

Anthropology and ethnic studies, Iran



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Abstract

For writing this invited paper, I was given the title Ethnic Groups of Iran and I was also asked to inform the reader/audience about the general situation of anthropology in the country. Specific questions were asked and the first part of this paper responds to those questions. The second part can be best understood if at the time of the reading reference could be made to the site mentioned in the article.

A few articles and one book have discussed the history of the field of anthropology in Iran and they are discussed in this text. This field has had great difficulty trying to establish itself in the country due to the sensitivity of the political machine of the country which at times it did not really understand its topic, and at others was sensitive to the information it could bring from rural and pastoral areas of Iran to the center and critically consider the activities of the government. Transparency of political activities have always been at odds with social sciences, and this can clearly be seen in the problems anthropology has had to face to establish itself. The very name of the field has been problematic and this also shows the lack of discussion of the erudite of the field in a clear manner. Today this field is dispersed in various faculties of different universities and topics.

The second part of this paper concentrates on my own work on the ethnic groups of country, and a map and a site which I have made to represent the active cultural life of all different peoples of Iran. My anthropological knowledge has helped me to divide the work according first to subsistence (pastoral nomadic, rural and urban), and then according to cultural characteristics and my hope is to continue this work which has been a very important lack in Human Relations Area Files. So far I only have some titles in English, its translation into English could disseminate the information to the anthropological scientific world.

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This paper was presented at the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) Forum as one of the keynote speeches in Oct 2021. “Anthropology and Ethnic Studies around the World” was one of the key themes of the forum and I was given the title Ethnic Groups of Iran and I was also asked to inform the reader/audience about the general situation of anthropology in the country. Specific questions were asked and the first part of this paper responds to those questions. The second part can be best understood if at the time of the reading reference could be made to the site mentioned in the article.

The discipline of anthropology

The disciplinary status of all social sciences and humanities is low in Iran’s higher educational system. From early childhood, children are told that they should study to become medical doctors or engineers. Those who go into literature and history are generally from families who have been rich in this tradition, or those who simply want to get a university degree.

Among social sciences, anthropology is even more misunderstood and has a lower status than political science, sociology, psychology, education and it has been pushed to study marginal issues or the marginalized people, and at best folklore and handicraft studies. We can understand this low status of anthropology, if we look at its history and see that for one reason since this field was not strongly founded, that is with specialists of the field, it easily has been ignored, misunderstood or survived in a state of ambivalence as we shall see below.

The first effort to establish this field in Iran was made by Sadeq Hedayat who was a social critic and a novelist of great importance. He wrote two pieces *Neyrangestan* (Hedayat 1933) and *Owsane* (Hedayat 1931) and more important articles on methodology for research as early as 1944–45 (Shahshahani 1986 and related notes). But the problem was that when in 1936 the Shah of Iran, Reza Shah the first Pahlavi king, decided and gave orders to establish an “Institute of ethnology ... for gathering the folklore and customs of different people of Iran ... and a museum and a library” (Shahshahani 1986)¹ Sadeq Hedayat was not included, rather a number of men of literature and philosophy became the organizing committee. One of them wrote the following, showing his and others’ lack of interest in anthropology per se, and his appreciation went toward establishing institutions as sign of progress as the king had deemed it necessary:

“Fortunately, a myriad of institutes under the leadership of His Highness are formed and are acting upon their responsibilities. We hope that the number of these scientific organizations, which is the sign of development of a people, will increase

¹ For all mentioned scholars, please see the bibliography of this text.

so that we will not remain behind the train of civilization” (Shahshahani 1986). Another founder of this Institute wrote (paraphrasing his poem), “The ministry of public’s instructions propagate in all manners ignorance and ingratitude ... it does not appreciate the knowledge of those who know, but builds the museum of ethnology” (Shahshahani 1986). Meaning the persons of erudition are passed unnoticed, but a museum is made of folk knowledge and ordinary objects of everyday life, which means that is worthless, that is, the ministry is propagating ignorance and ingratitude through creation of ethnology museum. If the founder of an institute does not believe in the work of an Institute and is not academically prepared for it, it is not a surprise that the work will not continue successfully.

