the provinces of Iran to three groups. The group of the most developed provinces are also those provinces that are mostly located in the central parts of the country and speak Persian. The group of moderately developed provinces primarily speaks Persian too, with a considerable population of ethnic minorities and, finally the group of the least developed provinces is dominated by members of ethnic minorities namely, Baluchis and the Kurds (Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987: 172, Amirahmadi, 1989: 93). Such regional inequalities have also been manifested in areas of wealth, income and expenditure. For instance, in 1971-72 the average household expenditure in Markazi province was twice that in Sistan and Baluchistan and 1.4 that of Kurdistan (Pesaran, 1985: 30).

Development inequality between core and periphery has added a new aspect to ethno-national politics in Iran. As Tohidi (2009) puts it, many grievances of ethnic minorities regarding their unequal and unjust socio-economic status, relates to uneven development policies implemented by both Pahlavi and Islamic Republic. Such policies have been centralist, étatiste and Persian-centered; and subsequently, have resulted in extreme core-periphery disparities (Aghajanian, 1983: 212, Tohidi, 2009: 316). In this way, the governmentality of mellat and qowm has manifested its economic development aspects. Indeed, based on what has been known as the “security view,” consecutive administrations have deemed ethnic minority regions of the periphery as ‘not a priority’ for investment, if not totally ‘not worthy of investment.’ According to several different economic and human measures of development, ethnic minority provinces of the periphery, generally, lag behind Persian-Shiite provinces of the core. Levels of industrialization, wealth, and HDI have been chosen in this thesis to show the core-periphery disparity.

This thesis focuses on the levels of development in East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchistan as ethnic minority provinces of the periphery, compared to Persian-Shiite dominated provinces of the core such as Tehran, Markazi, Esfahan, Yazd, Semnan and Qom. Obviously, not all ethnic minorities of Iran necessarily live in these provinces. Besides, not all the populations of these provinces belong to ethnic minorities of Azeri, Kurd, Arab, and Baluch respectively, and there are populations of Persians as well as other ethnic groups living in each of these provinces. For instance, Persians, along with other ethnic groups – primarily Lurs- constitute almost half of the population of Khuzestan (Aghajanian, 1983: 214)36. Making the picture even more complicated, millions of Azeri, Kurdish, Arab and Baluchi ethnic minorities live in other, and primarily neighboring provinces. However, provinces of East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchistan have been selected to delimit the study area. These provinces have primarily been compared to Persian-Shiite dominated provinces of the core such as Tehran, Markazi, Esfahan, Yazd, Semnan and Qom.  

6.3.1 Uneven Industrialization  

Industrialization has been one of the key components of modernization and economic development in Iran (Aghajanian, 1983: 222). Industrialization of a specific region, does not simply demonstrate the number of industrial units in that region or the level of access to job opportunities by its residents. Rather, it is a manifestation of the level of development of that region too. In fact, a high level of industrialization in a region shows how much it has departed

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36 For more discussion on this look at Aghajanian 1983, and Elwell-Sutton (1955).
from depending on agricultural activities of the primary sector. In fact, the level of industrialization for each province is an important benchmark for socioeconomic status of its residents, and even the level of affluence (Aghajanian, 1983: 214). Accordingly, the level of industrialization could be used to measure the level of inequality in economic development of each province.

Few aspects of economic development in Iran demonstrate ethnic inequalities more clearly than the spatiality of industrial units (Aghajanian, 1983: 221). The spatial pattern of large industrial units in Iran, generally follow the larger pattern of core-periphery economic development in the country. Core provinces have comparatively higher numbers of large industrial units, than peripheral provinces. In 1996, Tehran and Esfahan were the most industrialized provinces with 903 and 203 large industrial units respectively. In the same year, Sistan and Baluchistan and Kurdistan, had 16 and 14 large industrial units respectively, which accordingly put them at the bottom of the ranking (Table 2). The pattern has more or less continued, and in 2006 Tehran and Esfahan are still at the top of the table with 1161, and 466 large industrial units, while Sistan and Baluchistan and Kurdistan are at the lower most part of the table with each only 14 large industrial units (Table 2). This table shows that the number of large industrial units of Tehran has increased considerably in a decade. During the same time, Esfahan has more than doubled its large industrial establishments. The number of large industrial units of Kurdistan has remained the same, and the number for Sistan and Baluchistan province has even dropped from 16 in 1996 to 14 in 2006.

The core-periphery pattern of economic industrialization in Iran is even easier to notice if the distribution of industrial units would also be depicted per capita. In fact, while provinces like Yazd and Semnan may not show large numbers of industrial units compared to other central provinces of the country, if divided by the population, they show a high concentration of industrial units.

