

ARTÍCULOS

Analyzing Realities, Struggles and Challenges of the Self-Determination Right: A Study of Ahwazi People and Non-Persian Nations in Iran

Analizando realidades, luchas y desafíos al derecho de libre determinación: Un Estudio sobre el Pueblo Ahwazi y las Naciones no persas en Irán

Abdulrahman Hetteh

Regent College London, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT This article examines the persistent advocacy of the Ahwazi people in Iran for their right to self-determination within the framework of international law, amidst historical and contemporary grievances. Focusing on Ahwazi Arabs, it challenges prevailing perceptions of the Persian majority and scrutinizes issues of group identity, discrimination, and minority rights. By critically evaluating League of Nations and the United Nations' legal frameworks, in relation to the Ahwazi people and non-Persian nations in Iran, it reveals shortcomings in addressing their national aspirations and rights. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the Persian-centric system in Iran, highlighting the systemic marginalization of ethnic minority rights within academic discourse and emphasizing the necessity to recognize Iran's diverse cultures and nationalities. Scholars and activists can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the struggles and aspirations of non-Persian nations, including the Ahwazi people, within the ambit of international human rights law. This article seeks to fill existing gaps in the literature by amplifying Ahwazi perspectives, suggesting future research directions, and advocating for international backing for their quest for justice and self-determination.

KEYWORDS Ahwazi people and non-Persian nations in Iran, self-determination, international law, minority rights, Persian-centric discourse.

RESUMEN Este artículo examina la persistente defensa del pueblo ahwazi en Irán de su derecho a la autodeterminación en el marco del derecho internacional, en medio de agravios históricos y contemporáneos. Centrándose en los árabes ahwazi, desafía las percepciones predominantes de la mayoría persa y escudriña cuestiones de identidad grupal, discriminación y derechos de las minorías. Evaluando críticamente los marcos legales establecidos por la Liga de las Naciones y las Naciones Unidas, relacionándolos con el pueblo ahwazi y las naciones no persas en Irán, revela deficiencias a la hora de abordar sus aspiraciones nacionales y derechos. Además, examina el sistema persa-céntrico en Irán, resaltando la marginación sistemática de los derechos de las minorías étnicas dentro del discurso académico y enfatizando la necesidad de reconocer las diversas culturas y nacionalidades de Irán. Académicos y activistas pueden contribuir a una comprensión más matizada de las luchas y aspiraciones de las naciones no persas, incluido el pueblo ahwazi, dentro del ámbito del derecho internacional de los derechos humanos. Este artículo busca llenar las lagunas existentes en la literatura amplificando las perspectivas ahwazi, sugiriendo futuras direcciones de investigación y abogando por el respaldo internacional para su búsqueda de justicia y autodeterminación.

PALABRAS CLAVE Pueblo ahwazi y naciones no persas en Irán, autodeterminación, derecho internacional, derechos de las minorías, discurso centrado en los persas.

Introduction

Ahwazi people are one of several non-Persian nations and groups, living in three provinces in the south and southwest of Iran. Their historical struggle for autonomy and self-determination has been shaped by complex geopolitical dynamics and external influences. Ahwazi people had a long history of independence or semi-autonomous governance (Hetteh, 2023b). They had exercised effective sovereignty over their land before and after the Erzurum Treaty of 1847, which established the modern Iran-Iraq borders under the auspices of the British and Russian colonial powers (Schofield, 2008: 410). The British government was complicit in abolishing the semi-independent status of Ahwaz after the Russian Revolution in 1917, as the British government considered the Revolution a threat to the British colonial interests in the Arabian Gulf and India (Etheredge, 2011: 130). It consequently resulted in the British abandonment of their policy of protecting Sheikh Khazal, the local ruler of Ahwaz, against the Persian government. The British, who had until then supported the semi-autonomous rule in Ahwaz, saw the potential in the Persian war minister, Reza Khan, as a person who could protect their interests across the entire Persia.¹ The British government needed Reza Khan to establish and maintain a central government capable of holding Persia together without needing a British military presence.² During the 1920s, Persia used military forces and occupied the lands of the semi-autonomous non-Persian peoples, including the Ahwazi Arabs, Turks of Azerbaijan, Kurds, Baluch and Turkmen and created the contemporary Iranian nation-state (Ghods, 1991: 38).

It is very exceptional that a state encompasses only one homogenous nation (Harrison and Boyd, 2003; 18). Iran is a country with multiple ethnic identities and not one Iranian identity as usually portrayed in Iranian literature (Shaffer, 2002). Historical evidence suggests that Persia was an empire formed of adjacent territories similar to the Russian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the German Empire (Azizi Benitorof, 2019). Several territorial frontiers in Iran separate the Persians, Azerbaijani Turks, Kurds, Ahwazi Arabs, Baluchi, Turkmen, and Lurs from one another. The existence of diverse territories within the political structure of Iran shows that contemporary Iran is comprised of several regions and nations, making Iran a product and remnant of an empire with many trapped nations that have been rendered invisible by the existing political system (Azizi Benitorof, 2019).

Persia was known as the Protected Kingdoms (Mamaleke Mahroseh), of which Arabistan (part of the Ahwaz region) was one of those kingdoms with its vast majority Arab population under the Safavids (1500-1700). Later, Persia became known as the Imperial Kingdom during the Qajar and Pahlavi rule (1800-1900). From the rise of the Turkic Safavids Empire in the 1500s to WWI, the political structure of Persia was based on the monarch's indirect control in the form of a confederation or a traditional federation system. To demonstrate the ethnic diversity in the past and present Iran, one

¹ The name Persia was changed to Iran in 1935.

² «File 3/8 Affairs of Sh. Khaz'als sons. » [177v] (354/508), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/5/178, in Qatar Digital Library. https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100030262304.0x00009b.

can look at different regions separated from Iran in the 19th century (Azizi Benitorof, 2019). The Caucasus region, including parts of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Dagestan, was separated from Persia after a peace treaty was signed with Russia in 1828 (Cornell, 1998). Many peoples in the Caucasus region have become independent states and nations after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Similarly, Herat in Afghanistan gained its independence from Persia after a peace treaty was signed between Persia and Great Britain in 1857 (Volodarsky, 1987: 43-54). The remaining nations and peoples subsumed within Iran, including the Ahwazi people, have continued pursuing the recognition of their national identity and existence at the national and international levels.

Ahwazi people and other non-Persian nations in Iran view the Iranian state as either an occupying or colonial entity because it has not included them in the process of nation-state building, denying them participation in matters that related to their existence, including political, economic, social and cultural rights. It treated them as outsiders and second-class citizens and exploited their natural resources without benefiting them (Hamid, 2024).

This article aims to explore the historical and contemporary challenges and dimensions of self-determination of the Ahwazi people and non-Persian nations, contextualizing their struggles within the broader framework of international law and human rights discourse. It sheds light on Iran's denial to provide statistics on the religious, linguistic, ethnic and racial background of people who identify as Ahwazis, Turks, Kurds, Baluch and other non-Persians. It studies the deficiency of the minority regimes and mechanisms under the League of Nations and assesses the United Nations' legal framework for the protection of peoples with territorial claims and self-determination rights. It also investigates the role of Iranian scholars in promoting the Persian-centric nation-state discourse under the former Monarchy regime. Those scholars excluded non-Persian nationals from their studies and depicted Iran as a single nation with Persian history, culture and language. In addition, it criticizes the way the United Nations provided a platform to the Iranian Monarch who depicted Iran as a source of human rights and the Shah (king) as a role model and champion of human rights despite gross violations of human rights. It suggests that Iranian scholars have not sufficiently studied the suppression of ethnic identity and rights under the Islamic Republic. Finally, this article provides a literature review of some studies conducted on the right to self-determination of the Ahwazi people and its application under international law. It concludes that the road to self-determination is not straightforward for the Ahwazi people and other non-Persian nations in Iran as they have been facing prolonged systemic limitations and barriers in accessing platforms to freely express their national identity and demands without brutally being suppressed by either the state or Persian and Iranian-centric oppositions in exile.