Later we see in 1937 (Shahshahani 1986) another one of its founders gives the *raison d’être* of anthropology as a science “which aids politicians and those who are responsible for migration of people, to take them to areas fit to the racial, physical and spiritual estates. It is also for merchants who are in contact with different people, and for physicians who cure illnesses of various populations.” These two quotes show clearly that these founders were not people who had any training in anthropology, though they were men of culture within the country. In 1941 when Reza Shah was abdicated, the Institute of ethnology was closed down. After his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, became well established, in 1956 the *Journal of Ethnology* was published for 2 years. So this field which is apparently not a political field, is established or pushed aside with political tides of the country. We shall return to this topic later.

What about teaching of the field of anthropology in Iran? For the same period of 1930’s and 1940’s we see social sciences being taught at University of Tehran and Teachers Training College. In 1938 the first sociologist Dr. Qolam Hossein Sadiqi, with a degree from the Sorbonne, returned to Iran and started teaching at Teacher’s Training College. Later he became Minister of Interior. The arrival of Dr. Ehsan Naraghi, a young ambitious man, who had graduated from France and Switzerland, was essential for the establishment of the Institute of Social Sciences and Research as part of the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences of University of Tehran in 1957 (Shahshahani 1986). For 10 years advisers for M.A. theses in anthropology were sociologists. The first trained anthropologist with a *doctorate universitaire* from the Sorbonne was Nader Afshar-Naderi. He was trained as an engineer in agriculture and had a Masters in this field, but he continued in anthropology and became the first trained anthropologist to teach and engage in research and even making a few films from 1972 till the 1979 Revolution (Shahshahani 2012).

As far as books are concerned, in 1961 a book by Bessaignet *La Methode de l’Anthropologie* was translated into Persian, and 9 years later Jean Cazeneuve’s *Ethnologie* was translated by Soraya Sheybani into Persian into two volumes but, unfortunately, the second volume was never disseminated. She taught at Tehran University, Meli University (today it is called Shahid Beheshti University), and the Institute for Social Work, between 1968 and 1970 after which she left Iran. Her unpublished doctorate thesis was a true anthropology research work, research among the Guilaks in Northern Iran, and the changes in the structure of the family in two villages in the area after the Land Reform. It was a comparison of these villages, one of which had gone through the land reform and the other had not.

At the Institute for Social Research we see again names of non-specialists, such as Jalal Ale-Ahmad (writer) and Qolam-Hossein Sa'edi (writer and medical doctor) as authors of the best books, even though they were not trained in the field. In an interview with Ehsan Naraghi which was quoted amply in afore-mentioned article ("History of anthropology in Iran" 1986), he said, "at this time (after the coup d'état which had re-established the king in his position), the government preferred to have intellectuals within the establishment, as opposed to being outside voicing loudly their criticisms." We should note that many leftists Marxists intellectuals such as Mostafa Shoa'ian, were also enticed to work at the different research groups of the Institute for Social Research.

The afore-mentioned Institute of Ethnology and its affiliated museum became part of the Ministry of Culture and in 1958 became the Office of Popular Culture (*Farhang Ameh*). It recruited young men and women who had a B.A. in literature or social sciences and gave them 60 hours of training in method and send them for research to various parts of the country. Journal *Honar va Mardom* (Arts and People) from 1968 till 1973 published reports and monographs (Shahshahani 1986). This Institute also set up museums and exhibitions in various parts of the country. During this decade a number of scholars wrote short reports on their mostly rural expeditions, some of the most repeated names are Houshang Pourkarim, Ali Bolukbashi, Asqar Karimi, Morteza Honari, Hossein Tayabati, Mohammad Mirshokrai and Kazem Sadat Eshkevari and three issues of journal *Ethnologie et Traditions Populaires de l'Iran* (1974–78) present some of their best articles. Dr. Khaliqi the director of the Institute has an introductory note at the beginning of the first issue of the journal which is significant. When Soraya Sheibani was the Director of the museum, she took those teams of researchers to north of Iran a few times to teach them research methodology. Among those present were Ali Boluskbshi and Houshang Pour Karim, who were the leaders of the teams.

