

## Ethnic politics in Iran and its Consequences on Kurdish identity

Assist.Prof. Dr.: Omid Ghaderzadeh

[o.ghaderzadeh@uok.ac.ir](mailto:o.ghaderzadeh@uok.ac.ir)

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,  
University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran

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### Abstract

The discourse of ethnic politics in contemporary Iran has been a governmental discourse based on the Cultural engineering. The meaning created by this discourse was a unifying meaning with the aim of building a national identity that did not compromise with cultural diversity and plurality. Using the theoretical approach of critical discourse analysis, the ethnic politics of the governments after the Iran-Iraq war have been investigated. Based on the findings, two "post-political" and "antagonistic" visions can be identified. The dominant vision on the ethnic politics of governments in the ethnic politics of reformist and moderate governments has been post-political. In this point of view, by emphasizing unity and approximation and reconciliation between different and conflicting interests in the society as a precondition for building a nation, ethnic differences are not considered as original identities. The ethnic politics of fundamentalist governments has been of an antagonistic type and defines ethnic identities as otherness of Iranian-Islamic identity. In general, the ethnic politics of the governments can be summarized under the category of "Inclusive exclusion" and based on that, Kurdish identity is not accepted as an independent identity that has identity demands. The result of the ethnic politics has been the politicization of the Kurdish identity and its transformation into the resistance identity.

**Keywords:** Ethnic politics, Inclusive exclusion, Kurdish identity, Iranian-Islamic identity, Resistance identity

## Introduction

Nation-building policies in Middle Eastern Asian societies have made ethnic issues a stable feature of these societies, and the politicization of ethnic identity is one of the consequences of the establishment of modern states in these societies (Entesar, 1992: 10; Vali, 1998:83). The modern states in Iran, Iraq and Turkey have built their legitimizing identity in order to show themselves eternally and naturally, and the project of building a modern nation-state has been pursued in the form of ethnic politics. Ethnic politics is a mechanism of political power to plan the power relations and interests between the national state and ethnic groups, as well as a type of targeted social division of labor that organizes the ethnic diversity of the society into a convergent unit (Alavi, 2015: 2).

Iranian society is known as a multi-national society with a mosaic-like social structure. In Iran, with the rise of the Pahlavi state, the creation of a unified national identity that was based on the cultural elements of the Persian ethnicity, the history of Iran before Islam, the imperial government, and western secularism was given serious attention (Bashirieh, 2004: 122-125) and national identity was established through the denial of ethnic identities (Vali, 1998:83).

Pahlavi's ethnic policies, which were based on cultural and social integration and assimilation within a single and integrated identity and the application of unequal development policies, fueled the feeling of deprivation, discrimination and lack of freedom and justice among national minorities, and local leaders and elites led to resistance against centralism.

Nader Entessar, while confirming the unequal nature of the modernization policies of the Pahlavi regime, describes the situation of the Kurds in this period and adds:

“The modernist policies of Reza Shah generally did not spread to Kurdistan, no new roads or factories were built in Kurdistan, and the level of health care remained at a basic level. It meant that the traditional power holders in Kurdistan - tribal khans and religious sheikhs - were able to continue their exploitation... Kurdistan remained a state and was severely underdeveloped and not integrated into the national economy, while the administrative apparatus in the Kurdish regions was run by Persian and Azeri-speaking forces. It was

considered a sentence of exclusion and marginalization of the Kurds”

(Entessar, 1992:13-14).

The inability of the Pahlavi regime's identification policies in nation-building according to democratic norms and citizenship principles led to the formation of “ethnic resistance movements” in Iran; The resistance and conflict of local rulers in the Kurdish, Lorraine, Arab and Baloch areas with Reza Shah and the great ethnic crisis after the fall of Reza Shah can be examined in this framework.

