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Analysis of Iranian Studies Discourses in the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World: A Case Study of the Iran–Iraq War

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Abstract

Since the Iranian Studies discipline was created, different perspectives have taken shape and serve to present different representations of Iran. The purpose of this research is to identify the discourses of the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World, as an example of contemporary institutions active in the field of Iranian Studies that comprise a range of viewpoints held by scholars participating in that field. Thus, through an analysis of this encyclopedia, several approaches and their possible discourses can be identified based on various individual and institutional dimensions. In this research, thematic analysis and van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis are used as methods to study the Iran–Iraq War as addressed in the relevant entries in the encyclopedia. Results show that perspectives relating to Iran in this encyclopedia are multifaceted, and, in addition to the Western view of the East, the perspectives of Easterners and Iranians (focusing primarily on the Iranian diaspora) have also been included. The representation of Iran in each of these perspectives contains distinct features, as well as definitions of "self" and "others" with regard to Iran and the Islamic Republic. The integration of these approaches is reflected in the discourses and sub-discourses of Iranian Studies in Western institutions. The study also shows that institutions and researchers may both be involved in shaping these discourses; however, with specific reference to the analysis of this encyclopedia, the role of personal perspectives and backgrounds of researchers outweighs the institutional role.

Keywords: Contemporary Iranian Studies, Discourse, Representation, Iran-Iraq War.

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Introduction

In the last several centuries, Iranian Studies has continuously experienced significant changes. This field of study, in the beginning, was mainly based on trade, travel, and politics. Gradually, methodical Iranian Studies emerged, and subsequently approaches were formed in this discipline, which can be considered precursors of discourses in Iranian Studies that vary according to historical and political contexts. Each discourse has its own way of viewing and representing Iran, with its own definition of "self" and "other," and such definitions cannot be easily ascribed to common theories such as Orientalism, self-Orientalism, reverse Orientalism, etc. Therefore, it is more appropriate to consider a "meta-cognition," or an idea beyond merely Orientalism, which more comprehensively covers the cognitions of "self" and "other." In this way, we suggest, it is possible to make a more accurate identification of the common discourses in Iranian Studies with respect to the institutions involved in the field. Generally speaking, each country, researcher, and institution (funding or supporting bodies) related to Iranian Studies may have a specific approach to it. The aim of this research is to identify some of these approaches and, subsequently, the current discourses in Iranian Studies, each of which defines and represents Iran and Iranian Studies differently and offers a distinct definition of the "self" and the "other" related to Iran.

Iranian Studies consists of researchers who have diverse backgrounds, approaches, and mindsets, and most of them work in institutions (such as organizations and universities). Some of these institutions may have political, economic, and ideological affiliations that may affect their research approaches. Hence, the combination of individual and institutional approaches is considered central to the formation of Iranian Studies discourses. In fact, the interaction of individual and institutional perspectives has shaped specific approaches to Iranian Studies over the course of several centuries, and each period has created its own distinct discourse(s). This trend has expanded particularly since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and it is assumed that new and diverse discourses have emerged due to changes in the approaches, experiences, access, and intellectual as well as professional backgrounds of researchers and institutions.

Iranian Studies, as a discipline and research field, has important resources, one of which is encyclopedias, which can reflect an institutional approach, because institutions apply specific principles and policies in organizing entries, assigning them to particular researchers, and incorporating the opinions of editors and scientific

supervisors. The diversity of individual approaches among researchers can be determined by the composition of encyclopedia contributors. Therefore, the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World, as a contemporary source in Iranian Studies and as a prestigious Western institution with a diverse composition of researchers, can indicate specific approaches to Iran and Iranian Studies. Since Iranian Studies is a vast, diverse, and dynamic field, the Iran–Iraq War has been selected as a case study. This conflict has generated an extensive body of literature over more than three decades since the end of the war, has significant international dimensions, and can reveal the perspectives of researchers from different backgrounds. Of course, a case study cannot be fully generalized to the entire vast and diverse field of Iranian Studies, but it is useful in understanding dominant approaches and discourses.