As this Institute was responsible for giving permits to researchers, during 1970's we are confronted with French, British and American scholars who came for their doctoral research to Iran. Research on pastoral nomads which had started with Fredrick Barth (1961) from Norway under a UNESCO program (mainly for the purpose of sedentarisation of pastoral nomads) and later taken over by Nader Afshar Naderi, continued with Jean-Pierre Digard (who studied the Bakhtiyari), Lois Beck (the Qashqa'yi), Richard and Nancy Tapper (the Shahsavan), Erika Friedl and Reinhold Loeffler (the Boyer Ahmadi), Philip Salzman (the Baluch), Daniel Bradburd (the Komachi), William Irons (the Turkoman), Sekandar Amanollahi (the Lor), Susan Wright (the Mamassani) (Hegland 2009),² and myself (also the Mamassani). There were rural and urban studies, such as Christian Bromberger (Gilan), Mary Hegland and Eric Hoogland (Aliabad near Shiraz) and Paul English (Kerman), and yet fewer topic oriented theses such as land reform, linguistics or religious ceremonies in Iran, with William Beeman and Anne Betteridge. British scholar Brian Spooner was Senior to these scholars

² For all mentioned scholars, please see the bibliography of this text.

and did not only work on Iran, but on neighboring countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as well.

This rich period of research was followed by 2 years of Cultural Revolution when foreign researchers were no longer in Iran (there was no center responsible to give them permit for their research) and courses were not taught and it took a while till the department of anthropology started its activity in mid-1980's. Books which were published and then translated into Persian from this period (1970's) are significant. I was the only one to translate my thesis into Persian immediately and make it available to Iranians and of course to the Mamassani as well. This was a question which was raised during 1970's by critical anthropologists, and the result has been the writing of many books by regional authors. A few Iranian women anthropologists have published abroad, mainly from 1980's on ward Soraya Tremayne (Soraya Sheybani), Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Homa Hoodfar, Shahla Haeri, Fariba Adelkhah, Shahnaz Nadjmabadi (2009). Active Iranian anthropologists during this period have been Ali Bolukbashi, Nasser Fakouhi, Nemanollah Fazeli. The first mainly engaged in ethno-history, and the others, particularly Fakouhi has been important in translating texts into Persian and thus introducing the field more and more to Iranian readers. All the above share one characteristic and that is their lack of any association with any area in Iran: they have not engaged in fieldwork.

One important bourgeoning area has been the creation of regional or urban studies centers and journals all over Iran, from mid-2000. Some areas such as Gilan, Qashqa'yi and Bakhtiyari have been very active in this domain, and later also in social media. In certain areas it has been cities such as Kerman or Shiraz which have been central and publications are urban-oriented. Needless to say, given the long history of documentation about urban centers and good libraries, both public and private, these have been sources and supports for such creations. Well-learned men of literature and history are the backbone of such centers. Of course we cannot forget religious centers such as Mashhad, Esfahan and Qom. They definitely keep their areas flourish culturally. They act quietly and they are dedicated scholars. Anthropology has no share in these creations.

There are scattered attempts such as at the Ministry of Interior where they provide official maps. They have recently (2020) added a number of maps for all provinces of the country which have certain specifications which are definitely of importance for anthropologists today. The "National Divisions" (*taqsimat keshvari*) office which is doing this work has long been doing research on human geography of Iran. Their maps of various historical periods of Iran (there have been a few other cartographic publishers such as *Sahab* which have been providing maps also), and their provincial divisions from the last century onward show that divisions have been changing with the passage of time, and today we have 29 such provinces. While these maps are useful, they definitely do not provide us with what we need as an ethnic map (Map of Ethnic Groups of Iran 2015). Decisions as to even the names of provinces, townships etc. reflect the political agenda, more than the local human frontiers. In Southwestern Iran the Lor are divided in different provinces, in Northwestern Iran the Kords are divided in various provinces. In Southeastern Iran two different ethnic groups have formed one province. Here we are just speaking about facts, not disputing them historically or politically Fig. 1.