Understanding Ethnic Demographics in Iran

While the Persians dominate the power in Iran, numerically, they do not constitute the majority of the population (NBCRC, 2016). Due to the lack of official data, most statistics addressing the numbers of Ahwazi Arabs and other groups in Iran are based

on estimations. The discussion of the statistics serves several purposes in relation to group identity, discrimination and rights. It also spans Iran in general and addresses Ahwaz specifically.

Iranian Policies on Statistics

The Statistical Center of Iran, responsible for providing official statistics, does not offer statistics on ethnic populations (Motalebi, 2008). Iran claims that population censuses were taken only based on geographical areas because factors such as inter-ethnic marriages confuse the statistics about people's ethnic origin and that « many members of ethnic groups protested if they were classified by ethnic origin (CERD, 2003).» However, this claim was not supported by evidence. Taking the census in this manner is contrary to the right to self-identification affirmed in international law instruments and jurisprudence pertaining to minorities and indigenous peoples (UN, 2020).³ This right includes the obligations of states to ensure non-discrimination, survival and development of minorities by recognizing their right to self-identify as minorities. States have positive obligations to protect minority rights under Article 27 of the ICCPR, which necessitates minority right to self-identification. Iranian official censuses include only the population of religious minorities such as Christians, Zoroastrians and Jewish people (Statistical Center of Iran, 2018: 158). The lack of statistics based on ethnicity can be examined from two different perspectives. One is that the issue is political, as the Iranian government intentionally conceal information on ethnicity. The second is that the government does not believe in privilege or deprivation based on belonging to a particular ethnic group. Therefore, it does not see any urgency to collect data about the ethnic populations (Fazaeli and Karami, 2017: 230-31). The government may believe that ethnic groups already enjoy their human rights equally and do not suffer disadvantages compared to the Persian people – a position which does not stand up to scrutiny in the context of the Ahwazi people as international human rights bodies and NGOs documented the discriminations and violations against Ahwazis including their civil, political, economic and social and cultural rights by the Iranian state.

Although there are no published statistics on ethnicities, one can analyze information and the official statements on the languages spoken in Iran to estimate the overall percentages of the ethnicities in Iran. Statistics of Iran's census in 1996 show that 83 percent of the Iranian population speaks Persian (Motalebi, 2008). Because Persian is the only official language taught in schools, it is expected to be learned and spoken by the Persians and peoples such as the Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Baluch, Turkmen and others.

³ See UNGA, *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, A/RES/61/295 (2 October 2007) Article 33(1); *Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries* (ILO No. 169), 27 June 1989, 28 ILM 1382, Article 1(2); General Assembly Organization of American States, *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, AG/RES. 2888 (XLVI-O/16), 3rd plenary session (15 June 2016), Article 1(2); *Merits, Reparations and Costs*, 24 August 2010, IACHR, Series C No. 214, par. 37 (Xákmok).

Therefore, 83 percent of Persian speakers are not an indication of the Persian population. Haji Babaei, Iran's Deputy Minister of Primary Education, stated in 2009 that 70 percent of students across the country were bilingual. The term bilingual is used in Iran in reference to Iranian students whose mother language is not Persian but have to use the official language (Persian) in school. This is an indication that the Persians are not the majority in Iran (ISNA, 2012).

Reliability and Criticism of the Existing Estimates on Population

The statistics on the ethnic population of Iran presented by various organizations such as the CIA World Factbook and the US Library of Congress are mainly for estimation and cannot be conclusively accepted (Motalebi, 2008). According to the CIA World Factbook, 51 percent of the population of Iran are Persians (CIA, 2016). The rest belong to other ethnic groups, with 24 percent Azeri (in reference to Turks), 8 percent Gilaki and Mazandarani, 7 percent Kurd, 3 percent Arabs, 2 percent Lur, 2 percent Baloch, 2 percent Turkmen, and 1 percent other (CIA, 2016). The CIA World Factbook increased the percentage of Persians from 51 percent published in its 2000-January 2011 reports to 61 percent in its November 2011-2015. In its recent reports in 2021-2022, and in response to the critiques, the CIA World Factbook changed its website address, removing the links to the older volumes and no longer including the size of ethnic groups and their languages in Iran (Pipes, 2015). While there are no agreed-upon sources on Iran's ethnic makeup, there is a tendency among policy institutes and academia to rely on the CIA World Factbook for statistics on Iran's ethnic population (Pipes, 2015). Ali Akbar Salehi, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, stated in 2012 that 40 percent of Iranian people speak Turkish, which indicates that either the CIA or the government's estimation of the Turks in Iran is inaccurate as they do not coincide (Aparat, 2014; Shoaresal, 2016). Commenting on the issue, in his field research in 1999, the Ahwazi author Azizi Benitorof (2005) estimated that the Arabs in Iran were over 5 million, constituting 8 percent of Iran's population. He stated that 3 to 3.5 million Arabs live in Arabistan (Khuzestan), 1.5 million live in the islands and ports of Bushehr and Hormozgan, and half a million reside in other provinces as war refugees. According to Kamil Alboshoka's book using the Geographic Information System, WHO statistics and secondary data, the Arab population amounts to 8 million people in the Ahwaz region and more than 10 million in total across Iran (approximately 12 percent) (Alboshoka, 2023: 505, 513).

The League of Nations and the United Nations Legal Frameworks Governing Human Rights

Examination of the League of Nations Mandate System and Minority Protection and Their Implications for Ahwazi People and Non-Persian Nations

The League of Nations was established as an outcome of the Paris Peace Conference that established the Treaty of Versailles to end World War I, maintained international peace, resolved disputes among states through diplomacy and prevented another world

war (Beneš, 1932). US President Woodrow Wilson, Russian President Lenin and others advocated the principle of self-determination for the balance of power and reconstruction of Europe, justifying the formation of new states following the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires (Spanu, 2015: 16; Sargsyan, 2015: 31).

The Council of the League of Nations introduced the Mandate System to protect peoples and nations of non-self-governing territories who could not create states capable of performing their obligations in the modern world.⁴ In any case, studying the circumstances and the history surrounding the adoption of the Mandate System by the Great Powers illustrates that there was never an intention to prepare non-self-governing territories and peoples for their independence (Pearson, 2017). Also, it was never envisioned that the mandate would universally apply to all non-self-governing territories and peoples, especially the former colonial territories of European empires (Green, 1975: 155-57). The mandate system's objective was to share the administration of territories surrendered by Germany and Turkey between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers. It was to prevent the return of Germany to its African colonies and to avoid a new scramble for Africa that could cause another major war in Europe (Anghie, 2002; Matz, 2005).

The Mandate System did not include the Ahwazis or other peoples in Persia, leaving them with no legal status - despite being autonomous - and vulnerable to Iranian military force which eventually ended their autonomy. The failure of the Mandate System to recognize the Ahwazi people's autonomous status perpetuated their marginalization within the Iranian state and hindered their ability to assert their rights on the international stage.

The other regime introduced by the Council of the League was the Minorities Protection System aimed to safeguard the rights of minority groups. The system prohibited discrimination against and guaranteed the enjoyment of minorities' civil and political rights, including protection of their cultural and religious freedom, allowing them to have their own social organizations and use their own languages in schools and public (Müller-Sommerfeld, 2016: 264; Schmidt, 2007: 40-41). Despite being nuanced and innovative in protecting minorities, minority rights were relevant only to specific groups in states with minority treaties, particularly the defeated countries and newly established states. The system was biased because it imposed obligations only on states with minority treaties and lacked general application to all minorities worldwide (Thornberry, 1992; Fink, 1994). In addition, in practice, the Council could not improve the situation of minorities significantly in the defeated and new states and did not make good use of the committees assigned to protect minorities (Hilpold, 2013; Potter, 1948: 249).

The Minorities System did not impose obligations on Persia to protect its minorities, and Ahwazi people could not benefit from it. As a result, the specific challenges faced by the Ahwazi people were not addressed due to the system's narrow scope and selective application to minorities.

⁴ *Covenant of the League of Nations*, 28 April 1919, Article 22.

The Relevance of the UN Minority System and Self-Determination Right to Ahwazis

The United Nations (UN) inherited the shortcomings of the League of Nations towards minorities and non-self-governing territories and peoples (Pearson, 2017). The protection of minorities, in particular, was omitted from the UN Charter; this is the case for some but not all of the UN human rights treaties. For instance, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) prohibits discrimination against minorities,⁵ Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)⁶ and Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child refer to minority rights.⁷ Despite certain guarantees by international law and human rights mechanisms, minorities lack adequate protection and remedy, particularly with their political rights, natural resources, territorial claims, and self-determination (Castellino, 2010).