The common division between "East" and "West" in this study is used for analytical convenience and to categorize scholars from different countries and backgrounds. It roughly indicates perspectives and categories of authors that represent approaches to Iran and Iranian Studies beyond strictly geographical classifications. The approaches of some individuals, however, may not fit completely into these frameworks and may lie between approaches or on the boundaries of discourses.

Following this introduction, an explanation of the analyzed texts, the theoretical foundations, related frameworks, and the research methodology is provided. Subsequently, in the following sections of the research, the findings and their analyses, as well as the final conclusion, are discussed.[1]

1. The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World

First published in 1995, with a second edition appearing in 2009, this encyclopedia has attempted to provide accurate, comprehensive, and balanced scholarship in all areas affected by religion in the world today, including society, politics, economics, daily life, culture, and thought. The first edition was called The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, and the second

1. In order to ensure the validity and accuracy of the discourse analysis and to conduct the study as impartially as possible, it was necessary to quote words and phrases from the texts verbatim. This approach allows the researchers' viewpoints and the institutional stance toward issues related to Iran to be demonstrated with precision. Accordingly, all terminology presented in quotation marks reflects solely the perspectives of the authors of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* and is included exclusively for the purposes of accurate textual analysis and the extraction of the relevant discourse.

edition, The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World, was an expansion of the first edition, including numerous new entries while revising existing ones.

ohn L. Esposito, Professor of Religion and International Affairs at Georgetown University and Founding Director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim–Christian Understanding, served as editor of The Oxford Encyclopedia of Modern Islam, and Oxford Islamic Studies Online.

The entries seek to adopt a broad, comparative, and multidisciplinary approach that covers the geographical scope of Islam, both in countries where Islam is dominant and in areas where Muslims live as minorities, such as Europe and the United States. In the 1995 edition, the issues of Islamic societies in the modern world were examined from the eighteenth century to the present day, and in the 2009 edition, greater attention was given to the historical background of the pre-Islamic period in Islamic societies.[1] In topics related to Iran, some entries are written by Iranian authors (mainly those residing in the West as part of the Iranian diaspora), while others were authored by non-Iranian researchers, who are mostly European, American, Turkish, Israeli, and Arab. The number of Iranian and non-Iranian authors is approximately equal in producing articles related to Iran. The common phrase used in the encyclopedia to refer to the war examined in this study is "Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988)."

In the present study, both editions of the encyclopedia were examined; however, for the main analysis, the 2009 edition (online version) was used, and the 1995 edition is also referred to when appropriate to the subject or in cases of changes in entries. All entries that refer to the war, in any form, were studied. However, for the final analysis, only the most relevant entries are referenced, and less relevant entries or those lacking a clear discursive orientation were excluded.

2. Theoretical Discussions

Knowing the "self" and the "other" has always been of interest; although today we can no longer speak of a purely Western understanding in which individuals and institutions from the Western geographical region study the land and people living in the Eastern one. In order to recognize views that do not fit exactly within existing theories, a more comprehensive approach seems

1 https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195305135.001.0001/acref-9780195305135

necessary—one that can identify and analyze these views in greater detail. In the following paragraphs, we first introduce several important and influential views, and then examine their relationship to Iranian Studies.

Abdel-Malek (1963) was one of the first scholars to argue that traditional Orientalism was no longer responsive to the changes in the world and demonstrated that it was necessary to apply appropriate methods for understanding the "self" and the "other," as well as to use new and multidimensional approaches to understanding the East in accordance with a changing environment. Subsequently, Edward Said, in 1978, presented fundamental criticisms of Orientalism, defining the West's perception of the East as a discourse. His theory has since been used as the basis for examining Western views toward the East in numerous studies. Said considered the relationship between academic Orientalism in representing the East and institutional Orientalism as a force supporting Orientalist endeavors. He based his theory on several fundamental assumptions, stating that, in the Orientalist view, the West is always superior to the East and that there are fundamental and absolute differences between them. He further argued that the East is perceived as lacking an autonomous identity and that the West therefore defines an identity for it, since Eastern societies are seen as historically stagnant and thus subordinate to the West. Thus, Western understandings of the East are not neutral but rather constitute a form of representation based on the subjective perceptions of Orientalists.