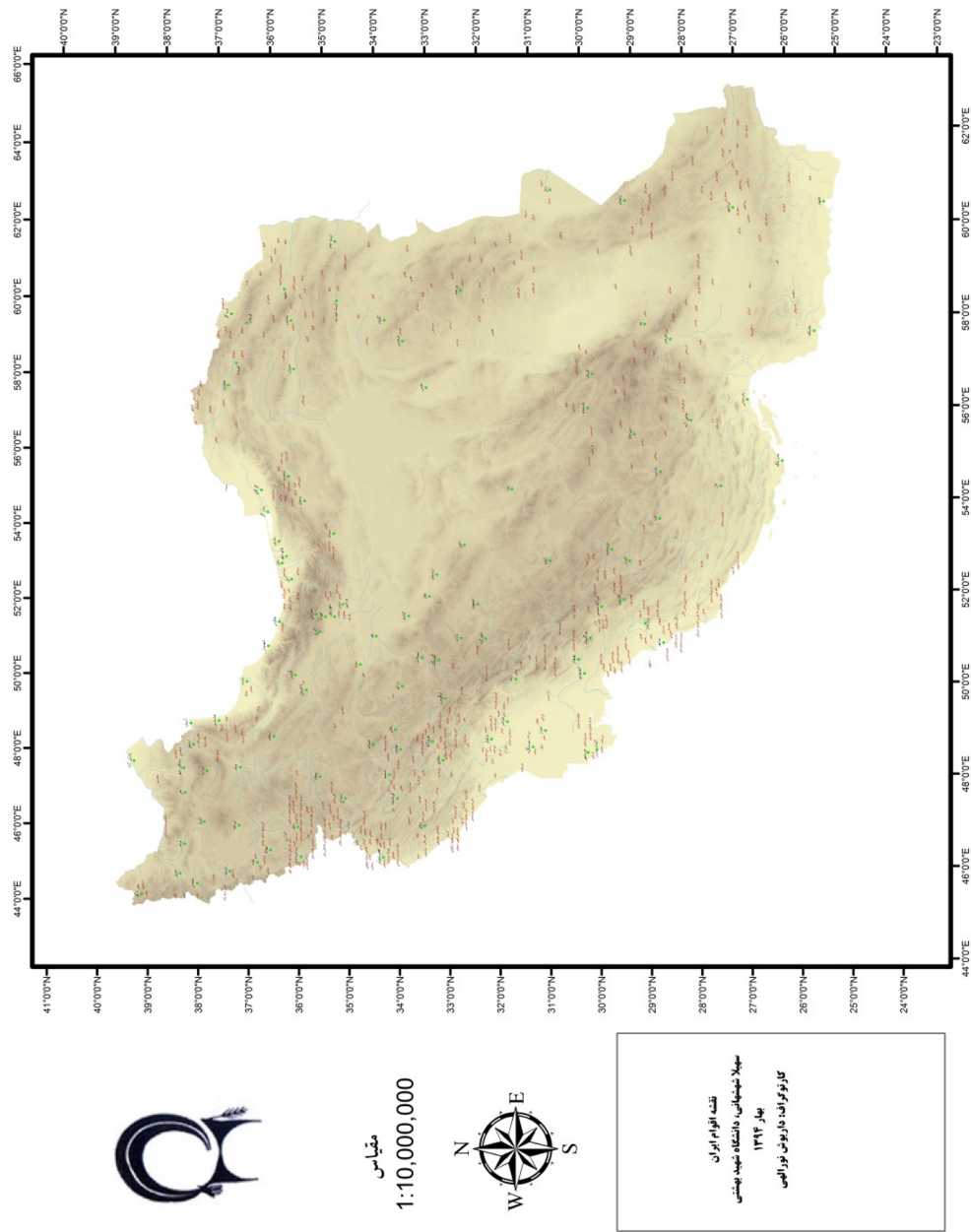


Fig. 1 Map of Ethnic Groups of Iran 2015, Soheila Shahshahani. Cartographer: Dâriush Norelâhi

As mentioned above, University of Tehran, Faculty of Social sciences, has had a department of anthropology from early 1950's, and it also has an association. For years this was the only university which had courses in anthropology with B.A. and M.A. degrees in this field, but now (from 2015 onward) there are a cluster of universities and institutions which have opened their doors to the field of anthropology. There have been a few people who got their doctorates abroad (France, U.S., Holland, India, Malaysia) and they are trying to make anthropology a viable field. Alameh Tabatabayee University, Free University, University of Gilan, Institute of Cultural and Social Studies within the Ministry of Sciences, Research Institute of Ethnology Related to the Ministry of National Heritage and Tourism, are all concerned with this field. I myself taught at Shahid Beheshti University, but after I have retired, no anthropologist has been recruited there, and the courses I gave are now offered by sociologists, who were my own students from 1990's-till 2017! It has been a practice at all universities that sociologists give courses of anthropology, and I think this is one of the reasons for stagnation of this field in Iran. It would have been better if a course entitled anthropology would not have been obligatory for students of many fields to take, rather than its being given by non-anthropologists, due to lack of trained scholars.