Nonetheless, international law recognizes the right to self-determination as a fundamental human right. Article 1 of both twin Covenants on human rights, namely the ICCPR and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) are identical about the right to self-determination, stating:

All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. 2. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a person be deprived of his own means of subsistence.

There are various international and regional mechanisms and frameworks that address self-determination topics and give legal, political and advocacy support for peoples demanding self-determination. Article 1(2) of the UN Charter emphasizes the principle of friendly relations among nations based on respect for equal rights and self-determination of peoples.⁸ The principle of self-determination was the driving force behind the UN decolonization process, leading to the independence of colonies and territories, particularly through declarations and resolutions including the UN General Assembly's Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and the establishment of Special Committees on Decolonization to monitor compliance with and respect for the right to self-determination.⁹ As a principal judicial

⁵ *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, 21 December 1965, 660 UNTS 195, (entered into force 4 January 1969) [ICERD].

⁶ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 16 December 1966, 999 UNTS 171, (entered into force 23 March 1966) [ICCPR].

⁷ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3, (entered into force 2 September 1990) [CRC].

⁸ *Charter of the United Nations*, 24 October 1945, 1 UNTS XVI, Article 1(2).

⁹ UNGA, *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and*

organ of the UN, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued advisory opinions on self-determination questions such as the Western Sahara case¹⁰ and Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo.¹¹ Also, subject to respect for the territorial integrity of states, the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples and standards for the recognition, protection and promotion of their rights and their survival is enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, regional organizations, including the African Union and the European Union, support and promote self-determination right of peoples through democracy and human rights. In addition, Non-Governmental Organizations such as the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) promote universal respect for the right to self-determination of peoples, particularly the unrepresented and marginalized peoples (an Ahwazi political group representing Ahwazi people is a member of the UNPO), by giving them platforms to raise their concerns (UNPO (n.d.)). Self-determination has two dimensions: internal and external. Internal self-determination is a matter of internal affairs that concerns the integration, autonomy and self-governance of a group within an existing state. It realizes a degree of aspirations of minorities in the form of regional autonomy – such as Åland Islands in Finland, Catalonia in Spain and Greenland in Denmark - or federalism - such as the Kurds in Iraq - while preserving the territorial integrity of the state. It involves power sharing, political participation and decentralization of power and decisions from a central authority to local entities. On the other hand, in external self-determination, a people, minority, or indigenous group has the right to secession and formation of an independent state. External self-determination is challenging and applies in colonial rule, foreign occupation, or severe oppression (Van Dyke, 1969; Senaratne, 2021).

In 1974, the UN General Assembly asked ICJ to give its advisory opinion on the status of Western Sahara, a territory in North Africa claimed by Morocco and Mauritania following the withdrawal of Spain from the region as part of the decolonization process. Representing the Saharawi people, Polisario Front claimed they have the right to self-determination and independence. On the other hand, Morocco and Mauritania claimed their historical ties to Western Sahara as part of their nations. The ICJ held that there were no legal ties of territorial sovereignty between Western Sahara and Morocco or Mauritania and that the Saharawi people had the right to self-determination.¹² However, with the continuing territorial claims, political interests and military conflicts, the implementation of the right to self-determination in Western Sahara remains challenging (Sterio, 2022).

At the regional level, Katangese People's Congress v Zaire (1995) case was brought before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Commission is responsible for protecting and promoting human and peoples' rights and interpreting the

Peoples, A/RES/1514(XV) (14 December 1960).

¹⁰ *Western Sahara*, Advisory Opinion, [1975] ICJ Rep 12.

¹¹ *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo*, Advisory Opinion, [2010] ICJ Rep 5.

¹² *Western Sahara*, Advisory Opinion [1975], ICJ Rep 12.

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Katangese People's Congress claimed that due to their distinct identity, they had the right to self-determination and independence from Zaire. The Zaire government contested secession as an interpretation of self-determination and argued for the importance of preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state. The African Commission agreed with Zaire's interpretation that self-determination does not necessarily mean secession as it could be realized through other means including autonomy. The Commission stated that there was a lack of concrete evidence of violations of human rights and the right to political participation of the Katanga people in government that could question the territorial integrity of Zaire.¹³

Kosovo's Declaration of Independence from Serbia in 2008 was an example of remedial self-determination where ethnic Albanians suffered severe human rights abuse and injustices following years of conflicts. The ICJ ruled that Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence was not in violation of international law.¹⁴ While not specifically adopting the right to remedial secession, the ICJ did not exclude that possibility either, where in extreme circumstances, a group could claim such right (Lafrance, 2021). However, while secession outside colonial rule remains controversial, internal self-determination is widely recognized (Sterio, 2022). Creating a balance between the group's aspirations and preserving the territorial integrity of the state has been a central argument about the meaning and application of self-determination in situations that do not involve colonial rule or foreign occupation. The lack of clarity from international law regarding the right to secession for oppressed peoples leaves the door open for scholars and practitioners to debate and offer different interpretations of the meaning and applications of external self-determination (Vidmar, 2010).

Historical injustices, including discrimination and marginalization, are the root causes of the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and Asia and the evolution of self-determination after World War II. Inequality and exclusion may lead to a lack of political power and resources for a group to exercise self-determination (Pentassuglia, 2002). For instance, many indigenous peoples around the world are not able to enjoy self-determination under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples due to states' biases and disempowerment. Internal self-determination allows marginalized people to enjoy political and cultural autonomy without changing the state's territorial integrity, for example, in the case of indigenous self-governance in Canada. The Catalan independence movement in Spain and the Quebec sovereignty movement in Canada are examples of demands for external self-determination (Freeman, 1999). Some contemporary self-determination cases include those seeking independence or autonomy, which have gained international coverage and publicity, such as Scotland in the United Kingdom, the Kurdish people in the Middle East, Tibet in China, West Papua in Indonesia, and Palestine.

¹³ *Katangese Peoples' Congress v. Zaire*, Comm. No. 75/92 (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 1995).

¹⁴ *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo*, Advisory Opinion, [2010] ICJ Rep 5.

Oppression refers to the systematic violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms and widespread discrimination against a group of people because of their racial, ethnic, religious, or other social background and membership (Cudd, 2006). Intersectionality and multiple associations of individuals with these characteristics could lead to unique experiences of human rights abuses (Collins, 2000). Forms of oppression include exploitation and use of natural resources without compensation, marginalization and lack of meaningful participation in society, powerlessness leading to a culture of silence about oppression and injustices, cultural imperialism and forced assimilation policies, and threat or actual use of violence against a group (Young, 2008). External self-determination can be used as a remedial measure to remove inequality and promote human rights, fundamental freedoms, and social and political participation for the oppressed people (de Waart, 1994: 54-97).

The Iranian state uses all forms of oppression against the Ahwazi Arabs living on a land rich with natural resources, subjecting them to economic, social and cultural marginalization and political suppression (Amnesty International, 2006). Due to multifaceted subjugation, Ahwazi people are described as oppressed people with high levels of poverty and unemployment, with a state's concerted effort to erase their cultural identity, with a lack of political participation and representation and subject to systematic arrest, torture and executions (Hetteh, 2023a; Hamid, 2018). Severe oppression of Ahwazis has started since the military occupation of their land by the Iranian state in 1925, violating their fundamental human rights, confiscating their land and subjecting them to forced displacement and systematic discrimination (Hetteh, 2023a; Hamid, 2018). As a remedy, the external mode of self-determination is applicable to Ahwazis as oppressed people with severe human rights violations (Sterio, 2010; Hetteh, 2023a).

Yet, the Ahwazi people's quest for self-determination remains largely unaddressed by the international community, partly due to the fact that international law is silent on the definition of people. Secondly, international law lacks an enforcement mechanism as the Security Council is unable to reach a consensus regarding war, the use of force and the resulting humanitarian situations around the world, let alone deciding whether a group should be considered a people with the right to self-determination,¹⁵ which requires coercing and forcing hands of the existing state to allow the people in question to decide their future independently. Also, the permanent members of the Security Council pursue their own geopolitical interests in the world. In addition, while self-determination is a matter of national pursuit of the people, the importance of political support from other states cannot be undermined (e.g., the 2008 Kosovo Declaration of Independence backed by the European Union and the United States).