After the revolution of 1979, religious culture and values were taken into consideration as the main source of identity building in order to promote a national identity in the form of “the identity of the Islamic nation of Iran” (Bashirieh, 2004: 122-125). The determining role of Shiite religion and ideology in ethnic politics After the revolution, Kurds and Baluchis faced identity challenges, and since the revolution, ethnic issues and tensions have resurfaced in the public arena of Iranian society. The crises and ethnic conflicts in the first decade of the 1979 revolution gave the atmosphere governing the ethnic areas, including Kurdish areas, a security and military face, and this face continued with the Iran-Iraq war.

In the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, religious, linguistic and ethnic diversity is recognized, and in principles 19 and 20, it states “equality of rights of ethnic groups and religious minorities with other members of the society”, and in principle 13, it states “freedom in adherence to religious beliefs and to practice its rituals” and in principle 26 on “the social and political rights of ethnic groups and religious minorities and providing equal opportunities in economic, social, cultural and political” has been emphasized and from the very first days of the 1979 revolution, ethnic demands and ethnic rights were taken into consideration by Kurdish political parties, elites and leaders. “Autonomy for Kurdistan and democracy for Iran” became a public demand. After the failure of the negotiations of the “Kurdish People's Delegation” with the representatives of the provisional government, for more than 10 years, the atmosphere of Kurdistan took the form of war and security.

According to the requirements of the first decade of the revolution (ethnic conflicts and the Iran-Iraq war and its security and military consequences), the rights of ethnic groups became secondary. Mousavi's government was practically involved in the Iran-Iraq war, preserving territorial integrity against Saddam's military attack, leaving no possibility for ethnic demands. For the government of Hashemi Rafsanjani (known as the construction government), the main issue was the reconstruction of the ruins after the Iran-Iraq war and

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[sjh@univsul.edu.iq](mailto:sjh@univsul.edu.iq)

the exit of the political system from international isolation, which was followed in the form of structural adjustment policy. In the government of Hashemi Rafsanjani, the security and military atmosphere of the Kurdish regions remained. It took two decades for the principles stated in the constitution regarding ethnic groups to appear in the political discourse. When Seyyed Mohammad Khatami's government came to power (known as the reform government), the issue of ethnic rights was raised in the public and political arena. The general popularity of the Kurdistan regions for the election slogan "Iran for all Iranians" caused a higher percentage of Kurds to come to the polls for the first time, and in the fifth and sixth presidential elections, the participation rate in the Kurdistan province exceeded the national average.

In the following periods of presidential elections, the electoral participation percentage of Kurdistan Province has always been lower than the average of Iran, and the low participation indicates the fact that the ethnic policies of governments have been incapable of handling ethnic issues in a democratic manner.

Unlike Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hassan Rouhani entered the election campaign with the promise of ethnic opening and the unveiling of the charter of citizenship rights, and to fulfill the ethnic promises, he also appointed a special assistant for the affairs of ethnic groups and religious minorities. What happened in practice was far from expectations. The statements of Ebrahim Raisi, as the twelfth president of Iran, in the last election debate, that "God has freed the Kurdish language", are indicative of the ambiguity of ethnic politics and the lack of familiarity of statesmen with the rights of ethnic groups.

In terms of political orientation and discourse, governments in Iran can be divided into fundamentalist, reformist and moderate. The main question of this study is: What kind of confrontation has taken place with ethnic and religious minorities in the ethnic politics of the post-revolutionary governments? And what has been the consequence of the governments' ethnic politics for ethnic identities, including Kurdish identity? To answer this question, the critical discourse analysis of Laclau and Mouffe has been chosen. Based on the critical discourse analysis approach, identities and political discourses are considered communicative entities, and the interdiscursive relationship or the relationship between us" and "them" that is formed in the space or political discourse is examined. Based on this approach, people, institutions and discourses form their identities through the mediation of othering and therefore need this other. In the Iranian political field, "us" refers to identities aligned with

the Iranian-Islamic identity, and “the other” or “them” refers to identities that are different and inconsistent with the dominant identity, namely ethnic and religious minorities.

