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Review

Domesticating the Global Discourse of Nationalism in Early Twentieth-Century Iran: A Sociological Institutionalist Account

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Abstract: This article explores how nationhood was discursively constructed in early twentieth-century Iran. While most studies concentrate on micro-national causes, this study complements this literature by drawing on domestication theory to show how globally diffused nationalist discourse was localized and tailored to the Iranian context at the turn of the twentieth century. It employs the methods of critical discourse analysis and critical metaphor analysis to investigate politics in the construction of nationhood in Iran. The data include all editorials and articles in three highly influential Iranian periodicals: Qanun, Tarbiyat, and Kaveh. By analyzing the shared premises in this data, the study highlights the transnational nature of the discourse to indicate how Iranian nationhood was embedded in world society yet adapted locally. The analysis then identifies three variations of Iranian nationhood, each woven into a particular national narrative at the time. These findings attest to the meso-level approach that addresses the discursive side of diffusion mechanisms and calls attention to the discursive politics in localization processes of nationhood. They point to new directions to understand contemporary Iran, not as an outlier or exception, but rather as discursively connected to world society. Given the discursive opportunities arising from these contentious notions of nationhood, the study calls for further critical investigations of identity-based appeals, often by authoritarian actors, in Iran's modern politics.

Keywords: domestication; nationhood; world culture; discursive construction; national narratives; imageries; discourse analysis; early twentieth-century Iran

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1. Introduction

In Iran's modern politics, everyone speaks in the name of the nation. Even in the "theocratic" state of the Islamic republic (1979–) that is supposed to be ruled in the name of God, policies are often made by representing religious identification as national identity. In contrast, opposition forces accuse the Islamist government of hijacking the Iranian identity. However, this challenge is not unprecedented; the game was exactly the opposite before the Iranian revolution in 1979. Then, while the ruling Pahlavi dynasty justified modernizing policies in the name of national interests, the opposition called the dynasty's discourse westernized, in which authenticity was forgotten. Such contestations in the cultural constructions of nationhood and hence national interests have remained prevalent in modern Iran. These trends affirm that nationalism still remains the most popular and potent discourse in the globalized world [1], thus prompting critical scrutiny into how notions of nationhood were constructed in Iran. This article, hence, is concerned with the discursive politics through which such contestations were constituted—by which social mechanisms the nationalism discourse was (re-)formed, and how those various national narratives were constructed in the Iranian context.

These challenges become even more intense when we consider the huge literature on the specificity of nationhood construction in the case of Iran. In his well-known work, Hobsbawm [2] noted that Iran—alongside some other societies—would have been recognized as a "historic nation" (p. 163). Following this, studies have identified how the conceptions of nationhood evolved endogenously from within. For instance, "Iran-shahri"

theories have tracked Iranian-ness as self-generating throughout history [3–5]. Also, much of the literature has focused on differences in the process of national identity-making in Iran after encountering modern ideas. Scholars stated the hybridization of nationhood conceptions with various world cultural elements in Iran's modern history [6–8]. From a postcolonial perspective, Dabashi [9] illustrated the resurrection of the archetypal figure of Iranian authority—the Persian prince—under colonial duress. Such studies into nationhood discourse in Iran shed a nuanced light on the exception of the Iranian case, or else how the political culture of the country has evolved in contact with the Western world yet remained distinct from it. In other words, both sets of meta-narratives zoom in on the specificities of Iranian political culture and the differences between Iran and Europe. But such an idiosyncratic view of nationhood underestimates that the expectation of national uniqueness has become increasingly institutionalized and then much encouraged in and by the great globalizing thrusts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [10]. In the case of Iran, as Matin-asgari [11] noted, the Persian-National paradigm and its critics actually converge on notions of premodern Iran as an empire, and not a nation. Put differently, these micro-level analyses missed that the sites of nationhood constructions are largely constituted by the global spread of nationhood models.

On the other hand, Gellner's renowned work [12] approaches nationhood as a necessary component of modernity [13]. Accordingly, Marashi [14] indicated how changing relationships between the state and society in early modern Iran triggered nation-building projects sponsored by ruling elites. Other studies, also, showed how the national question emerged as a functional instrument in the modernization trajectory [15–18]. Such claims, however, approach culture functionally and thereby expect cultural homogenization due to the same pathways imposed by worldwide political and economic systems [19]. But the evidence in the case of Iran and others with different contexts from European societies uncovers more heterogeneity and thus suggests taking culture and interpretation more seriously.

Since the influential work of Anderson [20], then, the position arguing nationalism and nationhood as cultural artifacts of a particular kind that, once created [in the eighteenth century of the Western world], became modular, capable of being transplanted (p. 4), has attracted much attention and called for rethinking the modular nation form [21]. Accordingly, Brubaker [22] stated that nationhood should be viewed as a cultural and political form that is institutionalized within and among states.