Said's theory is applicable, albeit with reservations, to the examination of Western research on the East. However, it cannot be applied uncritically to other perspectives, particularly to the views of Eastern researchers toward the East itself. That said, this framework remains relevant in cases where Eastern scholars are influenced by Western Orientalist perspectives and apply them to themselves. In other words, Easterners, despite their historical knowledge of one another, have sometimes come to understand "others" through an Orientalist lens.

Said defined the concepts of "self" and "other" primarily in terms of East and West and tended to treat the West as a relatively homogeneous entity in its thinking toward the East, while the geographical East itself encompasses a broad and diverse range of cultures and societies. If we consider the East and the West in a broader sense, as diverse cultural and geographical constructs, Iran—geographically part of the "East"—is studied not only by

Western scholars but also by other "Easterners," as well as by Iranians themselves. Consequently, a variety of analyses of Orientalism have emerged following Said's influential critique.

Sadiq Jalal al-Azm (1981) introduced the concept of reverse Orientalism, an approach that may be as problematic as Orientalism itself. This perspective can be adopted by Eastern scholars through the application of the same techniques, structures, fields of study, and theoretical foundations of Orientalism to the study of Western "others." Sardar (1999) discusses Orientalism in the contemporary world and concludes that Orientalist beliefs continue to play an important role in attitudes and power dynamics, with the main change being the form of their representation. Macfie (2002) analyzes Said's ideas more broadly in terms of their intellectual, historical, and theoretical foundations and reviews related critiques and alternative theories. Turner (2003), from a different perspective, examines Orientalism in relation to postmodernism and globalization, arguing that increasing global interactions have reshaped identities and cultures.

Here, globalization appears to be one of the factors that has transformed the foundations of knowledge about "others." Variations in identity resulting from globalization may, in turn, have altered the ways researchers view other countries and define the "self" and the "other." For example, the definition of the "self" among diaspora researchers who study their country of origin is often more complex. Another important factor is the influence of the media on researchers. Scholars may be indirectly influenced by media narratives and derive part of their data and knowledge from them. Access to, and proximity with, the subject of study—here, Iran—is also closely related to media representations. Researchers who lack direct access to, or experience with, Iran and Iranians are more likely to have their perceptions shaped, positively or negatively, by media sources.

Samiei (2010), expanding on Said's Orientalism, suggests that in the post–September 11 era, Western views of the East largely reproduce earlier Orientalist perceptions, though in subtler and more concealed forms that adapt to contemporary academic discourses and are embedded in cultural narratives. Dabashi (2011) argues that Western representations of the East, based on mental images and the denial of Eastern identity, have weakened the authentic identities of Eastern societies, prompting them to adapt to Western definitions in order to reduce their perceived "otherness." In another study, Dabashi (2008) notes that Western dominance over the East

continues to be reproduced through persistent Orientalist thinking in the postcolonial world. Behdad (1994) examines Orientalism and its persistence in media and academia under the concept of post-Orientalism, emphasizing the need for new, multidimensional approaches that recognize cultural diversity and complexity, particularly in Eastern societies. Farnia (2023), in a study on the influence of Iranian diaspora elites on U.S. foreign policy, discusses how these individuals' perceptions of Iran are formed. Limited attention to Iran's historical and cultural development, unfamiliarity with socioeconomic structures, the reduction and simplification of Iranian issues, and the influence of personal experiences have contributed to foreign policy decisions that are often based more on illusion than reality. Nazari (2020) examines the Iranian-American diaspora's representation of Iran and Islam through a critical analysis of memoirs by Iranian-American women. His findings reveal narratives shaped by nostalgia and a sense of belonging to the homeland, combined with enduring elements of Orientalism and neo-Orientalism, often articulated for political purposes.