### **Theoretical review**

Within the framework of critical discourse analysis, conflict and competition are an inherent part of politics, and any attempt to empty the political space of competition and conflict is in fact an attempt to eliminate the political. In the first step, we must recognize the principle of conflict as the essence of the political, then we must address the formulation of conflict in the social and political realms.

In her book “The Political”, Chantal Mouffe views politics as a relationship and identifies three types of “post-political”, “antagonistic”, and “agonistic” relationships between self and other. “Post-political” vision is fundamentally situated in the liberal paradigm and attempt to remove conflict from the political field through dialogue. The instrumentalist and deliberative perspectives fall under the post-political vision. In the instrumentalist view, politics is a place of compromise between different conflicting forces. Individuals are seen as rational beings motivated to maximize their own interests and act in a market-like manner in the political world. This model of politics can be understood through economic logic. The deliberative perspective, which arose in response to the instrumentalist perspective, seeks to establish a connection between ethics and politics. Advocates of this model attempt to replace instrumental rationality with communicative rationality and believe that a rational moral consensus can be achieved through free discussion in the field of politics. In this model, politics is understood not through economics but through ethics. Habermas and Giddens are among the thinkers of this approach (Mouffe, 2005:12-13).

In the realm of collective identities, the formation of “us” requires the existence of “them”. Under certain circumstances, there is always the possibility that the “us/them” relationship can become antagonistic, that is, “friend/enemy”. In this case, collective identities are transformed into political identities. This happens when “them” are portrayed as threatening “us” identity and are seen as threatening “our” existence. From this moment on, all forms of “us/them” relations, whether ethnic, religious, economic, etc., become the focus of antagonism. In an antagonistic political relation, a relentless conflict erupts between the two sides.

Carl Schmitt believed that politics is a matter of hostile conflict and that in order for the “us/them” relationship to become a political relationship, it must be transformed into a “friend/enemy” relationship (Mouffe, 2005:15-16). Antagonism establishes a purely moral relationship between the self and the other. In moral antagonism, the self sees the other as evil that must be destroyed and instead sees itself as morally good. An antagonistic relationship is full of monologue and boundless violence. According to Mouffe, every order is political and based on some form of exclusion. There are always other possibilities that have been repressed and that can be reactivated. The articulatory practices through which a certain order is established and the meaning of social institutions is fixed are hegemonic practices. Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony (Mouffe, 2005:18).

If we want to acknowledge on one side the permanence of the antagonistic dimension of the conflict, while on the other side allowing for the possibility of its “taming”, we need to envisage a third type of relation. This is the type of relation which I have proposed to call “agonism”. While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are “adversaries” not enemies. This means that, while in conflict, they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place. We could say that the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism. Antagonistic conflicts are less likely to emerge as long as agonistic legitimate political channels for dissenting voices exist. Otherwise dissent tends to take violent forms, and this is true in both domestic and international politics (Mouffe,2005:20-21).

### **Methodology**

This research was conducted using the critical discourse analysis method. In this method, political discourses are composed of a large number of concepts such as nodal point, floating signifier, empty signifier, element, moment, field of discursivity, articulation, hegemony, antagonism, otherness, dislocation, the other, logic of difference, chain of equivalence (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

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[sjh@univsul.edu.iq](mailto:sjh@univsul.edu.iq)

Discourse in Laclau and Mouffe's critical discourse analysis method is similar to discourse from Foucault's perspective. In this definition, discourses are paradigmatic and general knowledge formations, which are not limited to spoken and written discourses and linguistic resources; rather, they are a totality within which discursive subjects, discourses, tastes, and knowledge formations in general are produced. Discourses form their identity by distinguishing themselves from other discourses. Every discourse is made up of signs or signifiers; these signs or signifiers represent the meanings that the people in that discourse understand from that sign. For example, individuals within the fundamentalist discourse understand the signifiers of "national identity," "ethnicity," or "citizenship" to have a specific meaning that is different from the discourse of reformist or moderate governments. In some discourses, this concept may even not exist at all. Therefore, each discourse has its own signifiers and gives its own meaning to that signifier, which is different from other discourses. One or two nodal point form the core of each discourse, and other discursive concepts are articulated in relation to it and as peripheral moments around it (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