In line with these arguments, the macro-cultural approach of sociological institutionalism draws attention to the wider institutional environment within which actors are embedded and cultural models are circulated. In particular, World Society Theory (WST) convincingly points out that world polity structures and world culture principles are strikingly isomorphic, and shows how deeply the idea of a nation-state has been enacted as an organizing principle of world society [23,24]. Yet, such a mile-high view of isomorphism is not well tuned to micro-level processes that adapt world models to local settings [25,26]. The isomorphic development of separate nation-states does not mean that all national features are gradually disappearing from the world. Detailed case studies on the localization of global models demonstrate that exogenous models may reproduce, reinforce, or activate local cultural processes [27,28]. Recent years hence have witnessed increased attention to the actual processes by which ideas or models have spread. From idea edition [29] and translation [30] to glocalization [31] and hybridization [32], theorists have shown that global models are adapted to local conditions in various ways.

In the case of nationhood, also, although global models specify standard forms for the cultural depiction of national identity [20], evidence shows that national communities are imagined differently. That is, even though nation-states are theorized by drawing on models that are lodged at the world level, the sense of belonging to a nation is locally contested [33–35] or even decoupled from global models to manifest resistance in a colonial context [36].

However, the isomorphic aspects of the diffused model are often taken for granted in these studies, so they overlook the important point that there is, after all, global isomorphism at the macro level. For instance, Michael Billig [37] called "banal nationalism" the common tendency to brush aside global dimensions and present any idea with a national tint. Such discursive gestures appear to be common features of most localizations [25,38,39]. Addressing this "epistemological conundrum" [21], Rogers Brubaker warns against the persistent tendency to treat nationalist "categories of practice" as "categories of analysis" in nationalism studies [22]. Indeed, it is a significant point that the worldwide origin of common models or ways of doing things (like nation-building) are discursively swept aside to make them seem naturally national.

This approach has not yet attracted much attention in nationhood studies. Given the different context of Iran from Europe, where modern conceptions of nationhood developed, my aim in this paper is to address how the spread of worldwide nationhood models brought about social changes in early twentieth-century Iran. Iran's turbulent modern history, with shifts from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy (1906) and then from the Pahlavi dynasty era to the Islamic republic period (1979), not to mention multiple ethnic and religious minorities[1] that associate themselves with Iranian identity, make the case empirically rich yet challenging. In addition, the study tracks how particularities could be activated upon nationalist discourse in early twentieth-century Iran from a perspective of sociological institutionalism. Since most studies in this scholarship have been carried out on Western cases, the case of Iran would contribute to this school on how the global discourse of nationalism is localized in non-European societies.

In so doing, the paper uses some recent theorizing that has complemented WST with bottom-up approaches that scrutinize how global ideas and models land in local fields and vary in their practices [28]. Such an approach may be classified as a meso-level viewpoint [41] that fits between undeniable global isomorphism on the one hand and micro-cultural specificity on the other. I draw here on the theory of domestication [39] to understand such meso-level processes by which globally diffusing models of nationhood were naturalized and made acceptable in modern Iran. So, I ask how nationhood was discursively (re)constructed in early twentieth-century Iran.

Accordingly, the domestication framework addresses discursive practices through which diffused nationhood models were tailored to the Iranian context. The study highlights the period between the 1870s to 1920s, termed by Roland Robertson the "take-off" phase in which the main principles of world polity were widely diffused and non-European societies were involved in world culture [42]. Focusing on the role of media in social knowledge production, I examine here editorials and articles in three periodicals including Qanun (1890–1898), Tarbiyat (1896–1907), and Kaveh (1916–1921) which were authoritative and well known in early twentieth-century Iran. For analysis, I employ critical discourse analysis to investigate discursive strategies and modes of realization in actors' talks [43]. Also, critical metaphor analysis as detailed in the notion of "imageries of the social world" [44] is used to contribute to addressing the underlying presumptions in nationalist discourse.

The rest of this article is organized in the following way. In the next section, I discuss the theoretical framework of domestication, following which I describe critical discourse analysis along with the data of this study. The next two sections report on the results of the empirical analysis. I first identify the shared strategies that activated diverse themes and national narratives. Then, I address how three conceptions of national trajectories were constructed upon those strategies in early twentieth-century Iran including racialized pre-Islamic, civilizational, and religious ones. Each of them appealed to a distinct narrative to be justified. In the final section, I discuss the results, with particular attention on the empirical and theoretical implications.

Theoretical Framework: Domestication

From a discursive viewpoint, the theory of domestication [39] pays attention to discursive practices in domestic field battles by which global models are naturalized. Otherwise

stated, domestication, by wearing a wider lens, recognizes all actual practices in local fields through which not only global models might be varied to be adapted, but also local contexts are prepared (hence changed) to welcome diffused models. This approach concentrates on discursive practices that locally fashion global models.