Further analysis of the data available for the spatiality of Iran’s industrial units demonstrates the fact that over time, ethnic minority provinces such as Kurdistan and Sistan and Baluchistan have witnessed deterioration in their level of industrialization compared to other provinces (Hedayati, 2006). Underdeveloped ethnic provinces of the periphery have not experienced the same level of industrialization as the developed Persian-dominated core, and the gap between developed core and underdeveloped periphery has increased. Maps 6.5 to 6.10, show that over decades, the policy of industrial centralization has been pursued vigorously. In this section, the maps of industrial units per capita are especially helpful. While the maps of numbers of industrial units show a less unequal distribution, the maps of industrial units per capita depict the fact that ethnic periphery provinces are less industrialized. The per capita maps show more dark colored provinces in the core and pale colored provinces in the periphery.

37 ‘Large industrial units’ refers to manufacturing establishments with 50 or more employees.
Map 8: Large Industrial Units by Province – 1981 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)

Map 9: Large Industrial Units Per capita by Province – 1981 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)
Map 10: Large Industrial Units by Province – 1996 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)

Map 21: Large Industrial Units Per capita by Province – 1996 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)
Map 32: Large Industrial Units by Province – 2006 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)

Map 43: Large Industrial Units Per capita by Province – 2006 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)
While the maps of per capita show a better image of the level of industrialization for different provinces, yet they are mute over distribution within provinces. Generally, the levels of industrialization within provinces are also uneven and depending on geographic, administrative and demographic factors some counties, cities, and towns are more industrialized. Known as the center of Iranian oil and gas reserves and industries, Khuzestan is a noteworthy example. It is often viewed as an industrialized province, however, in terms of per capita, it falls behind provinces such as Yazd, Markazi, Semnan and Qazvin (Maps 9, 11 and 13). The inequality also persist within the province and the province capital, Ahvaz is more industrialized compared to other parts of the province especially predominantly Arab-populated western counties such as Shush, Abadan and Khorramshahr. As a result, most development and industrial project in the province do not benefit generally poor local Arab population (Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987: 172).

6.3.2 Uneven Wealth

Like many other indices of economic development, levels of income and expenditure in different provinces are generally related to the larger picture of economic development in Iran. In terms of income, in 1975 Iran had the world’s second most severe regional gap between Sistan and Baluchistan the most impoverished province, and Markazi the most affluent province, with a 1 to 10 income ratio of $313 and $3132 respectively (Amirahmadi, 1989: 93). Due to unequal access the employment opportunities and lack of investment, throughout decades, this disparity has more or less persisted.

The levels of income and expenditure of sample households around the country make meaningful connections with other indices that have been used here. Less developed provinces of the periphery, on average, have more households under lower income/expenditure categories, and vice versa. The expenditure index here, particularly accounts for wage differences between provinces, and helps to understand the levels of life in terms of affordability or expensiveness of different cities. For instance, a household in Tehran may earn more income than a household in Sistan and Baluchistan, but at the same time it has to pay more, compared to the household in Sistan and Baluchistan.
Map 54: Provinces Household Income – 1993 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)

Map 65: Provinces Household Expenditure – 1993 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)
6.3.3 Uneven Human Development

Measures such as the number of industrial units and the level of wealth are mute on human aspects of development. To alleviate this issue, the HDI index for different provinces is also demonstrated. Besides, due to its inclusiveness, the HDI is one of the most appropriate indices used for measuring development (Sabermahani et al., 2013). Human development index in Iran generally, follows the patterns of industrialization and wealth in the country. Accordingly, more industrialized and wealthier provinces also show better scores of HDI, and vice versa.

An examination of these maps (Maps 16, 17 and 18) shows that Persian-dominated provinces of the core have relatively higher HDI scores, while most provinces in the ethnic peripheries of the country show lower scores. In many aspects of development such as life expectancy, literacy rates and wealth Sistan and Baluchistan and Kurdistan not only lag behind other provinces, but also together with Khuzestan and to a lesser extend Azeri speaking provinces are among the least developed provinces in Iran (Elling, 2013: 56).