Given these theoretical foundations and the framework and objectives of the present study, a perspective beyond these established theories is required—one capable of encompassing the diverse approaches specific to Iran. This perspective may be termed "meta-cognition." To begin with, it is necessary to clarify the concepts of "self" and "other" in relation to Iran. These concepts may fall within the scope of existing theories or share some of their characteristics, yet each cognitive position remains distinct. A wide range of perspectives emerges from researchers of diverse backgrounds and contexts, who write for different purposes and audiences. Moreover, not only individuals but also institutions and research centers play a significant role in shaping these perspectives.

Therefore, an analysis that considers the interaction of individuals, institutions, and conceptual frameworks is required. In addition to the Western "self" vis-à-vis the Eastern "other," two further perspectives are emphasized here. The first concerns the views of "Easterners" toward one another—specifically, the perspectives of non-Iranian Eastern scholars, such as Turks and Arabs, on Iran. The second involves the Iranian diaspora's approach to Iran and its interpretation of the "self" and the "other." In some cases, particularly among diaspora scholars (and occasionally among researchers based inside Iran), a dual attitude toward the homeland can be observed: while maintaining a sense of belonging and attachment to Iran, they may define themselves as the "self" in

opposition to the Iranian government or the Islamic Republic, which is perceived as the "other."

Finally, all scholarly observations are shaped by the positionality of the observer. Approaches to Iran therefore depend on the standpoint from which it is viewed. None of these perspectives is inherently good or bad; each offers a particular interpretation and image that may be useful for different analytical purposes. Accordingly, this study does not seek to reject or endorse any specific form of Iranian Studies produced in different contexts. Rather, it acknowledges that each perspective highlights certain aspects of Iran, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the subject.

3. Methodology

In this study, thematic analysis and van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have been applied. Thematic analysis is a method employed to understand and interpret patterns in qualitative data. This method seeks to identify central ideas or patterns in the data and is flexible enough to capture the meanings embedded in texts, which can, in turn, help researchers gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. The researcher's main impressions and ideas are extracted from the text, and the data are organized by coding the main themes so that the dominant themes of the text and the meanings they represent can be understood (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This method is used as a complementary approach alongside critical discourse analysis to facilitate a clearer interpretation of the text.

Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis focuses on the relationship between discourse, power, and society, and it demonstrates how language is used to construct social meanings. This method emphasizes the role of discourse in reproducing power relations, ideologies, and group identities within social dynamics. It is used to study the structures of text, speech, and events, while social factors, cognition, and discourse are examined simultaneously. Generally, critical analysis using this method includes both micro and macro levels. At the micro level of discourse analysis, the structure of the text is examined to understand the general genre of the text and how a narrative is constructed. At this level, the text is analyzed in terms of vocabulary (e.g., word choice, metaphor, simile, contrast, exaggeration), grammar, sentence construction, and even typographical features (such as bold, italics, and capitalization). At the macro level, discourse is examined in relation to social cognition and cultural and social contexts, that is, the broader context of the text

(van Dijk, 2001). Van Dijk emphasizes the role of value-laden concepts in language. In every social situation and in every text, a discourse pattern can be identified based on who says or writes what, to whom, how, and under what circumstances (van Dijk, 1993). According to van Dijk's approach, the produced content, the personal and social backgrounds of scholars, the context, and textual structures are all significant factors that shape scholarly approaches. Therefore, these elements are essential for identifying and analyzing the probable discourses of contemporary Iranian Studies.

4. Findings

Since the study of the Iran–Iraq War is broad in scope and encompasses a wide range of topics, on the one hand, we have attempted to use a four-category classification of the major themes of this war, including its outbreak, causes and roots, course and termination, and the final consequences and effects of the war. On the other hand, the analyzed texts cover diverse areas that have been classified according to historical and political events, national and international organizations and institutions, geographical locations, and key phenomena and concepts. These two classifications have been applied simultaneously.

4-1. Country Entries

4-1-1. "Iraq"

In this encyclopedia, there is no independent entry for the aforementioned war. However, under the entry "Iraq," there is a heading titled "Iran–Iraq War." The causes, beginning, course, and end of the war, as well as Iran's role and the consequences of the conflict, are not examined in detail. Only some consequences of the war are mentioned, especially in relation to the impacts on the Kuwait War and the internal situation in Iraq. In other parts of the entry "Iraq," one can find implicit data about the causes, beginning, and continuation of the Iran–Iraq War.