Existing domestic interests and issues are bent into the discursive field of the new idea, term, or model, just as it is tailored to fit those issues so that it becomes part of the domus [45]. That is to say, domestication alludes to the practices by social actors in bringing "home" worldwide accepted models about existing realities.

It refers to the process whereby global ideas or models are adopted throughout the world yet assume a national significance tuned to local interests and conceived as self-evidently ours [45]. Thus, it scrutinizes how local actors, constituted by world culture, apply those world cultural discourses in local fields [46,47]. Hence, this approach not only pays attention to the communicative logic of discourses but also highlights the wide ranges of discursive politics in practices through which actors seek to internalize world cultural discourses.

This study evokes here Foucault's perception of discourse as practice and approach to discursive change by emphasizing action through which diverse themes, concepts, and ideas can be subjected and individualized [48]. In this regard, the domestication framework, by recognizing the constitutive role of world cultural elements in social changes, begs for more in-depth explanations combining global discourses and local meaning-making practices.

Following these, I scrutinize how the "modular form" of nationhood [20] was discursively (re)constructed in early twentieth-century Iran and by which discursive strategies nationhood was localized and institutionalized in the society.

This paper thus addresses those discursive politics in the local field by which the global models of nationhood became experientially domesticated and thus acceptable in modern Iran. Viewing nationhood as the worldwide accepted modular form of a particular kind (locality) in world polity, it investigates discursive practices in bringing home such global models.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Print Media Text as Data

To study in detail how the global model(s) of nationhood was discursively (re)constructed in Iran, I analyzed three leading periodicals in the first days of Iranian media from the 1880s to 1920s. I chose to analyze print media to follow Anderson's emphasis on the publishing industry [20] in the ways nationhood models are imagined and propagated. Furthermore, media played an even more significant role in mediating the spread of global culture [49] in latecomer societies like Iran. As a marked site of public debates, media is exploited by social actors to persuade audiences [50]. In particular, print media was the channel used by actors in Middle Eastern societies at the time to promulgate global ideas and shape the public sphere [51,52]. The study hence pays attention to the media as an influential site of change in early twentieth-century Iran.

The time span was selected based on the phases of cultural globalization theorized by Roland Robertson [42,53]. During the critical "take-off" phase between the 1870s to 1920s, the main "transnational linkages" of world society were institutionalized, and non-European societies were involved in world culture. It was the period in which not only did Iranians encounter diverse modern ideologies, but also various interpretations of religious thought were constructed due to the spread of Western religious reformation forms [54–56]. After that, the "struggle-for-hegemony" phase lasted from the 1920s to World War II and proceeded with a period of "uncertainty" since the 1960s. Synced with this trend, the main structural components of world polity like national states were diffused [57] into the society during that take-off period, and the first ever press channels were established in Iran in the first decades of the twentieth century [58,59].

The three choices including the Qanun (1890–1898), Tarbiyat (1896–1907), and Kaveh (1916–1921) periodicals are motivated, as they were well circulated at the time and highly influential in the history of modern nationalism in Iran. I began collecting data from the first-ever Persian magazines. The media archive in Iran is generally unreliably documented in terms of statistics. But the most significant ones were successfully preserved. Several studies emphasize that opinion pieces and editorials tend to reflect a society's values and power dynamics [60,61]. I read through around 10 periodicals (at least the first publishing years), initially coding the data, and narrowing it down to 3 due to their relations to nationalist discourses. There are some reasons for finalizing these three journals: their social influence, availability, and relatedness to the main subject of the research. "Qanun" had tremendous influence in the following century in Iran [62]. The long-lasting newspaper "Tarbiyat" was a literary pioneer of the time, particularly due to its literary focus and the publication of numerous translations [63]. It is widely regarded as a frontier in shaping the Iranian nation [64]. The 1920s Berlin Circle of Iranian intellectuals and their inspiring organ called "Kaveh" can represent the entanglements between Iran's discourses on nationalism, Islam, and national identity and their relations to the global entity [6].

2.2. Methodological Framework

The nature of this research object required a qualitative approach. This study employs critical discourse analysis as elaborated in the Discourse–Historical method (DHA) and approaches discourse as social practice [65]. Through discourse, social actors constitute knowledge, situations, social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between various interacting social groups [66]. This method "assumes a dialectical relationship between specific language-based occurrences and the larger contexts of situations, institutions, and social frameworks in which they are embedded" [67] (p. 157). As Wodak [68] stated, the DHA consists of three dimensions: after (1) having identified the specific contents or topics of a specific discourse, (2) discursive strategies are investigated. Then, (3) linguistic means are examined as types, and the specific, context-dependent linguistic realizations are examined as tokens. It uses the term discursive strategies to refer to "plans of actions with varying degrees of elaborateness, the realization of which can range from automatic to conscious, and which are located at different levels of our mental organization" [67] (p. 160).