Despite historical and contemporary grievances, including political and cultural repression and economic marginalization, the Ahwazi people continue to advocate for their right to self-determination within the framework of international law. The Ahwazi struggle for self-determination shares parallels with other international movements for

¹⁵ For example, the Security Council was not able to reach agreement to stop the humanitarian crisis and the killing of thousands of civilians in the Syrian conflict which started in 2011.

independence and decolonization, highlighting its broader significance.

The Challenges to Ahwazi Self-Determination in Light of the Persian-Centric Political System and Discourse

To understand the demands and aspirations of the Ahwazi people for self-determination, it is necessary to provide an overview of how the Iranian mainstream and Western academics depicted the picture of Iran as a nation-state. There is a conventional perception that Iran has a unified political history from the sixth century BC corresponding with the Zoroastrian religion and King Cyrus the Great. Persia would have been born as an empire and ended as a nation-state, following a path like Italy from its Roman empire roots. Conversely, Iran has always been a multicultural and divided society from the period of the Persians and the Medes, a division accentuated by the Arab invasion in the seventh century and Turkic conquests in the fifteenth century (Helfgott, 1980: 195-196).

The dominance of Persian-centric narratives in Iranian historiography has marginalized the experiences and rights of ethnic minority groups, including the Ahwazi people, perpetuating their marginalization within the national discourse. The Pahlavi regime's selective promotion of human rights on the international stage masked its repression of dissent and ethnic diversity within Iran, further exacerbating the challenges faced by the Ahwazi people in asserting their rights. The Islamic Republic's policies have continued to suppress ethnic minority identities and demands, undermining the Ahwazi people's efforts to achieve self-determination within a repressive political environment ((Nikpour, 2018: 366; Asgharzadeh, 2007).

This section provides context for the gap in Iranian studies regarding the human rights situation of non-Persians and their right to self-determination, particularly the Ahwazi people.

Persian-Centric Historiography and its Impact on Non-Persians in Iran

Overall, there have been few studies in English and Persian with a holistic view of the racial construction of historical Persia or current Iran to provide an understanding of the reality of non-Persian peoples living in Iran and their territorial claims and possibly their right to self-determination based on contemporary international human rights law and more broadly public international law. In the words of Elling, « ethnicity as a sociological concept has rarely been discussed or theorized in established Iranian Studies» (Elling, 2013: 15). The representations of ethnicity in Iran in the English and Persian literature often «reflect definitional ambiguity, conceptual inconsistency and simplistic generalizations,» which is related to global ethnicity problems (Elling, 2013: 15). The «second layer of critique revolves around the prevalence of Persian-centric identitarianism in Iranian Studies. A very telling example is the routine conflation, in English-language literature, of «Iranian» with «Persian. » This conflation is [...] « more than an issue of translation or proper language use: it is rooted in pervasive nationalist assumptions, and can no longer be excused by lacking consensus, ingrained habits or

academic sloppiness (Elling, 2013: 15).» Iranologists have contributed to the marginalization of minorities with Persian-centric, nationalist and ahistorical accounts of Iranian identity (Elling, 2013: 15). The magisterial Encyclopædia Iranica is criticized for «giving only «vague and very partial» coverage to non-Persian-speaking and non-Iranian communities and factors in both Iran and Afghanistan (Elling, 2013: 16).» Persian-centrism or classical Iranian Studies is «just the tip of an academic and ideological iceberg» and «one of several questions with which we should problematize our understanding of Iranian society and, in extension, the very concepts of ethnicity and identity (Elling, 2013: 16).»

The neglect of ethnic groups' rights in Iran was also connected to the geopolitical situation of Iran during the Cold War, including the Shah's alliance with the United States and the resulting silence of the US administration on Iran's human rights. Notably, before World War 2 (WW2), the Americans had little knowledge about Iran's history and contemporary situation. However, due to the gravity of the Cold War and the increasing US national interests in Iran, the US-Iran alliance became a priority for US foreign policy. Accordingly, the US government decided to fund regional academic centers specializing in the Middle East. The Iranian studies shaped the knowledge and understanding of the Americans about Iran's culture, history, and contemporary reality. These mainstream studies emerged during the era of Mohammad Reza Shah between 1940 and 1970 and were uncritical of the Pahlavi monarch and the state (Shannon, 2018: 289-90). The autocratic Pahlavi regime promoted the Iranian state's perspective in those studies. It augmented the Shah's role in developing the country without allowing access to state archival material to help create a more nuanced picture of the human rights situation in Iran (Schayegh, 2008: 1400).

In collecting data about Iran, Western social scientists relied on their research on the Iranian intellectuals, politicians and monarch families. The Iranian sources had top-down views of Iran, utilized the language of modernization and focused on the stability offered by the Shah, which «placed the state at the center of social-scientific analysis and doing so in ways that left little room for socioeconomic or cultural contexts (Schayegh, 2010: 44-45).» «Methodological statism» was and is still used predominantly by historians and social scientists who did not question Pahlavi's policies despite looking at Iran's social and cultural changes (Schayegh, 2010: 38). They allowed «the Pahlavi state's hold on analytical imagination to outlive its own death (Schayegh, 2010: 38).» Contemporarily, the primary literature has focused on Shah's affairs, diplomats and politicians, and exceptional events such as the 1953 coup, the US-Iranian relations and the 1979 Revolution rather than the routine experiences of individuals and groups in the society (Shannon, 2018: 290-91). Furthermore, most Iranian studies that relied on Western funds were conducted by scholars who supported either the Pahlavi regime or the Islamic Revolution (Chehabi, 1998: 496).

Despite historiographic improvements, «the most recent works do not seriously consider non-state actors or the transnational flow of ideas. Even the literature on human rights remains preoccupied with Carter's policies rather than the network of students, scholars, and activists that thrust the question of «rights» into the binational dialogue (Shannon, 2018: 290-91).» Also, international history on human rights concentrated on Latin

America and Eastern Europe and rarely included Iran, leaving human rights questions in Pahlavi's time uncovered and muted (Shannon, 2017: 2). Persian-centric and statism studies meant that Ahwazi issues went largely unnoticed in the general overview of the Shah and human rights.

State nationalism which the Pahlavi monarch had developed in the 20th century, was one of the reasons for eliminating ethnicity from Iranian studies. Iranian nationalism was centered on the Persian language, culture and identity, and the need to promote high culture for modernization by the state and national institutions (Gellner, 1983; Zimmer, 2003: 6-7). Nationalism was related to the sources of power as Reza Shah became the new leader, seeking to separate himself from the Qajar dynasty by legitimizing himself as a representative of the new nation (Helbling, 2008: 33-34). The relationship between nationalism and imperialism has been studied extensively. «Imperialist nationalism» can be found in overseas colonial and contiguous land-based empires. «In the latter case, nationalism can take the shape of either 'nation-building imperialism', in which nationalists strive for cultural homogenization throughout the state, or 'ethnocratic imperialism', in which the distinction between 'the imperial nation' and other national groups is retained (Kolsto, 2019: 18).» As a contiguous land-based empire, Persia adopted several policies during the Pahlavi era to create Persian cultural homogenization and establish a political structure mainly controlled by the Persians to protect their interests and power and control the national resources. Nationalism played a part in discriminating against and repressing non-Persian peoples (Zimmer, 2003: 1-2). Therefore, it is not plausible that countries such as Iran claim to be a nation-state. The discussion about the fictional concept of a nation-state has been long-running, and the question has long been how states can ensure respect for the plurality of nations and cultures within their borders (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 2006). As a legal entity, Iran consists of several nations, including the Ahwazi Arabs, and each of these nations is formed of a people who inhabit a defined territory and possess particular characteristics such as language, culture, ethnicity and historical territorial claims.