In this entry, Iran is seldom mentioned as an actor. The actors are mainly Saddam and the Iraqi government (often described as "the regime"); the Iraqi people and ethno-religious groups are presented as victims of the government, and international actors, such as the West and the United Nations, also appear. The Iraqi government and Saddam are described throughout the text with an emphasis on negative points, with rhetorical expressions repeatedly used to highlight this emphasis. The West is sometimes described positively and, on other occasions, with implicitly negative words such as "invasion," "invading,"

"aggressive," and "failed to see the opportunities." Iran, as one side involved in the war, is never described as the victim, while other countries, such as Kuwait, are mentioned several times as victims of the Iraqi invasion (Salmoni, 2009).

In general, neither Iran nor Iraq is represented positively in this entry. The author has apparently tried to maintain a neutral and scholarly tone, but with deeper analysis, one can see how the negative points and characteristics of both sides are emphasized in such a way that both Iran and Iraq appear as the "other" and are viewed negatively. Barak Salmoni is a Jewish-American scholar with an educational background in history and modern Middle East studies. Currently, he is a visiting defense fellow at the Washington Institute, serving as an expert on intrastate conflicts, regional rivalries, and military capabilities of Muslim societies, with a focus on Egypt, Turkey, Israel, and Iraq.[1] In the 1995 edition of the encyclopedia, the entry of Iraq was written by Chibli Mallat, a Lebanese international lawyer, and there, too, only a few sentences about the war are included in the description of the history of Iraq.

4-1-2. "Iran"

This entry, including its last two sections, titled "Islamic Revolution" and "Problems of the Islamic Revolution," does not mention the Iran–Iraq War. The author, Shahrough Akhavi, is an Iranian diaspora scholar and professor of political science in the United States. The fact that the Iran–Iraq War is omitted from the history of Iran but is mentioned, albeit without details, in the history of Iraq is an important issue in determining the characteristics of this discourse.

4-1-3. "Iranian Revolution of 1979"

This entry is titled "Iranian Revolution of 1979"; however, it does not mention its Islamic dimension. The entry is authored by William O. Beeman, an American anthropologist at the University of Minnesota and an expert on the Middle East, Iranian politics, and culture. In the last sentences of the entry, he does not mention Iraq, but uses words such as "debilitating," "standstill," and "rough" when referring to the Iranian government and the war, implicitly indicating the Iranian government's intent to continue the conflict.

1. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/barak-salmoni

4-2. Military and Political Institutions

4-2-1. "Sipāh-i Pasdarān-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī[1]"

Here, Farideh Farhi, Professor of International Relations at the University of Hawaii, in addition to referring to the role of the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) in the war, also examines the most important consequences of the conflict. She identifies consequences related to the IRGC, including its growing power, intervention in political and economic affairs, and its precedence over the army with the aim to "assure the survival of the Islamic regime." She refers to a war that "Iraq launched" and, throughout the text, shows a kind of pity and empathy for Iran as the homeland. The author does not mention "Iran" alongside the "Islamic Republic," and when referring to the Iranian government, uses the terms "Islamic activists," "Islamic regime," and "Islamic government."

4-2-2. "Khomeini, Ruhollah al-Musavi"

In this entry, we see more details about the war, including its reasons, continuation, ending, and the conditions in Iran than in any other entry, but Iraq's role and actions in the war have not been discussed at all. The text shows many explicit and implicit meanings regarding Iran and its government. The main actors include: Ayatollah Khomeini; all those who opposed the war, without specifying who exactly they were; Iranians who were subjected to the devastating effects of the war; and Iraq and its people, who had to be "saved" by Khomeini, which constituted one of the reasons for the Islamic Republic to continue the war. The author of this entry, Baqer Moin, is a journalist, writer, and head of the BBC's Persian Service.

When discussing the beginning of the war, phrases such as "great testing time for Khomeini," "Khomeini told the nation that the revolution was not about material well-being," and "sustain the regime" are examples that can indicate the author's view of the Islamic Republic's attitude toward the war and its desire to continue it.