Discourse analysis hence offers an opportunity to uncover the patterns that stand behind the text [69]. In particular, justifications for an action are most often built on assumptions [70]. To address those epistemic presumptions, Charteris-Black's [71] Critical Metaphor analysis (CMA) is applied here. Metaphors are often used in persuasive communication as their regular use establishes mental frameworks [72]. Since metaphors cut across the assumed divide between scientific and popular (public) language, actors seeking to affect society consider that others also think with such imageries and use those assumptions to make a "natural" argument [44]. As Charteris-Black [73] argues, metaphor is most persuasive when paired with other rhetorical devices. In line with this argument, the study invites the notion of "imageries of the social world" into analysis [44]. The imageries are built on "root metaphors" by which we all think of society [74] but articulated with an action goal. An imagery's self-evidence lures actors to view and present the situation in a certain way, so it can become a key discursive ingredient. Salient imageries Alasuutari and Qadir [44] have identified and that can be expected to occur in the selected speech acts include, but are not limited to: (1) the social world changing by naturally modernizing according to functional requirements; (2) the world governed by hierarchically positioned power players; and (3) the world divided into competing blocs or civilizations. These imageries of social reality are naturalized lenses of perceiving the social world: they have congealed into an appearance of self-evident assumptions that govern people's perception of social reality [41]. Identifying these imageries hence allows us to avoid the "epistemological conundrum" mentioned in the previous section, and provide an analytical device to address those regularities underlying the categories of practices in the discourse.

Following fundamental principles of qualitative social research, the idea was to build a broad enough categorization that captured the variations in arguments [75]. Different publications may, of course, also be analyzed and there is no inescapable reason as to why I constrained the sample to these newspapers. However, the aim here is not to propose a statistically significant sample representing a demarcated larger entity that the results can be empirically generalized from. Rather, through viewing the media as a distinct site of the public sphere in contemporary societies, the idea behind these choices was to generate sufficient variation in the ways through which the global discourse of nationhood was domesticated in the public sphere. Following the [naturalistic] generalization principles of qualitative case study research [76,77], this study intended to find patterns or sets of regularities at play that can be applied to the whole sample to make it justified in arguing that those shared modes can be related and/or extrapolated [78] to other cases. In summarily reading a random selection of other periodicals from the same time such as Akhtar (1876–1881), Habl al-Matin (1907–1908), and Ayandeh (1925–1928), I find no additional variations that would require spreading the data set wider.

In this inquiry, the study analyzed the media texts with the aim of identifying the discursive practices by which the nation was "imagined as a political community which is both inherently limited and sovereign" [20]. Data analysis is informed by a critical discourse analytic approach that calls for the examination of data at three levels: texts, discourse practices, and socio-cultural contexts [65,66]. In the first part of the analysis, I close-read and inductively coded the data manually, since the versions available are only scanned but not digitally searchable. I collected each news story, article, editorial, or letter to the editor from the newspaper archives that dealt with the elements of nationhood discourse, including "mellat" (equivalent to nation in Persian, IPA for mellat:/mellæt/), "melli" (equivalent to national in Persian, IPA for melli:/melli:/), "Manfa'at-e melli" (equivalent to national interest in Persian, IPA for Manfa'at:/mænfæ'æt/), Maslahat-e melli" (equivalent to national interest in Persian, IPA for Maslahat:/mæslæhæt/) and "Dowlat-e Melli" (equivalent to national state in Persian, IPA for dowlat:/dowlæt/). The search generated 127 hits from the Qanun (in 39 volumes), 282 from the Tarbiyat (in 434 volumes), and 172 from the Kaveh (in 56 volumes). Useless, irrelevant, or rhetorical mentions such as names of institutes, companies' announcements, etc., were excluded. Eventually, this resulted in 112 hits for Qanun, 191 for Tarbiyat, and 150 for Kaveh. In this analysis, the newspapers' articles have been coded according to what was said, by whom, how references were made, how nation was related to history, and how the (national) community was described. Each newspaper piece might be covering a wider perspective quoting or describing with a variety of simultaneous specifications and variations.

3. Results

In the following sections, the results of the analysis are presented, and the discursive politics are described. First, those discursive strategies that are shared between all actors are shown. Then, the politics upon the strategies that adapt the nationhood discourse in the case study are illustrated in more detail.

The analysis identifies three variations of the nationhood discourse in early twentieth-century Iranian print media, each accommodating a distinctive code of difference. Regarding these, the study reveals three variations including national trajectories that invoke ethno-racial, civilizational, and religious narratives to justify nationhood in the society.

3.1. Discursive Unities: Interplay of the Imageries and Constituting Shared Discursive Strategies

The data analysis reveals that there are some strategies that are shared between all actors. Regardless of what dataset is selected, these prevalent strategies keep all diverse sets of discursive practices united under the umbrella of nationalist discourse. The study here identified two major discursive regularities in the data.