In this study, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis method has been used to understand ethnic politics in the governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The advantage of the discourse analysis method is in historicizing texts. Laclau and Mouffe consider texts (experiential raw materials and information) as witnesses of historical-institutional processes and as discursive forms, and examine the historical context of their discursive construction. Critical discourse analysis interprets text, writing, or speech through a set of tools. In this study, in order to understand government policies, documents, economic, social, and cultural development programs of governments, and statements by presidents regarding "Iranian identity", "national identity", and "ethnic identity" were examined as field study and research texts. Within the framework of purposive sampling, statements, conversations, and documents related to the ethnic and cultural policies of governments were selected for review.

## **Findings**

### **State ethnic politics discourse in practice**

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[sjh@univsul.edu.iq](mailto:sjh@univsul.edu.iq)

The contemporary history of post-constitutional Iran can be divided into three main discourses: modernist, traditionalist, and a mixed discourse. The dominant discourse in the Islamic Republic of Iran is ideological traditionalism, which included a diverse spectrum from religious revivalists to religious intellectuals. This discourse emerged in response to the collapse of traditional solidarity during the Pahlavi era (Bashirieh, 2004:119). Regarding the confrontation with national and religious minorities, various discourses have been formed in different governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which can be categorized into the following two perspectives, according to Mouffe's classification:

***Antagonistic confrontation with national and religious minorities***

In Iran, ethnic and cultural policies are formulated and implemented by a series of councils and institutions, including Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, Expediency Discernment Council, Supreme National Security Council, Islamic parliament of I.R.IRAN, and Office of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. These policies are influenced by the dominant discourse in governments and discursive conflicts (Gholami Shekar Sarai, 2016: 113).

The policies of the Mir Hossein Mousavi and the Rajai governments between 1981 and 1989 took on a security-oriented character. Since almost all of Mir Hossein Mousavi's prime ministership coincided with the Iran-Iraq War, he is referred to as the "War Prime Minister." Due to the specific circumstances after the revolution, the weakness of the central government, and the duality of power, it does not seem realistic to expect the implementation of a codified and authoritative ethnic policy (Gholami Shekarsaraei, 2016: 114).

The main policy adopted by the government during this period was a cosmopolitan and Islamic perspective on ethnic issues. The Cultural Revolution took place during this period and the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution was established. With the transformation of ethnic crisis areas into war zones, ethnic politics in these years was overshadowed by the Iran-Iraq war, and with security being given priority, military, law enforcement, and intelligence institutions were created and strengthened. The "Hamzeh camp" in the northwest and the "Sarallah camp" in the east of Iran were established and engaged in military confrontation with ethnic movements. At this time, despite the sensitivity of ethnic issues, there was no centralized and codified policy discussion.

The metaphorical, idealistic, and ideological atmosphere of the 1980s was filled with revolutionary and epic symbols. During this period, the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, by emphasizing the strengthening of common, mass, trans-ethnic, and trans-class symbols, attempted to weaken ethnic, linguistic, class, and social distinctions and identities. Under the umbrella of Islamic identity, the assimilation of the population was put on the agenda.

The reduction of solidarity-building elements to religion, given the Shiite and ideological nature of the system, took on a paradoxical appearance, and the dominant ethnic politics was defined under the discourse of “ummahism”, and the metaphorical space of the discourse of ummahism consisted of the “unity of the Islamic world”, “interaction with religious minorities”, “cultural revolution”, “Islamic brotherhood”, “a unified ummah”, “sacred defense”, social justice”, and “confrontation with ethnic movements”.