Shah's Regime and its Approach to Human Rights Discourse

The Shah adopted a misleading approach toward the international human rights movement. On the international stage, he claimed to support the cause of human rights while demonstrating an attitude of intolerance and contempt towards such rights inside Iran. The Shah's family were an active member of the international community, supposedly promoting human rights. For example, during the 1960s and 1970s, Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, the sister of the Shah, became a significant member of several human and women's rights bodies and represented Iran at the UN as a member of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Rights (Nikpour, 2018: 365-66). Also, she served on the Human Rights Committee (CCPR), the body responsible for monitoring the implementation and compliance with ICCPR. The Princess advanced her reputation by meeting with leaders of states as part of her work with the UN and gained international press coverage for her efforts (Nikpour, 2018: 365-66).

The situation of women's rights improved as specific policies of the Shah led to the

enfranchisement of women, including gaining the right to vote and to run for and hold public office (de la Camara, 2012: 15-16; Vatandoust, 1985: 107). The Pahlavi regime publicized the Princess's work on human and women's rights to symbolize the regime's modern outlook (Nikpour, 2018: 366). The use of human rights discourse attracted public relations benefits for the Pahlavi elite and depicted them as benevolent and enlightened rulers in the international community (Nikpour, 2018: 366). In 1968, Princess Ashraf chaired the UN's first International Conference on Human Rights in Tehran to celebrate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)'s twentieth anniversary. The Princess strived for a radical change in the UDHR because she considered it a superficial instrument incapable of conforming to the demands of the post-colonial time and the needs of the developing countries. She perceived herself as a representative of the "Third World" nations and a supporter of the impoverished people in the global south. Yet, similar to many who see themselves as flag bearers for human rights, the Pahlavi family enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle when different groups in Iran, particularly non-Persians, suffered from systematic discrimination and socio-economic marginalization (Burke, 2008: 285).

The Shah used the Tehran Conference as a platform to emphasize the role of Iran in advancing human rights, using «state-nationalist bluster and rhetorical extravagance,» claiming that Iranian political culture was entrenched in human rights by connecting ancient Persia with human rights (Nikpour, 2018: 366). He evoked rights discourse «to confer modern legitimacy to the Pahlavi elite and [...] to trace the roots of that legitimacy to the earliest years of Persian Empire (Nikpour, 2018: 366),» using the UN platform to represent himself as a champion of human rights (Shannon, 2015: 679). The Tehran Conference presented the Shah as a modernizing and benevolent king despite failing to observe universal human rights (Shannon, 2015: 679).

The UN was not vocal about human rights in many countries then – apart from South Africa and Palestine- because the human rights bodies had not yet commenced monitoring human rights in state parties (Morphet, 2004: 526-27). As a result of the silence of the UN about human rights in Iran, the Shah believed that his self-image as a champion of human rights was convincing. For example, in his letter of presentation of a replica Tablet of the Edict of Cyrus to the UN Secretary-General in October 1971 in celebration of «the political birth» of the «Persian nation» 2,500 years ago, the Shah described himself as the successor of the founders of the Persian Empire which established «man's first declaration of Human rights.»¹⁶ Also, after accepting the gift, U Thant, the Secretary-General, expressed his gratitude and admired the Shah for his enduring involvement in UN human rights activities.¹⁷ Despite Shah's impressive address to the Tehran Conference and the international community's silence about Iran's human rights situation, there were serious concerns about the legitimacy of the Shah and his legal and penal practices, particularly the use of torture and imprisonment against political opposition (Nikpour, 2018: 366-67).

¹⁶ Statement by Secretary-General U Thant at presentation of gift from Iran to United Nations, 14 October 1971, UN doc. HQ/263[ST/DPI/PRESS/SG/SM/1553.

¹⁷ Statement by Secretary-General U Thant.

Iranian Scholars and Suppression of Ethnic Identity and Rights Violations under the Islamic Republic

Iranian and Western scholars have not sufficiently studied ethnic groups' rights. Since 1979, Iranian studies on human rights have been mainly about the violation of human rights in general and women's rights and religious minorities in particular (Afshari, 2001; Hoodfar and Sadr, 2010; Farzaneh, 2017; Sanasarian, 2000; Choksy, 2012). Academics specialized in Iranian affairs have focused mainly on the problem of the ideology of the Islamic Republic and ignored the question of the rights and situation of non-Persian peoples (Mayer, 1996). For example, in his book, Afshari (2001) provides an overview of the violation of human rights against individuals and groups in Iran, including the right to liberty and life, equality and non-discrimination and other fundamental civil and political rights, including women's rights and religious minorities. However, only the Kurds and Baluchi are mentioned as persecuted Sunni religious minorities. Afshari does not address the human rights situation and rights of ethnic groups including Ahwazi Arabs in Iran.

The literature that has addressed the human rights situation of ethnic groups and the interactions and dialogue between the UN treaty-based bodies and Iran has not considered the link between the violation of the rights of these people and self-determination (Moinipour, 2018). Hossein Raeesi (2014: 41-44) explores the discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities in Iran's Constitution. While considering the Turkman, Kurds and Baluchi as ethnoreligious minorities who face double discrimination, he does not mention the Sunni Arabs as an ethnoreligious group. Also, he does not include Ahwazi Arab and Azerbaijani Turkic students in the category of children like the Baluchi, Kurds and Turkmen who do not know the Persian language and face dropping out of education during primary school. These issues require further analysis by researchers who have inside and comprehensive knowledge of non-Persians. Ghanea and Hass (2011: 3) address the claims for self-determination by the Turks, Kurds and Qashqai people in the 1940s and the suppression of demands for autonomy in different ethnic populated regions in Iran, including Ahwaz in 1979. However, in-depth and comprehensive research is needed about the violation of various aspects of Ahwazi people's rights, and its connection with current Ahwazi claims for self-determination.

Addressing the Gap: Ahwazi Perspective and Future Directions

There are numerous academic writings, mainly in Arabic, on the political history of Ahwaz, its Arab Kings, Sheikhs and rulers (Amer, 1981: AlAli, n.d.; AlHilo, 1969; Khuri and Tadmori, 1999; al-Najjar, 1971; Ranjbar, 2004; Strunk, 1977). There is also material available that offers a colonial perspective on the situation of the Ahwazis in the British archive in the form of treaties and undertakings between the Sheikhs and the British administration and other regional powers and sheikhs that shed light on 1: Persia's title to Ahwaz, 2: the relationship between Persia and Ahwazi Sheikhs, and 3: the extent to which the Sheikhs exercised sovereignty or autonomy over Ahwaz before

1925.

Only a few studies were conducted in Arabic that considered the legal status of Ahwaz territory in 1925 as either an independent or semi-independent state occupied by the Iranian military force (Shebli and al-Asimi, 2014; al-Dulaimi, 2021; Asakerah, 2004). These studies apply self-determination as a means to end the illegal military occupation of Ahwaz by Iran in the context of colonialism without exploring the other legal avenues, such as the link between the violation of human rights of the Ahwazi people and their right to self-determination beyond the concept of occupation and colonialism. These studies do not explore the application of the legal regimes governing the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples and their territorial claims and rights to land and natural resources, which in recent decades, has gained considerable attention and focus from the UN human rights mechanisms.

Shebli and al-Asimi (2014: 5-6) argue that the right to self-determination of the Ahwazi people arises from the fact that Iran waged an aggressive war against and occupied the last Ahwazi Kaab emirate in 1925. Iran has continued with the occupation to these days, initiating elements of the contemporary Ahwaz human rights issues and territorial claims. The Kaabs ruling or Kaabs emirate was a confederation of several Arab tribes that rose to power in the 18th century (Newman, 2003: 272). Ahwazi revolutions and resistance against the Iranian state since 1925, including their demands for autonomy, liberation and self-determination, placed Ahwaz in a different legal position as an occupied region by Iran from the perspective of the Ahwazi people. Ahwazi resistance is a result of the arbitrary change of the status of Ahwaz from an autonomous territory to a province governed by Iranian direct military rule after 1925 (Shebli and al-Asimi, 2014: 5).