The entry continues by describing the prolonged nature of the war and the unfavorable conditions in Iran. Moin characterizes the effects of the war on Iran with phrases such as "economic troubles," "internal shortages and external pressure in response to Iran's intransigent policies put Khomeini on the defensive," and "a wave of resentment came to the surface over the inability of the regime to protect its citizens," through which the author's distinction between

1. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

"Iran" and the "Islamic Republic" becomes evident. Syntactically, the phrase "Khomeini pursued the war regardless of the burden it was imposing on the country" is repeated twice in separate paragraphs, perhaps emphasizing the author's view of who is responsible for the continuation of the war.

Throughout the text, Ayatollah Khomeini's name or position is consistently mentioned; however, at the end of the entry, immediately following the ceasefire, he is described as "the old man" and "frail Ayatollah," perhaps intended to convey weakness, incapacity, and the loss of authority. Elsewhere, phrases such as "Khomeini's defensive tone," "feeling adversity both internally and internationally," and "his revolution was in serious trouble" highlight his efforts to ensure the survival of the Islamic Republic.

Based on the above analysis, the author's perspective can be interpreted as portraying Khomeini as primarily concerned with the revolution and the Islamic regime, rather than the welfare of the Iranian people or the country itself. In accepting the end of the war, the revolutionary struggles and the survival of the Islamic Republic are depicted as opposing forces. In this entry, the Iranian leader is shown as entirely responsible for the continuation of the war. Attention to other actors involved is minimal, with the focus almost exclusively on the responses and actions of the Iranian leader. Considering the title of the entry, this emphasis is consistent with the encyclopedic method.

4-3. Institutions and Groups

4-3-1. "Bunyād"

Hooshang Amirahmadi explains the establishment and activities of the "Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs" in a relatively neutral tone. Amirahmadi holds a PhD in planning and international development from Cornell University, is the former director of the Rutgers Center for Middle Eastern Studies, and the founder of both the Center for Iranian Research and Analysis and the Iranian American Council, known for his efforts to improve understanding between the peoples of Iran and the United States. Amirahmadi's view of Iran appears to be shaped by empathy and nostalgia for the homeland among a certain generation of Iranian immigrants. His text reflects a dichotomy between "Iran" and the "Islamic Republic", though with less emphasis on otherness and less pessimism toward the Islamic Republic.

4-3-2. "Freedom Movement of Iran"

Herein, Houchang Esfandiar Chehabi, an Iranian diaspora scholar, emphasizes the role of Iran's leadership in the continuation of the war.

4-3-3. "Arab League"

The Iran–Iraq War is mentioned as one of the factors that weakened the League, but the manner in which the war started is not mentioned, and the phrase "Iraq was at war with Iran" does not identify an initiator of the war. This entry was written by Tawfiq Y. Hasou and later updated by Joseph Kéchichian, a UCLA professor specializing in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

4-3-4. "Hizb al-Da'wah al-Islāmīyah"

Amatzia Baram, a professor at the Center for Middle East and Iraq Studies at the University of Haifa, mentions the role of this party during the war under Iranian pressure, but explicitly states that Iraq started the war: "Iraq invaded Iran."

4-3-5. "Arab Nationalism"

Here, the consequences of the war and Iraq's heavy losses are mentioned, and phrases such as "lackluster Iraqi claims," "appalling losses in the eight-year-long war with Iran," and "a non-Arab revolutionary Islamic Iran" highlight the negative characteristics of Iraq while remaining mostly silent regarding Iran (Korani and Kechichian, 2009).

4-3-6. "Congresses"

This entry is about Islamic conferences but interprets the 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War as causal factors for Iran's intervention and its claim to leadership over the Muslim world. Martin Kramer, the author, is a historian and analyst of the Middle East and Israel at Tel Aviv University and a fellow at the Washington Institute.[1]

4-3-7. "Federation of Islamic Associations"

This entry refers to the federation's stance on the war, highlighting its strong support for Iraq and its sharp criticism of the Iranian government, with phrases such as "the 'bloody' nature of the regime" (Haddad, 2009).