A major part of the political atmosphere of the 1980s was influenced by the hegemony and charismatic personality of Imam Khomeini. He was the final arbiter and decision-making authority in the field of solving fundamental issues in society and government (Fawzi, 2005: 95 -98). The nodal point of the Imam's thought was a “unified ummah”, and “national unity” and “Islamic cohesion” were considered as the moment, and “ethnocentrism” and “nationalism” were rejected and marginalized:

“The purpose of the Prophet's mission and the emergence of Islam is to eliminate discrimination between black and white, Arab, non-Arab, and Turk (Imam's Page,1:377). The criterion of excellence in Islam is purity, deviation from error (Imam's Page,5:388) and piety, and color, race, ethnicity, and gender are of no value (Imam's Page,5:187). One of the West's tools for creating this division is to promote ethnocentrism and nationalism based on racial affiliations. (Imam's Page,1:377-378). Due to fear of Muslim unity, colonial governments plan and conspire to create division among Muslims and pursue this desire by using widespread propaganda among the masses” (Imam's Page,13: 132).

With the coming to power of Hashemi Rafsanjani, the discourse of construction emerged in the political arena. Around the reconstruction of the devastation caused by the Iran-Iraq war,

[sjh@univsul.edu.iq](mailto:sjh@univsul.edu.iq)

the economy became the nodal point of the discourse of construction within the framework of the structural adjustment policy. In the first and second economic, social and cultural development programs, poverty alleviation and modernization of deprived areas became the nodal point.

One of the most important documents related to ethnic politics during the Hashemi Rafsanjani era is the “Principles of the Country's Cultural Policy” which approved in 1992 by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. The key signifier of Principles 5, 7, 22, and 25 are: national unity, religious unity, ethnic and religious characteristics, removing obstacles to unity, strengthening and promoting Persian literature, and introducing the authentic religious and national identity.

In the articulation of this discourse, a close link is seen between the floating signifiers of “political centralism” and “national unity” as well as the central signifier of “modernization of deprived areas”. In fact, the main assumption of this discourse is that deprivation in border and deprived areas (which include most of the ethnically settled areas of Iran) will disappear when, first, the government has great influence in these areas and, second, the people of these areas show great attachment to national identity (Gholami Shekarsaraei, 2016: 122-123).

In the Rafsanjani government, ethnic and religious minorities were not given the opportunity to act in the fields of politics and culture, and instead of paying attention to ethnic and cultural differences, emphasis was placed on a homogeneous and unified national identity. The Rafsanjani government's ethnic politics continued to be of a security nature, and during this period, leaders of Kurdish parties were assassinated in vienna.

The confrontation of the conservative ninth (2005-2009) and tenth (2013-2019) governments with the issue of ethnic and religious minorities can be defined under an antagonistic approach. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared the four fundamental principles of his government: justice, compassion, service, and the country's all-round progress and excellence:

“From this little brother of yours, four axes were proposed as the working principles of this government: spreading justice, kindness, serving the servants of God, and the progress and general excellence of the country” (Tajik & Rozkhosh, 2008:109).

In the discourse of the Ahmadinejad government, there was a kind of return to the ideal of expanding justice. Justice was defined as supporting the inferior masses and placing them as the central signifier against the superiors. With the dual notions of the marginal versus the mainstream, the rural versus the urban, the periphery versus the center, and the attention and satisfaction of the masses was attracted (Mousavi & Mousavi, 2019: 133).

The elimination of deprivation was given attention in the ninth and tenth governments by restoring subsidies and housing for the deprived within the framework of the Mehr Housing Project, especially in marginal areas. In this discourse, economic liberalism and democracy in the field of civil rights were alienated, so ethnic and religious minorities were not given the opportunity to participate in culture. Cultural policies during this period were presented as a document of fundamental transformation of education, which sought to achieve global justice, a Mahdist society, and the identity of pure Islam.

The metaphorical space of the discourse was justice-building, Iranian-Islamic identity, Mahdavi society, and the elimination of deprivation. In the ethnic and cultural politics of this period, the identities of ethnic and religious minorities were marginalized.