Since 1979 when the journal *Honar va Mardom* stopped publication, there was no proper anthropology journal till I started *Anthropology* (2001) which had two issues (with an addendum) with an important publishing house (Markaze Nashre Daneshgahi). When the publishing house declined to continue publication, I published it myself with another name *Farhang va Ensan* (Culture and Human Being) 2003–2012, with a number of important addendums, introducing various sub-fields of anthropology. In this journal I had regular interviews with anthropologists from abroad, had a long report on Fei Xiaotong Conference, and had an interview with Dr. Yang, head of the clothing Museum of Minorities in Beijing (Shahshahani 2007), and translated the works from the forefathers of anthropology in articles, which presented the Chinese laws regarding minorities, and introduced new topics and directions of research. The Interview section included Iranian and non-Iranian anthropologists who had worked on Iran or important sub-fields of anthropology such as urban anthropology. It is interesting to note that University of Tehran, which was actually the central academia, had two anthropologists in the department and each of them edited one journal (one from 2002 to 2014 and the other 2010–2019), and they headed the association of anthropologists one after the other, repeatedly. These two scholars were educated in France, and apparently they could not allow for another colleague, like Farhad Khosrokhavar, who had also graduated from a French University, to teach in the department. He left the country and has been affiliated with Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, and has become Professor at the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences in Paris.

Before closing this part, I should briefly refer the following on the terminology: ethnology and anthropology. When in 1930's by the order of Reza Shah an institute was established, the term ethnology was used, but to translate the term correctly, it would mean "*demosology*," or study of people and not the ethnic groups, as ethnic would be translated into *qowm*. So the problem is historically rooted, as the first Iranian social scientists, anthropologists included, had studied in France, had used

the term which was prevalent there. During 1960's the term ethnology was still used in France, for anthropology in U.S. or social anthropology in Great Britain. "Ethnology" was translated into *mardomshenasi*, but even then the term *mardom* means people *demos*, and not *ethnos* which would mean *qowm*. I decided to use the term anthropology, finding the term *anthropos* more meaningful for my purposes, after having studied this field in the U.S. In 1980's, in France they decided to use the term anthropology hence the Association of French Anthropologists, which started its activities in 1980's, no longer uses the term ethnology. So our inherited names were never questioned seriously and academically, and still today we see both terms used.

If we look at the syllabus of courses of the most important universities that have departments of anthropology, we see the term *mardomshenasi* used for the field, but right after when an explanation of the field is given, the term anthropology is used. For various courses, without mentioning any reasons, mostly *mardomshenasi* is used, and once in a while, again without giving any reasons, the term anthropology is used. At Tehran University it is now accepted that the term ethnology ("*mardomshenasi*") by used for this field which part of the faculty of social sciences. But in the description of the field, it is immediately mentioned that is anthropology, giving the equivalent in English. The names of the courses carry the same problem, at times they are anthropology (eg. Urban Anthropology), but most often they are ethnology of...such as Ethnology of War, Ethnology of Islam, Critical Ethnology, Ethnology of Space and Time, Ethnology of Globalisation, Iranology from the perspective of Ethnology, but then there are two courses one Sociology of Pastoral Nomadic Society and another Ethnology of Pastoral Nomadic Societies. Apparently there is little clear thinking behind the names of the courses.

Today's above-mentioned Institutes and Universities try to avoid any serious discussion on the two terms, and they claim "Cultural Studies" better represents their idea of a department. I think they are still evading the important problem of definition of the field and its identity. Let me add an anecdote: Once I was invited to the Ministry of Higher Education, and there I noticed that they were using the term *mardomshenasi*. I asked the reason, and I was told that there had been a vote about this. This is definitely not acceptable that the name of a field be put on a vote while some specialists of the field remain completely in the dark on the decision. So we can see that the identity of a field which is abbreviated in its name is still unclear, and although we do not question it on daily basis any more, we definitely know that it is a political and thus a sensitive problem, which is best not to open up. Why is this so? The essence of the field is contact with people and reporting on people's situation. Have the states established ever since the beginning of the twentieth century been open to studies which would report on the activities and responsibilities of the state as the situation of the people of the area would reflect? Anthropology is by definition a critical field, one which studies people and this means the responsibilities of the states are seen through whatever situation the people of that region face. So by definition this is a political field and this should be clearly spelled out and its activities pronounced clearly, instead of its activities being constantly questioned, its identity not pronounced clearly and its specialists reside in ambivalence. We have seen institutions being created or closed by political orders, and "one walks between eggs", as the French expression goes, to avoid direct analysis of the presence of the