3.1.1. Strategy of Synchronization: Commonalities with Others and Connection to World Society

This part of the analysis uncovers how actors first applied strategies of commonalities with others and linguistic devices of we among others to justify their arguments. In this regard, referring to "clans of the globe" is a prevalent depiction upon which comparisons to others and, subsequently, aforementioned strategies are activated. For instance:

> If the clans of the globe have accepted that all human beings everywhere are the same in the principles of talent; then the duty of each community that finds itself lagged behind other nations is to pursue nurture, follow the progress path and reach the leading convoy. (Tarbiyat, vol. 2, 24 December 1896)

This assumption relates to a view of the globe as a whole divided into sub-units (blocks) that pursue their interests [44]. In so doing, while previous research has mainly focused on how national communities are constructed by strategies of "sameness within" and/or "difference with others" [66], this level of analysis takes a step back to reveal first how nationhood was related to the broader structure of world polity and became an institutional imperative among recipients. Each comparison presupposes that the comparing things are of the same kind.

Also, "reference groups" were employed to make sense of comparisons with other societies. In all variations, it is a common understanding that global society as a whole is an evolving organism, and all clans of the globe must first keep up with others and then follow those reference groups which are more "developed." The strength of this strategy derives from the view of the world as a hierarchical polity [44], whereby Western societies are consistently figured as "developed" and "leading" countries throughout the entire data set.

> Among the diaspora, those wise people who compare foreign societies' progress with Iran's situation have been thinking about how they can help desperate people captured in Iran. . . (Qanun, vol. 1, 20 February 1890)

> Although our continent was the cradle of human civilization; western nations, for now, are like the teachers of other lands' people. . ., and if we do not deny or be disrespectful, we should accept that we have recently learned or borrowed many things from them. (Tarbiyat, vol. 225, 18 April 1901)

Consequently, all actors unavoidably presumed that the common, justified type of vernacularity in the modern world is nationhood. In other words, in all pieces of the data, writers implicitly appealed to nationhood as the authoritative form of imagining the local community. This synchronization strategy [41,79,80], which is shared between all actors, naturalizes the adoption of world cultural discourses (in this case nationhood), and makes comparisons with others possible.

3.1.2. Strategy of Historicization and Re-Interpretation of the Past: Nation as an Evolving Organism

Second, the whole data show that the strategy of "historicization" [81,82] is activated. Such a discursive regularity, relying on the imagery of the social world as "driven by inherent laws of evolutionary progress" [44], permits imagining a nation as an evolving organism and triggers the narratives of national history. The temporal continuity of nationhood and hence narrativization has been assumed as self-evident in all the data, where nationhood is presented as an evolved sensibility. That is to say, although the form of nationhood was newly constructed at that time in Western societies, all previous forms of vernacularity in the Iranian society were re-interpreted in favor of nationhood, and thereby all local history was amassed under the projects of "national history". For example:

> A famous French proverb says that "lucky the nation that has no history", which is to say the nation that has spent a peaceful time without proper historical events like revolutions, wars, etc., is so lucky. . . On the other hand, we can see that this

> silence would result in the coldness of a nation's blood and hence its extinction. . . Now, this indolence, sleepiness, and "historylessness" of the last 80 years have caused this worse-than-death situation. . . (Kaveh, vol. 2, 8 February 1916)

Therefore, the past is re-interpreted based on nationhood, whereby national narratives are constituted. In another example, nationhood has been projected into the past to position Iran among other famous nations and justify national pride through revitalization practices:

> We, the Iranian nation, have not been unknown people; if you would like to know who we have been, be informed that we are a community that sophisticated people in all societies had considered us among great and well-known nations. . . as we've got pride and admiration since ancient times. (Tarbiyat, vol. 6, 21 January 1897)

3.2. (Re)Constructive Strategies: Accommodating Codes of Differences and Constructing National Trajectories

These strategies entail primarily linguistic procedures which constitute a national we-group through particular acts of reference [67]. As the two sides of the same coin, it runs hand-in-hand with the construction of "difference/distinctiveness with others" (dissimilation) and/or "sameness/uniqueness within" (assimilation) practices [83]. In the following sections, I investigate how the shared discursive strategies mentioned above (synchronization and historicization) formed domestic field battles through which diverse codes of difference and thereby national trajectories for each of them could be activated and naturalized at the time.

I find three modes of national trajectories adapted to the local context in early twentieth-century Iranian print media, in which actors tried to construct national narratives by accommodating distinct codes of difference (ethnicity, race, religion, etc.,) and submerging them [84] under the rule-like form of nationhood. I describe these modes below as three discursive variations and provide quotes to illustrate the politics behind such differentiation strategy in each mode.