1. https://martinkramer.org/sandbox_blog/home/

4-3-8. Other Relevant Institutional Entries

Mujāhidīn (Abrahamian, 2009), United States of America (Smith and Leonard, 2009), Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) (Wiley, 2009), Jamʿīyatul Ulamāʿ-i Islām (Kennedy, 2009), Organization of the Islamic Conference (Khan, 2009a), World Muslim Congress (Khan, 2009b), Muslim Brotherhood (Warburg, 2009), Hizbullāh (Uslu, 2009), and the Ba'th Parties (Cannon, 2009) also make brief references to the war, but do not provide detailed information, so they were excluded from the final analysis.

4-4. Concepts and Phenomena

4-4-1. "Martyrdom"

This entry investigates the concept of martyrdom in Islam, but the author of the entry on "Iraq" stated that both Iran and Iraq have relied on their own interpretation of martyrdom as an "ideal" to motivate their soldiers (Lawson, 2009). It seems that, for this Western scholar, these two countries are just two "others" engaged in the war, using religion only as a psychological tool for their own victory.

4-4-2. "Āshūrā"

This entry is written by Peter Chelkowski, a specialist in the history and culture of the Middle East, especially in taʿzīyah. He learned Persian in Iran, made several trips to Iran, and had close experience with Iran and its people. Chelkowski, examining Ashura in contemporary Iranian culture and politics, points out the use of Ashura concepts in war. At the end of the entry, there is a section named "The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War" (Chelkowski, 2009a). His definition of war is "a long, bloody defensive war," which is similar to official terms used in Iran. We can consider Chelkowski a representative of Western scholars with an approach that shows empathy and interest toward Iran.

4-4-3. "Taʿzīyah"

In this entry, Chelkowski, in addition to describing the folklore aspects of Taʿzīyah, highlights its role in the Iran-Iraq War. The point is the difference in his tone when talking about Taʿzīyah in the Pahlavi period versus the Islamic Republic. For example, "backward ritual" and "restrictions" for the Pahlavi period are contrasted with "heroism," "solace," and "loved ones" during the war period (Chelkowski, 2009b).

4-4-4. "Secularism"

Here, Nader Hashemi, the Director of the Center for Political Islam

Studies at the University of Denver and a specialist in political issues, sees the war as a means to consolidate the power of the Islamic Republic, and uses the phrase “the disciples of Khomeini” to refer to the government, which evokes a state of blind and mindless imitation.

4-4-5. “Suicide”

This entry discusses the religious context of suicide and various suicide operations, and mentions martyrdom, which is the ideal of religious authority, as a kind of religious suicide, citing the Iran-Iraq War as an example (Clarke, 2009).

4-4-6. “International Relations and Diplomacy”

James Piscatori, Professor of International Relations and Political Philosophy at the Australian National University, mentions that the acceptance of the idea of the Iranian nation-state (in contrast to the Islamic Ummah) is one of the effects of the war. Phrases like "Yet for all his [Khomeini] wider aspirations for 'promoting Islamic unity'" implicitly indicate that there was no acceptance of "Iran" separate from the Islamic unity, and therefore the aspirations of the Muslim Ummah were inevitably set aside because of the war.

There are also some war-related topics in the entries on “Terrorism” (Norton and Kéchichian, 2009), “Banks and Banking” (Wilson, 2009), “Architecture” (Al-Asad and Türeli, 2009), and “Persian Literature” (Dabashi and Brookshaw), which are omitted here for brevity.

4-4-7. People

In this encyclopedia, the biographies of “Khoʿi, Abol-Qāsem” (Wiley, 2009), “Mahmoud Ahmadinejad” (Kéchichian, 2009), “Ḥakīm, Muḥammad Bāqir al-“ (Luizard, 2009), “Assad, Hafez al-, and Bashār al-Assad” (Entessar, 2009) contain brief references to the war, which were not included in the final analysis. However, the biography of “Ṣadr, Muḥammad Bāqir al-” uses the phrases “an all-out war against Iran” and “the bloodiest war in the Middle East of the twentieth century” (Mallat, 2009), which are somewhat similar to the descriptions of the war within Iran.