Al-Dulaimi uses various legal arguments to demonstrate the illegality of the Iranian occupation of Ahwaz and argues that the liberation of Ahwaz is a right rooted in international law, as shown in various UN resolutions, humanitarian law, the Geneva Conventions, the Hague Regulations, the International Criminal Court, as well as self-determination under the ICCPR and ICESCR. Ahwaz's position is similar to many countries and regions that became independent from occupying colonial powers based on the right of peoples to self-determination under the decolonization process (al-Dulaimi, 2021). Up to 1925, Arabistan had some of the characteristics of a state such as having a government and authority that applied the law and maintained security and internal stability. Arabistan had and still has defined borders and Arab people who have their own characteristics, such as distinct ethnicity, language, religion, history, customs, common traditions and way of life, including other non-Arab minorities who have traditionally lived in the region (with the exception of recent Iranian settlers) (al-Dulaimi, 2021).

The mechanisms behind the current secession among the Arabs of Ahwaz are not merely sectarianism. The more accurate instigators of conflict include «economic grievances, racial marginalization, and systematic human rights violations (al Youha, 2019).» While some ethnic groups in Iran were integrated into the Iranian economic and bureaucratic systems, the Arabs faced «decades of marginalization, lack of economic opportunities and intolerable pollution in a resource-rich region [which] became the precursor for

ethnic and economic rivalry (al Youha, 2019).» Further research is required to assess the causes of separatism in Ahwaz by studying the Iranian state's historical, economic and political colonization of Ahwaz (al Youha, 2019). Colonization and rights linked to decolonization (including self-determination) have been a real expression of Eurocentrism in international law, as colonialism is seen as what the Europeans did to the Americans, Asians and Africans, and sometimes, it has been applied to Japan (Peattie, 1989) (considered part of the «civilized nations» from early on). But the scholarship traditionally ignores other colonizing pursuits, with notable exceptions such as Al-Dulaimi's book on the colonization of Ahwaz by Iran, a non-European country.

Ahwazi author Asakerah asserts that the last Ahwazi Kaabs emirate was a legitimate state in Ahwaz that was not consulted during the Erzurum Treaty of 1847, which raises questions about the legality of this treaty that has had long-standing repercussions on the Ahwaz region. The treaty created the borderline between Persia and the Ottoman Empire and gave Iran territorial title over Ahwaz. The treaty was not necessarily binding on the Kaabs, who did not sign nor participate in its drafting (Asakerah, 2004: 50-51). Despite the Erzurum Treaty, the Kaabs remained the de facto ruler of Ahwaz until 1925, when Persia used military force to annex it and other non-Persian semi-autonomous regions for its own political, economic, territorial and military ambitions (Asakerah, 2004: 53-61). Persia's use of military force, abolishing the Kaabs state and annexing Ahwaz was illegal according to international law, as the 1924 Geneva Protocol stipulates that aggressive war constitutes an international crime (Asakerah, 2004: 63-65, 121-24). Accordingly, the international community is required to bring justice to Persia's wrongdoing in Ahwaz and restore the legitimate state in Ahwaz by granting the Ahwazi people the right to self-determination that was lost due to the continuity of Persia's presence in Ahwaz as an illegal occupation (Asakerah, 2004: 63-65, 121-24).

Under international law, the Ahwazi people can be categorized as oppressed people because the Iranian state has severely violated their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Oppressed people are entitled to practice the external dimension of the right to self-determination and to create an independent state as a remedy for gross human rights violations and non-observing of international law and human rights by the state in question (Hetteh, 2023a).

Existing literature on Ahwazi history and human rights has often overlooked the perspectives and experiences of the Ahwazi people themselves, highlighting the need for more inclusive and nuanced scholarship. This study proposes a comprehensive examination of Ahwazi history and human rights from the perspective of the Ahwazi people, aiming to fill existing gaps in the literature and amplify their voices in academic and political discussions. Future research should prioritize the inclusion of Ahwazi perspectives and experiences, while advocacy efforts should focus on raising awareness of their struggle for self-determination and mobilizing support for their rights within Iran and the international community.

Conclusion

The historical and contemporary challenges to the realization of the right to self-determination of the Ahwazi people in Iran are deeply rooted in the Iranian state's systematic persecution and discrimination against Ahwazis and Iranian scholars' and mainstream media's lack of coverage for the Ahwazi issues and violation of their human rights. Iranian state refuses to either collect or publish official data on the population of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. The existing information on Ahwazis is not reliable due to a lack of field research and transparency of information coming from Iran and from the CIA Factbook, a source that most scholars relied on about the percentages of ethnic groups in Iran. Iranian scholars have either promoted the state's assimilation and suppression of non-Persians and the centraliation of the power in Tehran since the 1920s or ignored discussing the human rights situation of these groups. Only a few Iranian scholars mentioned the violation of Ahwazi human rights and other non-Persian groups, and almost none delved into the issue of self-determination and its applications to these groups. Iranian opposition groups and mainstream media outside Iran rarely mention the Iranian state's discriminatory policies and systematic human rights abuses against Ahwazis, excluding them from advocating and promoting their right to either internal or external self-determination.

However, the lack of recognition for Ahwazi rights in Iran does not mean that there is no protection for Ahwazis under international law. While it lacks enforcement mechanisms, the UN legal framework requires protection, promotion and respect for the right to self-determination of peoples under the UN Charter, ICCPR, ICESCR, Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other international and regional bodies including the ICJ, the African Union and the European Union. The right to self-determination applies not only in the context of colonial rule and foreign occupation but also in severe oppression and systematic human rights violations of a group due to their ethnic, religious and linguistic background. Ahwazi people are considered an oppressed people subject to widespread human rights abuse and denial of their fundamental freedoms, necessitating a discussion on the application of the external dimension of the right to self-determination.

As Ahwazis continue to assert their rights within a challenging political and social context, the Ahwazi people's quest for self-determination deserves greater recognition and support from scholars, policymakers, and human rights advocates. The Ahwazi struggle for self-determination poignantly reminds us of the ongoing challenges faced by ethnic groups in asserting their rights and identities within nation-states, underscoring the importance of solidarity and advocacy in advancing global human rights and justice.

References

- AFSHARI, Reza (2001). *Human Rights in Iran: The Abuse of Cultural Relativism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- AL YOUHA, Ali (2019). «The Forgotten Arabs of Iran.» Published 3 January 2019 at Harvard Kennedy School. <https://studentreview.hks.harvard.edu/the-forgotten-arabs-of-iran/>

- AL-DULAIMI, Amer (2021). *Alehtelal alirani leeghlim alahwaz alarabi wa ghararat alomam almotahedah wa aloghod aldowaliyah leenhae alestemar* [The Iranian occupation of the Arab region of Ahwaz, United Nations resolutions and international agreements to end and eliminate colonialism]. Amman: Dar Academic for Publishing and Distributing.
- AL-NAJJAR, Mostafa AbdulQadir (1971). *Al-tarikh al-siyasi le emarat Arabistan al-Arabiya 1897-1925* [The Political History of the Arab Emirate of Arabistan 1897-1925]. Cairo: Dar al-Maaref.
- ALALI, Saleh (n.d.). *Alahwaz fi Ohood Alislamiya: Darasah fi Ahwaliha Algographya wa Alsukaniya wa Alidariya* [Ahwaz in the Islamic Era: A Study in its Geographic, Population and Administrative Situations] (Baghdad: Research and Information Centre.
- ALBOSHOKA, Kamil (2023). *Political Geography of Ahwaz*. New York: Dialogue Institute for Research & Studies.
- ALHILO, Ali (1969). *Al-Ahwaz «Arabistan:» Fi Adwariha Atarikhiyah* [Ahwaz «Arabistan:» In its Historical Periods]. Vol. 2. Baghdad: Dar al-Basri.
- AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (2006). «Iran: Defending Minority Rights: The Ahwazi Arabs.» Published 17 May 2006 at Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/mde130562006en.pdf>.
- ANDERSON, Benedict (2006). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. First published 1983, London: Verso.
- ANGHIE, Antony (2002). «Colonialism and the Birth of International Institutions: Sovereignty, Economy, and the Mandate System of the League of Nations.» *N.Y.U.J. Int'l L & Pol* 34 (3): 513-634.
- APARAT (2014). «40 per cent of people in Iran speak Turkish.» Published 14 January 2014 at Aparat. <https://www.tribunezamaneh.com/archives/206803>
- ASAKERAH, Abbas (2004). *Alghathiya alahwaziya* [The Ahwazi Question]. London: Al-Hikma Publication.
- ASGHARZADEH, Alireza (2007). *Iran and the Challenge of Diversity: Islamic Fundamentalism, Aryanist Racism, and Democratic Struggles*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- AZIZI BENITOROF, Yousef (2005). «The identity and ancestry of the indigenous (Ahwazi) Arabs of Iran: A nation or an ethnic group?» Published in 2005. Translated from Persian to English and published by Ahwaz Studies Center. Accessed 30 October 2020. <http://yousefazizi.com/en/?p=278>.
- . (2019). «Iran; bazmandeye yek emperatory ba saz o kare esteemare dakheli [Iran; a remnant of an empire with an apparatus of internal colonization].» Published 24 September 2019 at Tribune Zamaneh. <https://www.tribunezamaneh.com/archives/206803>.
- BENEŠ, Eduard (1932). «The League of Nations: Successes and Failures.»