state in people's everyday lives. As critical anthropologists, we know it a well merited inheritance from the colonial period, that was inclined to lead the intelligent population of a nation toward medicine and engineering and not into social sciences, and particularly not toward anthropology which seeks direct contact with people and their everyday lives.

There has definitely been some tension between theological schools and the academia and after the Revolution there was an attempt to make these two centers, *howze* and *daneshgah*, communicate and today we see clearly the pressure particularly on social sciences to adopt a religious worldview and place their theories therein.

We must be clear about one topic which is very important, but is generally forgotten: The education system of Iran before modernity came to the country was directed by the religious centers. Those who were founders of modernity, even the Shah himself was not against religious thinking and laws of the country were to be reviewed by the theologians before they could be approved. Even women poets of this time such as Parvin E'tesami, upheld religion strongly. So the struggle after the revolution 1979 is a struggle for one important group of powerful men in education and law to organize the country. Our concern here is only anthropology. There is one direct point on which these two cannot agree: Religious world-view vs. world-view of any people under study. The former study the other from their perspective, and only compare what they study to their own standpoint. The latter study the 'other' to find their world-view, and I myself, as an anthropologist, put on pedestal any other culture on its own behalf, for its strength to have continued existence during hundreds or thousands of years. My task is both to find origins and particularities of any culture and to see how different parts of a culture support each other and make each other meaningful—a classical definition of what anthropology does. During the Pahlavi period authorities did want to show the poverty which existed in the country, and did not want to show that modernity which they claimed to have brought to Iran, had not reached its different provinces and rural areas. Presently the problem is again one of distance between the center and various provinces, which the authorities do not like to see reported, but there is also an attempt at making people religiously obedient and to perform rituals correctly. A case in view is a small group of people, the Bashagerdis, who are not on all maps, and were approached by provincial authorities, and the first attempt, was to make them wear clothing which was considered "correct" and behavior which was religiously acceptable. No anthropologist was invited to go for a preliminary research period there.

What makes the possibility of mentioning the name of a people and not allowing them to declare their needs, their grievances, is the created world of traditional life and handicraft. Tourism has made it possible to classify people as object of interest to be visited, whose handicraft could be consumed, whose area could be described in exotic terms to attract attention and even bring patriotism. So festivals are flourishing where the names of various groups are accompanied by their clothing, food and other handicrafts. This way they are not studied by anthropologists, they are caricaturized and they are not dangerous to claim any part of the cake of modernity and progress of the country, as it is within large cities and favored states such as Yazd and Kerman.

Let us move on and come to the topic of my concern:

Ethnic groups of Iran

So, what about the study of ethnic groups? There is one course at B.A. level called Languages and Ethnic Groups at Tehran University, and a course at Allameh Tabataba'yi University called Ethnic Ethnology in Iran (precise title). At Shahid Beheshti University I taught a course at the doctorate level for many years, but recently I have not been asked to continue to give this course either. Note that its title alone shows the difficulty and the ambiguity surrounding both ethnic groups and anthropology, and how sociology wants to be the leading term: "Sociology ethnology (general culture and ethnics)" (number 111719)! What I taught in this course was general theories in anthropology related to ethnicity, ethnic groups, ethnicity and gender, and migration and becoming ethnic groups in another host country, and ethnic groups of Iran as I shall discuss below, and I always had to comment on the title of the course which has remained problematic.