### ***Post-political confrontation with the issue of national and religious minorities***

The origin of the post-political confrontation with ethnic issues dates back to the formation of the provisional government in 1979. The ethnic policy of the provisional government (Mahdi Bazargan's government) can be categorized under the post-political approach by adopting an interactionist approach to ethnic issues in Kurdistan. The policy of the Bazargan government was to control the situation through political bargaining and a policy of interaction and dialogue. Since there was no codified ethnic policy, interaction with ethnic and religious minorities was mostly based on the constitution. The provisional government believed in the effectiveness of negotiation as a method of confronting the counter-revolution. The meeting of the “Goodwill Delegation” from the provisional government in October 1979 with the “Kurdish People's Delegation in Mahabad” can be analyzed within this framework.

The metaphorical space of the provisional government's discourse consisted of the charisma of the Imam, the unity of religions, the constitution, and the unity of the ethnicities:

“The members of the Goodwill Delegation believed that negotiating with the counter-revolution would be more effective than any other method. Therefore, they did not support military confrontation and called for a halt and then an end to it”.

In an interview with the Etelaat newspaper on October 16, 2015, Interior Minister Hashem Sabaghian said:

“In my opinion, a political solution to the problems of Kurdistan will be more successful than any other solution, and if we consider the ratio compared to other issues, we may have a role of more than 50 percent, and if we also define the development solutions as political solutions, it will be about 70 to 80 percent successful. But military solutions will not be very successful. Mr. Forouhar has gone to these areas for negotiations, and it is not yet clear with whom these negotiations were held”. (Etlatla Newspaper, October 16, 1979, quoted from the website of the Islamic Revolution Documents Center).

These negotiations did not come to fruition due to the heated political atmosphere and the diversity of voices, and Kurdistan was practically involved in a heated political atmosphere until 1995. Mohsen Rafiqdoost<sup>1</sup> says the following about the performance of the two political groups that went to Kurdistan during the counter-revolutionary activities:

“In 1979, two delegations went to Kurdistan. One was at a very high level, and included Ayatollah Taleghani, Shahid Beheshti, Hashemi Rafsanjani and Bani Sadr. They went to Sheikh Ezzeddin Hosseini's place, gave speeches to the people, and said that we want to develop and serve. The benefit of this delegation was that a majority of the people of Kurdistan separated from Komala and the Democrats. The delegation that the provisional government formed was headed by Dariush Forouhar. They had gone to negotiate with those who were fighting. Overall, because the opposing sides thought that the time was right to separate part of Kurdistan from Iran, it did not work out.

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<sup>1</sup> Minister of the Revolutionary Guards from 1982 to 1989

Therefore, we in the IRGC<sup>2</sup> came to the conclusion that both the method of the great leaders to separate the Kurdish people from the counter-revolution, the work for the people of Kurdistan, and the armed war must be carried out” (Rezaei Mirqaed, 2008 53 - 54).

The second post-political confrontation with the ethnic issue occurred 18 years later, with the rise to power of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami. The reform discourse found concrete expression in the political arena in 1997, with the rise to power of the seventh government. Cultural policy in the reform discourse, with its emphasis on citizenship rights and civil society and political development, was reflected in the slogan “Iran for all Iranians” and its attention to the culture of ethnic and religious minorities. The implementation of Article 100 of the Constitution and the establishment of The Islamic Councils in urban and rural areas in the seventh government, and the efforts to establish NGOs in ethnic areas can be interpreted as the government's first step towards deepening democracy.

The ethnic politics of the Khatami government was manifested in the idea of civil society. In the reform discourse, ethnic demands and ethnic rights were considered not as independent political identities but under the concept of citizenship.