- Foreign Affairs* 11 (1): 66-80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20030484>.
- BURKE, Ronald (2008). «From Individual Rights to National Development: The First UN International Conference on Human Rights, Tehran, 1968.» *Journal of World History* 19 (3): 275-296. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.0.0020>.
- CASTELLINO, Joshua (2010). «The Protection of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in International Law: A Comparative Temporal Analysis.» *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 17 (3): 393-422. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157181110X512142>.
- CERD, «Consideration of Reports, Comments and Information Submitted by States Parties Under Article 9 of the Convention, Sixteenth and Seventeenth periodic reports of the Islamic Republic of Iran.» Sixty-third session. Summary Record of the 1597th Meeting. Held at the Palais des Nations: Geneva on 13 August 2003. CERD/C/SR.1597. Published 29 September 2003.
- CHEHABI, H. E. (1998). «The Pahlavi Period.» *Iranian Studies* 31 (3-4): 495-502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210869808701927>.
- CHOKSY, Jamsheed K. (2012). «Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Contemporary Iran.» *Iran and the Caucasus* 16 (3): 271-299. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1573384X-20120017>.
- CIA (2016). «World Factbook 2016: Ethnic Groups.» Accessed October 29, 2020. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/download/download-2016/index.html>.
- COLLINS, Patricia Hill (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge.
- CORNELL, Svante E. (1998). «Iran and the Caucasus.» *Middle East Policy* 5 (4): 51-57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.1998.tb00369.x>.
- CUDD, Ann (2006). *Analyzing Oppression*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- CURTIS, Glenn and Eric Hooglund (editors) (2008). *Iran: A Country Study*. 5th edition, Area handbook series, Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.
- DE LA CAMARA, Andrea (2012). «Women's rights in Iran during the years of the Shah, ayatollah Khomeini, and Khamenei.» BA Dissertation: University of Central Florida.
- DE WAART, Paul JIM (1994). *Dynamics of Self-Determination in Palestine*. The Netherlands: Brill.
- ELLING, Rasmus Christian (2013). *Minorities in Iran: Nationalism and Ethnicity after Khomeini*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- ETHEREDGE, Laura (editor) (2011). *Middle East: Region in transition: Iran*. Rosen Publishing Group, Inc.

FARZANEH, Delaram (2017). *Judgeships in Iran: Step Down, You are a Woman: A legal analysis of international human rights: A history of women's rights in Iran and women judges in the United States*. Lake Mary, FL: Vandeplass Publishing.

FAZAELI, Mostafa and Mousa Karami (2017). «Ethnic minorities in Iran» or «Iranian ethnic groups?» From a journalistic perspective to a legal perspective.» *Shiraz University Journal of Legal Studies* 9 (3): 219-248. <https://doi.org/10.22099/jls.2017.20727.2009>.

FINK, Carole (1995). «The League of Nations and the Minorities Question.» *World Affairs* 157: 197-205.

FREEMAN, Michael (1999). «The Right to Self-Determination in International Politics: Six Theories in Search of a Policy.» *Review of International Studies* 25 (3): 355-70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20097605>.

GELLNER, Ernest (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

GHANEA, Nazila and Hass Binesh (2011). *Seeking justice and an end to neglect: Iran's minorities today*. London: Minority Rights Group.

GHODS, M. Reza (1991). «Iranian Nationalism and Reza Shah.» *Middle Eastern Studies* 27 (1): 35-45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263209108700845>.

GREEN L. C. (1975). «North America's Indians and the Trusteeship Concept.» *Anglo-American Law Review* 4 (2): 137-162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147377957500400202>.

HAMID, Rahim (2024). «Ahwazis: An Oppressed People in Iran Standing with Their Peers for Freedom in Palestine, Syria and Globally.» Published 12 January 2024 at Dialogue Institute for Research & Studies. <https://astudies.org/2024/01/ahwazis-an-oppressed-people-standing-with-their-peers-for-freedom-in-palestine-syria-and-globally/>.

HAMID, Rahim (2018). «The World's Terrible Silencing of Ahwazis' Century of Struggle Against Iranian Colonialism.» Published 9 October 2018 at Dialogue Institute for Research & Studies. <https://astudies.org/2018/10/the-worlds-terrible-silencing-of-ahwazis-century-of-struggle-against-iranian-colonialism/>.

HARRISON, Kevin and Tony Boyd (2003). *Understanding political ideas and movements*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

HASSAN, Hussein (2008). *Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities*. Washington: Congressional Research Service.

HELBLING, Marc (2008). *Practising Citizenship and Heterogeneous Nationhood*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

HELFGOTT Leonard M. (1980). «The Structural Foundations of the National Minority Problem in Revolutionary Iran.» *Iranian Studies* 13: 195-214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210868008701570>.

HETTEH, Abdulrahman (2023a). «The Rights of the Ahwazi People in Iran: Historical Claims, Contemporary Reality and Future Prospects.» PhD

Dissertation: Middlesex University London.

HETTEH, Abdulrahman (2023b). «Political History of Ahwaz: Iranian Occupation, Colonialism and Ahwazi People's Territorial Claims.» *The Journal of Iranian Studies* 7 (2): 291-322. <https://doi.org/10.33201/iranian.1354019>.

HILPOLD, Peter (2013). «The League of Nations and the protection of minorities—Rediscovering a great experiment.» *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* 17: 87-124. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18757413-90000081>.

HOODFAR, Homa and Shadi Sadr (2010). «Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran.» *Third World Quarterly* 31 (6): 885-903. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2010.502717>.

ISNA (2012). «The Deputy Minister of Education announced: 100 hours of Persian language teaching to bilingual children in preschool.» Published 13 October 2012 at ISNA. <https://www.isna.ir/news/91072213844/-معاون-آموزش-و-پرورش-خبرداد-100-ساعت-آموزش-زبان-فارسی-به-کودکان>.

KHURI, Ebrahim and Ahmad Jalal Tadmori (1999). *Saltanat Hormuz al-Arabiya [The Arab Sultanate of Hormuz]*. Vol. 1. Raes al-Khaima: Matbaat Raes al-Khaima al-Wataniya.

KOLSTO, Pål (2019). «Is Imperialist Nationalism an Oxymoron?» *Nations and Nationalism* 25: 18-44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12449>.

LAFRANCE, Sébastien (2021). «The Kosovo Reference and Kosovo's Secession.» In: Kevin W. Gray (editor), *Global Encyclopedia of Territorial Rights* (pp. 1-18). Switzerland: Springer Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68846-6_563-2.

MAJBOURI, Mahdi and Sanaz Fashreka (2019). «Iran's Multi-Ethnic Mosaic: A 23-Year Perspective.» *Social Indicators Research* 145: 831-859. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-017-1800-4>.

MANN, Brian (2014). «The Khuzistani Arab Movement, 1941–1946: A Case of Nationalism?» In Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi (editors), *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity: Histories and Historiographies* (pp. 113-136). Austin: University of Texas Press.

MATZ, Nele (2005). «Civilization and the Mandate System under the League of Nations as Origin of Trusteeship.» *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* 9: 47-95. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187574105X00039>.

MAYER, Ann Elizabeth (1996). «Islamic Rights or Human Rights: An Iranian Dilemma.» *Iranian Studies* 29 (3/4): 269-296. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4310998>.