Map 76: Provinces HDI – 1996 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)
Map 87: Provinces HDI – 2001 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)

Map 98: Provinces HDI – 2005 (Data from Statistical Center of Iran)
6.4 Uneven Development and Ethnic Minority Regions

As mentioned throughout this thesis, interprovincial inequalities in economic development have immense ethno-national dimensions as well. Many scholars, and also an abundant bulk of data support the argument that lines of unequal interprovincial development, in many instances, overlap with lines that separate the Persian-Shiite majority of the core from ethnic minorities of the peripheries of Iran. By looking at the map of ethnic groups of the country (Map 19), this fact becomes clearer that most provinces that are economically developed, are also located in the central parts of the country, and hence dominated by Persian-speaking communities.

No matter if they have mentioned the ‘ethnic aspect’ of underdevelopment, most studies that have dealt with economic development in Iran, and its regional and interprovincial dimensions have identified central, Persian-speaking provinces like Tehran, Markazi, Qom and Esfahan among others, as the highest developed provinces, while also pointing out peripheral minority dominated provinces such as Sistan and Baluchistan and Kurdistan among others, as the least developed provinces (Aghajanian, 1983, Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987, Sharbatoghlie, 1991, Noorbakhsh, 2002, Gheissari and Sanandaji, 2009). Moreover, there are considerable disparities

Map 109: Iran - Ethnic Groups (http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/)

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between provinces that are classified under the same categories based on their level of development. For instance, Tehran is by far the most developed province within the category of developed provinces. The same situation is true regarding Sistan and Baluchistan being the most impoverished province within the category of underdeveloped provinces (Noorbakhsh, 2002).

This ‘double under/development’ for Tehran and Sistan and Baluchistan is of immense political implications in terms of access to power structures and centers of policy-making and investment.

6.5 Conclusion

Considering Persian language and Shiite Islam as the backbone of the Iranian nation, has created a core-periphery rift in which, the Persian majority are at the center and various ethnic minorities are in the periphery of Iran’s territory. From spatial perspective, this core-periphery of ethnic demography also overlaps with levels of economic (under)development in the country. In such a core-periphery pattern the Persian-Shiite region of the core consists of more developed provinces, while the ethnic minority periphery primarily encompasses underdeveloped provinces. Although modernization which centered on Tehran and other large cities of central Iran, in part, explains this unequal development, the state’s aversion in investment in ethnic minority regions also plays a significant role.

The state as the main economic agent has been reluctant in investing in minority regions of Iran. This reluctance has primarily originated from the state’s perception of minority populations as not a priority, and also potential threats to security and sovereignty of the Iranian state. According to Persian-centered discourse, development and prosperity of the country’s ethnic minority periphery also bears the threat of secession with it (Aghajanian, 1983, Amirahmadi and Atash, 1987, Amirahmadi, 1989, Elling 2013).
Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate the relationship between political discourses of nation and ethnicity, and regional inequality in Iran. According to this thesis, mellat and qowm as categories of ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity’ have neither inherent nor natural meanings, rather, they are conceptualizations of the dominant political discourses in Iran. Such discourses categorize the Iranian population based on their ethno-linguistic and religious affiliations. These categorizations, assign two meanings to mellat: one as every Iranian individual, and the other as Persian-Shiites. This, inevitably divides the Iranians into first-class of Persian-Shiites and lower-classes of non-Persians, non-Shiites or non-Persian-Shiites. This thesis further argues that alienation and marginalization of large numbers of qowms (ethnic minority citizens) that don’t share one or both of Persian language and Shiite religion, is the immediate result of such categorizations.

Chapter six of this thesis that corresponds with the second sub-question, contends that state’s perception of ethnic minorities as second-class citizens has influenced its policies of economic development in those ethnic periphery regions. According to this perspective, the dominant political discourse of the state, has applied “the security view” in relation to ethnic minority regions. The security view, has regarded the ethnic minority periphery as ‘not an integrated part of the nation,’ ‘not committed to the state,’ even a ‘potential threat’ to the country’s sovereignty, and thus not worthy of investment and development. These economic policies of the state, informed by the security view, has prevented ethnic periphery provinces from reaching the proper levels of their development potentials. This thesis argues, over decades, state-led policies of economic development has created an internal core-periphery pattern of socio-economic development within Iran. This core-periphery pattern of socio-economic development, to a large extent, overlaps with the ethno-religious composition of the country, in which the Persian-Shiite dominated core is more developed, and ethnic minority periphery is less developed.

The core-periphery socio-economic disparity, is not only of immense implications for interprovincial migration flows in Iran, but also when overlapped with ethno-religious structure, has enormous potential consequences for population mix and cultural assimilation in the country. As populations from less developed ethnic periphery migrate to more developed cities of the core, they find themselves in a different cultural milieu under the domination of Persian language and Shiite religion. In what follows, this section attempts to pose some speculations for cultural assimilation potentials of interprovincial migration.