3.2.1. Constructing Narratives of Lost Pre-Islamic Glory: Discursive Variation of Racial Nationalism

One common discursive variation of nationhood in early twentieth-century Iran is to reinterpret racial origins as part of a national trajectory. In such a discursive variation, in which the imagery of competition is highlighted, the themes of grandeur and decadence of Persian emperorships[2] in a political sense, and of Iran's (or national) spirit in a social sense have been subjected by means of ethno-racial codes of difference to construct a national narrative. For instance:

> This praise for spring[3] is one of the biggest national properties of the Iranian race which has been gradually placed in the essence of this nation and inherited throughout generations. . . and it is surprising that the history of Iranian national existence, just like these accurate seasonal changes in nature, entails sequential falls and springs. (Kaveh, vol. 5–6, 18 April 1916)

> The only wish and regret of Iranian immigrants is to see Iran once again prove that its national spirit is not dead yet. . . (Kaveh, vol. 1, 24 January 1916)

Then, actors invoked mythological figures to justify the narrative [85]. Eventually, a tragic narrative on the decadence of a noble community among evolving others was constructed.

> The masterpiece of Iran's glorious era is Kaveh's[4] flag, which reminds all Iranians of ancient greatness and national pride, and evokes Iran's lively and non-contemptible soul. (Kaveh, vol. 1, 24 January 1916)

This narrative, framing a glorious past by involving ethno-mythical origins, posited Iran's nation as a legendary community but kept asleep in a world comprising evolv-

ing nation-states. What becomes desirable here is taking lost superiority in the world's hierarchy by recalling the decent inherence and authentic nature of ours.

> If we are an authentic and decent nation, if we are children of those ancient fathers. . . we must now show our nature to friends and enemies. . . (Kaveh, vol. 2, 8 February 1916)

3.2.2. Constructing Narratives of Cultivated Community: Discursive Variation of Civic Nationalism

In another type of nationhood articulation, the community is imagined as an ancient civilized one that has lagged behind the global convoy in the modern era. In this variation, actors emphasized nurture and education. Thus, learning modern science and sophistication became the main theme, in contrast to the nature of race/ethnicity highlighted in the racial narrative. The texts are certainly indicative of the imagery of progress in this narrative.

> If human beings were not from the same species, and there were differences in principles of talent among people's branches and clans, we would not have the right to assume all of them committed to the same task, and encourage them to the superb features of science, sophistication, progress, civilization, industry, and art. . . But it has been proved that human beings everywhere are the same, and from the same descendent and origin having similar nature and talent, and the difference here is from nurture. If people everywhere follow the path of nurture, they can gain a high level. . . (Tarbiyat, vol. 1, 17 December 1896)

Actors frequently referred to classical scientific inventions and forgotten cultural achievements in such a nationalist narrative as the main forces of greatness in old Persian emperorships, and invoked the authority of science and knowledge in their claims.

> The kingdom of Kaykhosro and other [Persian] emperors which overspread from east to west; the [Persian] nation that was superior to all others in terms of sciences, arts, civilization, and industry at that time; do not they demand glory and greatness today? Indeed, they want. (Tarbiyat, vol. 52, 9 December 1897)

Such a discourse of nationhood sought to persuade others that we were previously civilized but lagged behind for a long time so should be equipped with modern education and science to return to developed camps.

> In my opinion, even for our leaders, we should get educated and become craftsmen; we should not be dropped behind other nations, and should not be blamed or defeated by foreigners. . . (Tarbiyat, vol. 273, 26 March 1903)

3.2.3. Constructing Narratives of Forgotten Islamic Origins: Discursive Variation of Religious Nationalism

Another narrative of nationhood involves collective religious identities. As recent studies indicate that religious nationalist projects sought to structure social life through calls to continuity with the past even as they adopt the core assumptions of the nation-states projects [86]. In the Muslim world, in particular, the very evolution of nation-states often fuses religion with national narratives [87]. The data here clarify how these practices became thinkable in the society.

In so doing, the strategies of sameness within the national community were based on the dominant religion [88], and the theme of decadence was related to forgetting public affairs among Muslims.

> This is really amazing and yet tragic that in the country of Iran, among this pure nation of Islam, administrators including the ruling system and armies have become the worst enemy of any common or even Sharia laws. . . At the beginning of Islam's era, no Muslim was saying that the nation's affairs are not my business. Because of two Sharia duties "enjoining good and forbidding wrong," every

> Muslim identified himself as the protector and advocate of God's rules; and by such preservation, Islam's law made the world subject to Islam's kingdom (rulership) at the fastest pace. The day foolish Muslims gave up the preservation of public affairs, that ominous day was the end of the greatness of Islam's nations. (Qanun[5], vol. 24)

In this narrative, actors appealed to Islamic thought to adapt the local context with modern principles.

> On the other side, we observe that all the principles of the Tanzimat[6]—including security, that justice, those rights, and progress you address us in foreign societies—had already been prepared inside Islam. . . Now, instead of begging for favorable reformations from foreign societies as done thus far, we would easily extract all those reformation principles from Islam itself. . . the progress of Islam's nations will never be possible unless by relying on Islam's knowledge. (Qanun, vol. 36)

Also, the imagery of the "world as comprising competing blocks" is highlighted in this variation. In this sense, Islamic nation-states should be united to form a competing block of Islam.