I would like to start with a map (Map of Ethnic Groups of Iran 2015), knowing perfectly well that maps are stable, but people are not, so they give an idea of primordial belonging and no more. In the definition of an ethnic group, geography and more precisely a location such as a mountain has an importance, so geography is definitely important for finding the identity of an ethnic group. I made this map basing myself on a map which was made on pastoral nomads of Iran 60 years ago (Iran-shahr 1964). My map has been approved by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance and is on my site entitled Ethniciran.com. Referring to this map you will see many small names, which refer to sub-branches of ethnic groups. The large divisions, marking the different ethnic groups are the Fārs, Kurds, Azari and Turks (Qashqa'i, Bayat/Xalaj/Tat), Lor, Lak, Taleshi, Gilak, Mazani, Turkoman, Sistani, Baluch, Khuzi, Bandari, Bushehri, Religious minorities and immigrants mostly Afghans in Iran, cannot be seen on the map. I found it necessary to work with the essentialist view of ethnic groups to be able to define them separately, to describe them through the topics, characteristics, about which I shall write below. Then there is division according to subsistence into urban, rural and pastoral nomadic groups. I should mention here that within urban areas I have mentioned several multi-ethnic cities. Of course, all cities today are multi-ethnic, Tehran the capital which has parliamentary members from all over Iran, and has religious minorities, and foreign refugees, is the most important multi-ethnic city. But what I had in mind, was not large cities of today which host populations from many different areas, rather cities such as Dezful, Bojnurd and Varamin which have been multi-ethnic for a few centuries. Within those cities we can see how they have made boundaries, how and when they have been crossing these boundaries (such going to each other's mourning ceremonies), and how they have respected them to finally live in harmony for centuries.

This map, which is on one page, can also be consulted on six different pages where the letters are much larger. I am hoping for the day when, first the map would also be in English, and, second, by clicking on a name, the reader can go to the corresponding name in the texts.

What text and how is the body of the data, which I shall refer to as text, is organized? The Persian plateau or the Persianate speaking area was larger than Iran of today, and the Persian plateau is a very old civilization with urban centers such as Shahre Suxteh (Burned City) or Jiroft both of which boast of 7 thousand years of urban life. Recently paleontology has become important in Iran, and finally in collaboration with the CNRS (Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique) in France, pre-historic sites particularly in Western Iran are explored. Before the last decade, when the research first started, data existed on Eastern Europe, Western Middle East, Pakistan, and China, but not on Iran, and this could not be, as “out of Africa” human species must have passed through the Persian plateau to reach China. It was absolutely necessary to invest in this research to show the passage of human species from Africa to China. This has been very illuminating for Iranian paleontology.

Anyway this civilization soon got ethnic names associated with its various areas, The Aryans from North East, close to the Aral Sea, were the people who formed the Fars ethnic group and moved to South-Western Iran and formed the first dynasties (Medes, Achaemenids, Sassanids), and then came Alexander from Greece. What is significant to us here is the continuation of existence of the Greeks as Seleukids in Iran. Later the Arabs came with various waves and conquered different parts of Iran at different times with great many battles and thus with great difficulty. Unlike the Greeks, they came with a religion and this religion was a means of conquering the area also. With the passage of time peoples from Turkistan, of North-Western China and Mongolia have passed through the Persian plateau to Europe, and their quest was the prairies and pastures of the area, fit for the herders. They formed dynasties within the country such as the Saljukids and Teimurids, Ilkhani, and Qajar, or simply moved further toward Anatolia and Syria. The Kurds have always been recorded to have occupied what is today North-Western Iran, and they have always been protectors of the throne, and as warriors they have been sent to all corners of the empire and that is why we see them in North-Eastern Iran (Bojnurd and Quchân, and in Baluchestân area, the Baluch-Kurds); the Lor came from Syria. So, each and every ethnic group occupying a specific area has their history which is today more and more found in ancient manuscripts (something that was difficult of access when I started my research in Iran in 1970's and 80's), due to republication of old texts and translations from other languages. We should note that following the history of various ethnic groups, we realize that they do not occupy the area they originally occupied, but they have moved many times. We should also not think that the land was not occupied before their entrance, so we must look for how each and every area hosted or fought the newcomers, and how long the newcomers stayed, and if and how and to where they were dispersed afterwards. If we see the name of Bayât or Afshâr (both Turk groups), in many areas of Iran, it is exactly because of their particular history which must be known to account for the same people's migrations or displacements, which had resulted in their occupying very different geographical areas. If we look at the city of Varâmeen close to Tehran, we see all ethnic groups, except the Baluch present there. They were moved to this area with great pastures, and they lived in many villages before a city was formed and they became urban dwellers.