7.1 Migration Effects on Iran’s Minority Regions

In Iran’s multi-ethnic settings, regional inequalities could function as instigators of demographic change. One of the most important ways in which demographic change occurs, is a two-way process of interprovincial migration between core and periphery. From one way, members of ethnic minorities of the periphery migrate to the Persian-majority core, and from the opposite direction, members of the Persian-majority migrate to and settle in ethnic minority regions. The assumption of this thesis is, economic impetus and seeking more employment opportunities, partly explain out-migration from ethnic minority periphery to Persian-majority core (Aghajanian, 1983: 221). In-migration into ethnic minority periphery from Persian-majority core, however, could not simply be understood as economically motivated.
7.1.1 De-concentration by Out-migration/Urbanization

Due to economic underdevelopment, ethnic minority regions of the periphery offer less employment opportunities and as a result, their generally young populations seek employment in larger industrialized cities of the core. In some instances, such cities might be located in the periphery or nearby minority provinces. However, most of such cities are located in the Persian dominated core. In the cities of the Persian dominated core, minority populations find themselves in a different cultural milieu in which they cannot practice or express their native ethnic cultures. In fact, in Persian dominated cities of the core, formal and informal spaces of everyday life are under the influence of Persian language and Shiite religion. Assuming that members of the household still practice their native culture within the household and do not voluntarily encourage or pursue assimilation, assimilation happens virtually anywhere outside the household space.

Quite often, family environment of the ethnic migrant households are a mixture of native ethnic and hegemonic Persian cultures. Older generations and especially parents continue to speak their ethnic mother tongue and practice their traditional religion. However, the children who were either born or raised in the new cultural environment of the Persian core, often speak Persian and may even practice rituals of Shiite Islam. As large numbers of population migrate from the ethnic peripheries to the Persian dominated core, over generations and long periods of time, cultural change and assimilation seems to be very likely (Elling, 2013: 55).

Since the first official countrywide population census in 1956 in Iran ethnic peripheral provinces such as East Azerbaijan and Khuzestan have been among top migrant senders to other provinces. Moreover migration balance for provinces such as Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan and Sistan and Baluchistan has generally been negative meaning that they have primarily been migrant senders rather than migrant receivers (Javan, 2001). This may provide a basis for speculations about the large number of Azeri populations outside traditional Azeri dominated regions. This might also provide some basic initial ideas for understanding the reason behind the ‘dramatic demographic change’ in Khuzestan that has transformed it from an Arab dominated province to a very highly mixed population structure of Persian, Arab, and Lur. Some scholars have mentioned the effects of Iran-Iraq war in changing the demographic composition of Khuzestan.

Apart from the regular internal migrations, wars have also functioned as tools of population mix. As a long lasting war, the eight-year war with Iraq had profound effects on population structure of Iran’s western provinces. While the real extend that the Iran-Iraq war displaced populations and mingled ethnic groups out of their regions is not clear, what is certain is the fact that Iran-Iraq war internally displaced thousands of minority population in western Iran primarily Arabs and Kurds as refugees. These populations settled in predominantly Persian speaking cities of central regions, either integrating with host communities, or forming ‘ethnic enclaves with their co-ethnic brethren (Elling, 2013: 57).

7.1.2 De-concentration by In-migration

War and dramatic events provide some basis for speculation about population mix and demographic change. Many more factors, however, affect demographic structures of different regions in more subtle, yet persistent manners. With increasing number of Persian populations that migrate to ethnic peripheries, many scholars as well as lay Iranians have started noticing an
unofficial and undeclared policy of demographic change by the Iranian state. Many members of ethnic minorities have suspiciously been noticing the increase of “outsiders” inside their cities and towns. For instance, Elling (2013) briefly mentions such concerns of the local Baluchi population in Sistan and Baluchistan province. “The policies of the Iranian state in encouraging migration to Baluchistan has generated anger among local Baluchi population” (Elling, 2013: 55). Arab community of Khuzestan also shares similar concerns. They have specifically been concerned with land confiscations by the government, and also in-migration from Persian regions to work in oil industry (Elling, 2013: 70). While regional and local economies of ethnic minority regions are generally weak and quite often cannot naturally absorb the new-comers, most of these migrants work in government offices, institutions and establishments. In fact, it is very common to see non-native statesmen, higher and lower ranked office workers in governmental offices of minority regions. By virtue of the boom in academic education, these minority regions usually have enough well-educated workforce to fill such positions.