> The third idea, which has been extensively heated debate in all Islamic territories and has spread pretty much so that it has attracted Islamic society to itself, is the political unity among Islamic states and nations. (Kaveh, vol. 12, 15 September 1916)

In this discursive variation, the writers tried to direct people toward constructing an Iranian national narrative by relying on Islamic origins, then asking for the unification of all Islamic nations to become the superior block in a hierarchical world. The imagery of progress is still obvious in this variation, but it goes behind modern Islamic thought.

> Indeed, Islam deserves to conquer the world. But which Islam? Islam of science not Islam of ignorance, Islam of kindness, not of disturbance, Islam of progress not Islam of inferiority, Islam of unity not dissension, . . .Islam of reasoning not Islam of imitation. . . (Qanun, vol. 27)

> The glory of Islam's nations was based on unity, and the revival of Islam's nations will not be possible except with unity. . . which one is the leading nation on earth? The nation that believes more in science and has more supplementary schools. And who would be the greatest ruler of Iran? The one who liberates people from the ruling class's cruelty by spreading science and implementing the law. (Qanun, vol. 11)

4. Discussion

This study investigated the discursive construction of nationhood in Iran. It aimed at identifying the discursive practices by which the global modular form of nationhood—which is imagined as limited and sovereign—was adapted in Iran's modern history. Staying in between macro-cultural discussions of isomorphism by neoinstitutionalist scholars on the one hand, and micro-level analyses of particularization on the other, this study examined the discursive side of globally diffused nationalist discourse in a quintessential site of social change: the Iranian print media in the early twentieth century. This study relied on the theoretical framework of domestication, and applied critical discourse analysis and critical metaphor analysis as elaborated in the notion of the social world's imageries.

The study first uncovered shared strategies applied by all actors. This section—by focusing on the similarities among all diverse nationhood variations—addresses discursive unities whereupon nationhood is imagined. This level allows us to incorporate into our analysis those pre-given basic assumptions which are left out of analyses in micro constructionist studies of nationhood (see e.g., [67]).

In this sense, the realization of the world as a whole unit (like a tribe) divided into several sub-units (like clans) is prevalent in all texts. As Brubaker noted [90] "Underlying

nationalist discourse is the premise that humanity is divided into distinct nations" (p. 51). This synchronization strategy triggers comparisons with others and naturalizes the adoption of the global model of nationhood, so all actors unavoidably presumed that the self-evident form of vernacularity in the modern world is nationhood. Moreover, the imagery of social reality as "driven by inherent laws of evolutionary progress," permits imagining *nation* as an evolving organism and brings about the strategy of historicizing nationhood, whereupon national narratives are constructed.

When membership in world society and continuity in history were constituted, the various discursive practices for imagining community became possible and local field battles were constituted. Put differently, while the first part of the analysis addresses by which strategies actors justified the global discourse of nationalism in early twentieth-century Iran, the latter investigates how actors assign meaning to nationhood and design national trajectories at the time. The study then identified three discursive variations through which the world cultural discourse of nationhood was naturalized in modern Iran. Each of those variations applied a distinctive, legitimizing narrative [91] intertwined with specific imageries of the social world to construct national communities. One variation brought ethno-racial pre-Islamic origins under the umbrella of a national trajectory and constructed a tragic narrative. As explicated by Zia-Ebrahimi [92], pre-Islamic Iran is cast as a "golden age" in this racialized conception of Iranian nationhood. In this trajectory, the Iranian nation was identified as a legendary ancient community kept asleep in a world comprising evolving national communities, and one that needs to regain its lost superiority. Another variation sought to convince Iranian public opinion that the community had been civilized but had lagged behind for a long time, and so should learn modern education and science to return to the developed camp. A third variation, by highlighting the imagery of competing blocks in a hierarchical globe, turned towards constructing national identity by relying on dominant Islamic origins, then asking for the unification of all Islamic nations to become the deservedly superior block in the global hierarchy. All three variations existed at the same time, even within one periodical, affirming that nationhood was contested—even "ill-defined" [93]—in Iran.

The first part of the analysis recognized institutional conditions that provide "frames of meaning" within which all actors inform their aspirations [79] (p. 4). It contains rules and assumptions, often unstated and taken for granted, that are built into global institutions and discourses [94]. One would say here that the imageries of social realities have become almost universally assumed world cultural principles [95]. Nationhood, in this sense, can be viewed as a "precarious frame of vision and a basis for individual and collective action" [96] (p. 19). Upon such governing premises, nationalist actors naturalize localization of the global discourse. The paper also confirms those studies indicating that nationhood was projected into the past, such that former modes of social organization in Iran were re-interpreted as the historical predecessors of nation-states [1], and such that other codes of differences like religion or race were submerged under nationhood [81,84,97,98]. Iranian nationalists sought to remake their history, not in circumstances of their choosing, but within the global epistemic settings which are embedded. Through these discursive politics, nationhood was naturalized and thus became ours. As Malešević [99] convincingly argues in a recent theory that incorporates the findings of the World Society perspective, "nationalism has become deeply grounded in the everyday life of modern human beings".