Another interesting point is that we see the name of various dynasties of Iran, as people occupying certain areas, and by giving military support to a king, and as a result of certain battles and historical events, moving to form the next dynasty. All these movements, competitions, wars, and alliances form the particular history of an ethnic group. This makes for an important part of identity of a group as it mentions the names of their heroes, military or men of learning.

I am dwelling on this topic for a while, just to show that every ethnic group we study, as well as being part of the more general historical events, also has its specific independent history and, in the site-text we refer to every area's pre-historic and historic past. Iran having been a country with massive written history, we have found a great amount of data on its past. But we do not rewrite that history in this text of ethniciran.com, rather only familiarize the reader with the ethnic group during different periods (in the text we try and give a short synopsis of the group to familiarize the reader with important events, persons of the area and more important a bibliography which could be used by readers: the following groups have been introduced the Turkoman, the Sistani and the Baluch.

We then go to a few specific topics such as archaeological and historical sites, important personalities (military and cultural), architecture, housing, arts, clothing, food, games and crafts of the area. As the material on ceremonies was written for certain important religious groups such as the Zoroastrians thousands of years ago, and by foreign or local travelers on different ethnic groups during past centuries, and finally during the past decades, they have been recorded by local scholars, these give us the possibility of considering various characteristics of every ethnic group separately. After reading books by ethnologists and anthropologists, quite a few local scholars even without university background have seen interest in recording the histories of their areas, and all of them have been paying attention to their languages, dialects and ceremonies. (Please check the bibliographies of the site.)

As can be observed on our map, the Fars or the population which speaks Persian is in the center (excluding the desert area, the cities surrounding the desert: Mashhad, Kerman, Yazd, Shiraz, Esfahan, Qom, Tehran), the Azari and Turks, while they are concentrated in the north western provinces with the cities of Tabriz, Ardabil and Orumieh, they are also in Qazvin, Zanjan, and we find other related Turkish groups among the Bayat, Khalaj, Tat, Qashqa'yi. The latter, previously important pastoral nomads of South-western Persia, have two cities associated with them, Firuz-Abad and Farashband. But the other Turkish groups are integrated in various cities, and we have to look closely at the map to find, for example the Tat, and then we find them in various places, from near Bojnurd in the North to central Iran, near Saveh.

So far, we have referred to the text and to the map of ethnic groups of Iran, but I have not yet said a word on our gallery which we have actually moved to become an independent Instagram site called ethnic_iran.com. There, all the pictures I have been taking for more than 40 years are labeled precisely in coordination with the ethniciran.com site and they introduce to a wider public pictorially various ethnic groups. Using these pictorial supports, we have had symbols of all

the ethnic groups graphically worked on and they represent every group on the site.

Music is another area in which we have been interested. We have been collecting data from various ethnic groups, and we are not ready to present ethnic music of different groups yet. There is plenty of material on social media related to ethnic music, we refuse to repeat what exists already. We also need some expertise in our presentations, which we have not yet been able to find. But this is not a forgotten area of concern.

As I have already mentioned, I have collected some of the material from local people who were where I have traveled, or from my students, some of the other material we had a number of scholars collaborate for writing them, and we will be asking for more collaborators both to write on books we choose to be studied, summarized, with partial notes from them and also, we look forward to cooperation with individual scholars from various locations who would be interested to collaborate with us in specific contexts. So far, the names of all collaborators in any capacity have been mentioned.

We are conscious about the fact that ethnic studies are not a field which is much appreciated by the government as it is considered to be a very political topic. I am aware that the American attack on Afghanistan and Iraq were first through border lines, through cooperation with various ethnic groups. We have seen today how the Taliban have come to Afghanistan through the border with Pakistan, so we are aware of the reason for such sensitivity.

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Secondly, as our map has been validated by the ministry of Islamic guidance and before that by the armed forces of Iran, it does not have anything but cultural appreciation of all ethnic groups as aim. We are aware that all serious Persian books on ethnic groups of Iran critically study the events at the beginning of the century when the Azari and the Kords were enticed by Soviet Union to proclaim independent states. So, it has been difficult for me to maneuver in this atmosphere to study the ethnic groups of Iran. But I have had every reason to continue this endeavor and to show the rich cultural heritage of each and every group, what has been making a powerful state in the area, and so the motto of my site has become: Our Diversity is our power, our power is our unity.

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Comments

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