Due to better employment conditions, these primarily Persian-speaking migrants to minority regions normally enjoy a higher level quality of life compared to the local populations. In addition, migrants are usually supported by various state loans and land allocation through their respective offices. These factors also contribute to native populations’ resentment towards central government. Moreover, because of linguistic differences, quite often these office clerks find it hard to communicate with locals. The author of these lines has witnessed several occasions in which native Kurds, especially senior citizens that sometimes can speak only few Persian words had to communicate with non-native office clerks with tremendous difficulty.

Aside from regular civil workers in governmental offices, members of the armed forces are also among migrants from the Persian core to ethnic minority peripheries. In fact, a large majority of different branches of security forces such as police, army and the Revolutionary Guards in minority regions are formed of non-natives. Such military migrants are often viewed by the locals as agents of the hard oppressive force of the authority, and also as outsiders to their communities that use scarce resources of their region. This provides members of minority populations with several reasons to look at such migrants with resentment and anger. Due to their remoteness, lack of infrastructures and urban amenities, and most importantly, because of being ‘perceived as not safe,’ ethnic minority regions are not a desirable destination for state-employed migrants. Moreover, although these migrants are supported by the state to overcome destination repulsions, these migrants are generally aware that they will not be welcome by local populations (Elling, 2013: 55). In time of social or ethnic unrest, these migrant members of the armed forces could be viewed as ‘agents of the state’ and thus convenient targets. For instance, in February 1999 unrest in Sanandaj there were rumors of disarming and executing a military officer by the angry crowd. In the same incident that lasted for half a day, as many as three to eighteen civilians were shot dead by security forces.

7.2 Assimilation and Persianization

No matter internal migration is from an ethnic minority region to a Persian majority dominated region, or vice versa, it has immense assimilatory potentials. This is primarily due to the dominance of Persian language and culture in different domains within the country. In fact, considering the larger political and cultural frame of Iran with educational system and media playing a significant role, internal migration could only facilitate assimilation. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, out-migration of ethnic minority populations from their native regions
towards Persian-dominated regions presents a powerful assimilatory dynamic. However, in-migration of Persian populations into minority regions could also lead to assimilation in favor of the dominant Persian language and culture. In fact, when Persian populations migrate to ethnic minority regions they do not learn the language of the minority regions, and it is their ethnic minority hosts that should speak Persian with them.

While the effect of one individual in a group of friends, one family in a neighborhood, or in a similar manner one neighborhood in a city may seem too insignificant to mention, however, the entire cultural package that they represent has an immense influence on native ethnic minority populations. Due to better employment and affluence, Persian migrants in minority regions are viewed by some locals as more educated, and more “up-to-date.” Such perception is in align with the imagery produced by the media that represent Persian culture as superior, and Persian language as a richer language compared to its ethnic counterparts. To put it in more Iranian context “Persian is –as sweet as- sugar” is a very well-known saying advertised by the state media. All of a sudden, for increasing numbers of ethnic minority populations speaking Persian -or at least having some Persian words in the sentences-, and behaving like the Persians becomes fashionable.

7.3 Future Research

The ‘ethnic issue’ in Iran has been viewed from different perspectives. However, the effects of internal migration and its potential demographic implications for ethnic minority populations have generally been overlooked. There are several interrelated factors that contribute to such a failure in conducting research in this dynamic field. Lack of reliable data is one of the most important of such factors. The unavailability of data could be the result of some major obstacles. Data regarding internal migration in Iran, usually does not include migration flows between provinces in relation to each other. Rather it generally includes in-migration and out-migration for different individual provinces regardless of migrants’ future destination or previous origin. This makes it very hard for scholars to track down migratory patterns between individual provinces one by one. In this case, the 1996 census is the only exception, in which in-migration and out-migration for all provinces is available. Another difficulty is the fact that while recording individuals’ internal migration, their ethnic affiliation is not asked. As a result, any study reflecting ethnic dynamics of internal migration in Iran ought to leave room for some speculations. For instance, if a scholar attempts to examine the ethnic effects of in-migration of around eight hundred thousand people to Khuzestan in a ten years period, they have assumed that they are originally from other provinces. In reality, however, a considerable part of such population might simply be returnees. Another issue, which is similar to the previous problem is the fact that there are many provinces with different levels of ethnically mixed populations, and not all the population of the so called ethnic provinces belong to that specific ethnic group.

Profound understanding of ethnic dynamics of interprovincial migration requires extensive field work and individual interviews. Unavailability of adequate data, especially in below-province scales has been a major impediment for this study. Besides, any study considering ethnic related aspects of internal migration would demand a more open political space within the academia (Elling, 2013).
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