The second part of the analysis here shows divergences when the global models are discursively institutionalized in recipient societies. Although contemporary conceptions of locality are largely produced in something like global terms, this certainly does not mean that all forms of locality are thus substantively homogenized [10]. As Alasuutari [100] noted, even if there is a carefully made master plan, each participant has to strategize, apply, and relate to the master plan (p. 20). In compliance with the fresh wave of studies in neoinstitutional theory, the findings here underline the salience of local contextual factors in interpreting and delivering the global cultural frameworks to the local public when no sin-

gle understanding holds sway [101–104]. In particular, Wimmer's theory of nation-building indicates the role of slow-moving, generational processes such as linguistic assimilation, and states' capacity in deepening national integration [105]. Following Koenig [106], I have shown that sociological institutionalism can provide a fruitful conceptual framework for the study of contemporary transformations of cultural models—as long as it is pushed to more process-oriented and actor-sensitive modes of analysis.

Furthermore, as Syväterä and Qadir [80] have indicated, what actually spreads as a cultural model is not a single, identifiable organizational format, but an evolving codification that moves back and forth through the world polity. In this sense, instead of approaching such ramifications as local variations [28], the study propounds them as discursive variations (derivations), since they can distinctively be diffused across the world in the following courses, and "finally leads, on the aggregate, global level, to the worldwide hegemony of the nation-state model" [107]. The global rise of religious nationalist movements [108,109] and the racial/ethnic sense of national belonging [33,110] would put those discursive variations beyond local domains. This view emphasizes that global discourses exist through their local articulations [111]. In other words, while the diffusion of a world cultural discourse triggers changes in each society, it may simultaneously bring about change and even mutation in the global discourse itself. This paper hence suggests that such practices addressed by domestication can be best described as the discursive side of diffusion by which a world cultural model (nationhood) was made understandable and natural for a local audience (Iran). In this sense, it shows how the multi-level dynamics of institutionalization result in varying, mediating, and localizing mechanisms of world culture. From this perspective, rather than loose coupling, changes in diffusion mechanisms of global models through practices can be best understood as the micro-narratives of divergence in convergence [112].

To sum up, the meso-level discursive view on institutional politics here lends credence to domestication mechanisms. This perspective, on the one side, challenges micro-level exceptionalist claims about modern Iran. In this way, it points to new directions to understand contemporary Iran, not as a rogue outlier, but rather as discursively connected to world society. On the other side, it highlights the local meaning-making of world cultural models, as evidenced in the case of nationhood in modern Iran. Indeed, such discursive politics in nationhood domestication have constituted further contestations on Iranian national identity [113–115]. That is to say, since the Islamic revolutionaries took forward one of the discursive variations, other Iranian forces appeal to different variations. The consequences of these contestations might be problematic, as it provides the discursive opportunity for subtle forms of political manipulations, which specifically aim to influence Iranians' states of mind and emotional habitat [116]. Hence, this study suggests that the instrumentalizations of religious invocations of nationhood as evidenced in "Shi'ism"[7] [117] or racialized framings of national identity as manifested by "Aryanism"[8] [118], and thereby seeking the formation of homogenizing claims in modern Iran's nation-building projects should come under closer scrutiny. Such epistemic conducts, often implemented by authoritarian actors, invite more critical investigations into the national identity-based appeals in Iran's modern politics.

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Notes

1 According to *The World Factbook* [40], there are seven ethnic groups besides the Persian majority, and four religious minorities alongside the Shia majority.

2 It generally refers to all ancient Persian empires. In particular, the reference point there is the Achaemenid Empire as the foremost Iranian empire (550 BC–330 BC), which spread from the Balkans and Egypt in the west to Central Asia in the east.

3 Rooted in the pre-Islamic Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism, Iranians celebrate the first day of the spring season as the beginning of the new year: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nowruz (accessed on 8 June 2023).

4 An Iranian mythical hero, "Kaveh the Blacksmith" is a 5000-year-old figure in Iranian mythology who led a popular uprising against a ruthless ruler named Zahāk and delivered the throne to the legitimate king.

5 From the seventh volume, the exact dates of the volumes' publications were removed from Qanun's layout in the data source.

6 Series of reforms promulgated in the Ottoman Empire between 1839 and 1876. These reforms, heavily influenced by European ideas, were intended to effect a fundamental change of the empire from the old system to that of a modern state [89].

7 Please refer to the first note.

8 As Zia Ebrahimi [118] described the term "Aryanism": "the claim to belong to the 'Aryan race,' believed to be rooted in the ancient self-designation ariya."

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