MOINIPOUR, Shabnam and Mark Bendall (2018). «UN Treaty-Based Bodies and the Islamic Republic of Iran: Human Rights Dialogue (1990–2016).» *Cogent Social Sciences* 4 (1): (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2018.1440910>.

MORPHET, Sally (2004). «Multilateralism and the Non-Aligned Movement: What Is the Global South Doing and Where Is It Going?» *Global Governance* 10: 517-537. <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-01004009>.

MOTALEBI, Masud (2008). «Geghrafyaye siyaside aghvame Irani [Political geography of Iranian ethnic groups]» *Zamaneh* 70. <http://ensani.ir/fa/article/10950/جغرافیای-سیاسی-اقوام-ایرانی>.

MÜLLER-SOMMERFELD, H. (2016), «The League of Nations, A-Mandates and Minority Rights during the Mandate Period in Iraq (1920–1932).» In S. R. Goldstein-Sabbah and H. L. Murre-van den Berg (editors), *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East* (pp. 258-283). Leiden: Brill.

NBCRC, «The Supplementary Response of the NBCRC regarding the Concluding Observation on the Combined Third and Fourth periodic reports of the Committee on the Rights of the Child for the Islamic Republic of Iran.» Published 30 March 2016, [10].

NEWMAN, Andrew (2003). *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period*. Leiden: Brill.

NIKPOUR, Golnar (2018). «Claiming Human Rights: Iranian Political Prisoners and the Making of a Transnational Movement, 1963–1979.» *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 9 (3): 363-388. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2018.0019>.

PEARSON, Jessica Lynne (2017). «Defending Empire at the United Nations: The Politics of International Colonial Oversight in the Era of Decolonisation.» *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45 (3): 525-549. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2017.1332133>.

PEATTIE, Mark R. (1989). «The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945.» In: Peter Duus (editor), *The Cambridge History of Japan* (pp. 215–270). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521223577.006>

PENTASSUGLIA, Gaetano (2002). «State Sovereignty, Minorities and Self-Determination: A Comprehensive Legal View.» *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 9 (4): 303-24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24675246>.

PIPES, Daniel (2015). «Did the CIA Fiddle with Population Statistics about Iran?» Published 5 January 2015 and updated 31 January 2021 at danielpipes.org. <https://www.danielpipes.org/blog/2015/01/did-the-cia-fiddle-with-population-statistics>.

POTTER, Pitman B. (1948). *Introduction to the Study of International Organization*. 5th edition, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

RAEESI, Hossein (2014). «Discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities in the Islamic Republic Constitution» In Tahirih Danesh and Shadi Sadr (editors), *Iran Human Rights Review: Violence* (pp. 41-44). London:

The Foreign Policy Centre.

RANJBAR, Mohammad Ali (2004). *Moshahsaiyan: Mahiyate Fekri-Ejtemaee va Farayande Tahavolate Tarikhi [Moshahsaies: The Intellectual-Social Nature and Historical Transformation Process]*. Tehran: Entesharate Agah.

SARGSYAN, Diana (2015). «Principle of the Right of People and Nations on Self-determination in International Law and its Implementation in Modern World.» *Caspian Sea Journal* 9 (1): 29-53. <https://csjonline.org/CSJ/2015/29-53.pdf>.

SCHAYEGH, Cyrus (2008). «Recent Trends in the Historiography of Iran under the Pahlavi Dynasty, 1921-1979.» *History Compass* 6 (6): 1400-1406. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2008.00558.x>.

SCHAYEGH, Cyrus (2010). «Seeing Like a State:» An Essay on the Historiography of Modern Iran.» *Int J Middle East Stud* 42 (1): 37-61. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743809990523>.

SCHMIDT, Carmen (2007). «The Minority Protection System of the League of Nations and the Central and Eastern European States.» *Baltic Yearbook of International Law Online* 7 (1): 35-46. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22115897-99000023>.

SCHOFIELD, Richard N. (2008). «Laying it down in stone: delimiting and demarcating Iraq's boundaries by mixed international commission.» *Journal of Historical Geography* 34 (3): 397-421. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2007.11.002>.

SENARATNE, Kalana (2021). *Internal Self-Determination in International Law: History, Theory, and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SHAFFER, Brenda (2002). *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

SHANNON, Mathew K. (2015). «American–Iranian Alliances: International Education, Modernization, and Human Rights during the Pahlavi Era.» *Diplomatic History* 39 (4): 661-688. <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhu019>.

SHANNON, Mathew K. (2017). «Review of David R Collier, Democracy and the Nature of American Influence in Iran, 1941-1979» *H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews* 1-3. <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49707>.

SHANNON, Mathew K. (2018). «Reading Iran: American Academics and the Last Shah» *Iranian Studies* 51 (2): 289-316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2017.1407238>.

SHEBLI, Saad Shaker and Athba Zaid al-Asimi (2014). *Aleshkaliyah alghanoniyah fi hagh taghrir masir eghlim Arabistan [The legal problem of the right to self-determination of Arabistan region]*. Jordan: Zahran Publishers.

SHOARESAL (2016). «What is the population of Iranian Turks?» Published 10 February 2016 at Shoaresal. <https://shoaresal.ir/fa/news/10118/جمعیت-ترک->

های-ایران-جقدر-است.

SOLEIMAN, Amer (1981). «Belad Ilam wa alaqateha be al-Iraq al-qadim [The Land of Elam and its Relations with the Ancient Iraq].» *Adab Elrafedin* 14: 166-181.

https://archive.alsharekh.org/MagazinePages/MagazineBook/Adab_AL_Rafidayn/Adab_AL_Rafidayn_1981/Issue_14/index.html.

SPANU, Maja (2015). «The idea of self-determination: Hierarchy and order after empire.» PhD Dissertation: European University Institute.

STATISTICAL CENTER OF IRAN (2018). «Chapter 3- Population.» In *Country's Statistical Yearbook 2017-2018 (Iranian Shamsi Calendar of 1396)* (pp. 125-178). Tehran: Statistical Center of Iran.

<https://media.iranopendata.org/Sources/IOD311.pdf>.

STERIO, Milena (2022). «Right to Self-Determination Under International Law.» In: Kevin W. Gray (editor), *Global Encyclopedia of Territorial Rights* (pp. 1-10). Switzerland: Springer Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68846-6_673-1.

STERIO, Milena (2010). «On the Right to External Self-Determination: 'Selfistans,' Secession and the Great Powers' Rule.» *Minnesota Journal of International Law* 19 (1): 137-176.

STRUNK, William Theodore (1977). «The Reign of Shaykh Khaz'al ibn Jabir and the Suppression of the Principality of Arabistan: A Study of British Imperialism in Southwestern Iran 1897-1925.» PhD Dissertation: Indiana University.

THORNBERRY, Patrick (1992). *International Law and the Rights of Minorities*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

UN (2020). «UN expert clarifies the concept of minorities to ensure their protection in international law.» Published 26 October 2020 at OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/10/un-expert-clarifies-concept-minorities-ensure-their-protection-international>.

UNPO (n.d.). «Current members» at UNPO. <https://unpo.org/members/>.

VAN DYKE, Vernon (1969). «Self-Determination and Minority Rights.» *International Studies Quarterly* 13 (3): 223-253. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3013530>.

VATANDOUST, Golam-Reza (1985). «The Status of Iranian Women During the Pahlavi Regime.» In Asghar Fathi (Editor), *Women and the Family in Iran* (pp. 107-130). Leiden: Brill.

VIDMAR, Jure (2010). «Remedial Secession in International Law: Theory and (Lack of) Practice.» *St Antony's International Review* 6 (1): 37-56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26227069>.

VOLODARSKY, Mikhail (1987). «Russian diplomacy during the Anglo-Persian conflict of 1855-1857.» *Central Asian Survey* 6 (2): 43-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634938708400583>.

YOUNG, Iris Marion (2008). «Five faces of oppression» In George Henderson and Marvin Waterstone (editors), *Geographic Thought* (pp. 55-71). London: Routledge.

ZIMMER, Oliver (2003). *Nationalism in Europe, 1890-1940*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

About the author

ABDULRAHMAN HETTEH is a lecturer of law at Regent College London. He has a PhD in Law and an LLM in International Law from Middlesex University London. His email is Abdulrahman.hetteh@rcl.ac.uk. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2797-3090>.