In a speech early in his presidency, Khatami portrayed a society filled with diverse tastes and tendencies. A society in which not only is there no sign of absolute majority rule and the exclusion and neglect of minorities, but the sanctification of any taste can be harmful:

“Differences in tastes must be accepted, because each of us has our own unique tastes, which in turn leads to evolution and increases the power of intelligence, understanding, choice, and judgment of people, who are the main owners of society. What is important is that while tastes are expressed, no one claims that such and such a taste or opinion is the same as Islam and the same as the revolution, and as a result, all other experts are considered outside the system and the system is harmed in terms of security, structure, durability, and strength” (Speech at the seminar of the Imams of Jom'e of the country, 18/05/1998).

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<sup>2</sup> The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp  
[sjh@univsul.edu.iq](mailto:sjh@univsul.edu.iq)

The dominant discourse of the first two decades of the revolution was characterized by terms such as return to self, struggle against global imperialism, support for the underprivileged, sacrifice, and jihad. During the reform period, as the discursive space changed, terms such as human rights, pluralism, democracy, freedom, civil society, political participation, dialogue of civilizations, and citizenship emerged in the public and political arena (Abrahamian, 2007: 324).

Land use planning and drawing general lines for regional development based on feasibility and priorities, removing regional restrictions, and empowering regional management in the Third Development Plan replaced the approach of modernization and economic reconstruction of ethnic regions in the Rafsanjani administration. Preserving foundations and religious and national values, strengthening national unity and solidarity while respecting national cultures, and developing and expanding the Persian language as a mediator language were placed on the agenda, and efforts for decentralization began with the implementation of Chapter 7 of the Constitution in relation to the councils (Articles 100 to 106).

By explaining the discourse of national unity and solidarity among Iranian ethnic groups, acceptance of the individual, social, and political rights of all (regardless of their ethnic, religious, and linguistic affiliations) was considered based on the principle of citizenship and civil society, and the expansion of local media was placed on the agenda.

The approach of the seventh and eighth governments (Khatami's reform government) was different from previous governments, and instead of centralization, decentralization was emphasized, and instead of revolutionary and the Ummah Oriented discourse, interaction-oriented discourse was emphasized. The metaphorical space of the reform discourse included political and civil society development, the expansion of local media, decentralization, legalism, citizenship, and national consensus and solidarity.

Reform discourse theorists, such as Hamid Reza Jalaeipour, believed that instead of ethnic demands, ethnic groups should put the demand for citizenship on the agenda. If citizenship is realized, a significant portion of ethnic and religious demands will also be realized.

After Khatami's reform government (1997-2005), the third post-political confrontation with the ethnic issue occurred in the eleventh and twelfth governments of Hassan Rouhani (2013-2021), known as the "Government of Hope and Prudence". Moderation was the central signifier of the Rouhani government's discourse, which appeared in the political arena

alongside other signifiers such as avoiding radicalism, freedom, de-escalation, engagement with the Islamic world, and moderation.

The ethnic and religious policies of the Rouhani government were reflected in The Citizens' Rights Charter and focused on the right to life, health, and quality of life. In line with principles 15 and 19 of the Constitution, Kurdish language and literature courses were established in 2015 at the University of Kurdistan, and Azerbaijani language and literature courses were established at the University of Tabriz in the 2016 (Mousavi & Mousavi, 2019: 131).

In Citizens' Rights Charter, the rights of ethnic and religious minorities were limited to the prohibition of humiliation and insults against minorities. In this Charter, respect for cultural diversity is articulated within the framework of national identity, and intercultural communication must be free from ethnic and religious differences, and the right to learn a language is limited to the official language, and the languages of ethnic and linguistic minorities are reduced to local dialects. The security considered in the charter is equivalent to independence, unity, territorial integrity, and national authority, which is consistent with centralism. Ethnic and religious minorities enjoyed limited rights during this period, and most ethnic policies were in line with the Citizens' Rights Charter and The country's Cultural Engineering Map . The metaphorical space of the moderate discourse of the Rouhani government was based on citizen rights, de-escalation, and constructive interaction with the world.