4-4-8. Places

The entry of “Atabāt” (Algar and Matsunaga, 2009) mentions that Saddam was already preparing to start a war “against Iran.” The entry on “Baghdad” (Unus, 2009) also mentions the consequences of the war in Baghdad, including financial losses, lack of development, and political tensions.

4-5. Analysis

In the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World, the Iran-Iraq War is not considered an important subject. No entry has been allocated specifically for the war, but under the topic of "Iraq" there is a subtitle entitled "Iran-Iraq War," which lacks detailed discussion, especially with regard to Iran. More information about this war can be found in other entries that are related to Iran (but not in the entry on "Iran"), which provide scattered and fragmented information about the war. The results of the analysis can be summarized in several findings, including: recognizing researchers' approaches to Iran and classifying these approaches and explaining their underlying discourses; defining "self" and "other" in relation to Iran; determining the individual and institutional roles in Iranian Studies; and understanding some changes that have occurred in Iranian Studies in the past decades.

According to the analyses, at two levels—the micro level of the text and the macro level of context—this encyclopedia is mostly concentrated on the Islamic world, and accordingly, the Iran-Iraq War is discussed primarily in terms of its effects on international relations and regional events. However, the details of the war, the situation and experiences of Iran during the war, and its effects on Iran are given limited attention. The exceptions are entries that are especially related to Iran or those written by Iranian scholars. In general, it can be argued that the examination of the Iran-Iraq War remains confined to the thematic scope of the encyclopedia—namely, the Islamic world—and that the war is not considered sufficiently important or influential to warrant a separate entry with detailed analysis.

As mentioned previously, we used a classification of the four important topics of the war, including the beginning and causes, continuation, ending, and the consequences of the war. There is a consensus amongst Iranian and non-Iranian scholars that Iraq was the perpetrator. However, only a few entries contain general or implicit references to the causes and pre-war conditions. In a few entries related to Iran, most of the authors who are from the Iranian diaspora, pay attention to the process and reasons for the continuation of the war; and the common denominator of almost all of them is that the reason for the continuation of the war is the Islamic Republic's desire for its own survival. But generally, in other entries, nothing is said about the continuation of the war and operations.

Regarding the end of the war, Iran’s insistence on continuing the conflict and its reluctance to accept ceasefire resolutions are

emphasized. Only a few entries address the end of the war and the eventual acceptance of Resolution 598 and the ceasefire, with most of the relevant discussion appearing in the entry "Khomeini, Ruhollah al-Musavi." Consequently, the war is treated as a secondary topic, with greater emphasis placed on its consequences and losses, while critical aspects such as its beginning, continuation, and conclusion are considered of lesser importance.

4-5-1. Individual and Institutional Role in Iranian Studies

One of the important issues at the macro level and within the broader context concerns the producers of the text. Of course, the authors have written at the request of the institutions supporting the encyclopedia, but the encyclopedia, as an institution (in this case, a Western one), has largely ignored the longest war of the twentieth century, apparently because the war was an event that occurred between two non-Western countries. In other words, war is something that has happened many times between Easterners or "others" and is implicitly treated as a recurring and normalized phenomenon. However, the authors of the entries are not only Western scholars, but also Iranian diaspora and non-Iranian Eastern scholars who are active in the field, each of whom has contributed a distinct perspective to the texts based on their specific approach. It appears that for the encyclopedia as an institution, war is treated as a routine or secondary event, whereas for individual scholars or researchers it is not; therefore, they have assigned it varying degrees of importance and interpretation according to their own views.

If we seek to examine the role of the individual author in Iranian Studies, it is necessary to pay attention to their mental, educational, and professional backgrounds, personal experiences, and degree of access to Iran. At the same time, institutions as supporters of research activities shape particular research orientations among individuals and authors. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that beyond institutions, there are also human beings, and they can influence institutional discourses through their personal backgrounds, experiences, and prejudices.

To better explain the role of institutions in Iranian Studies, one can compare the works of the same scholar produced for two different institutions and examine whether the results and discursive approaches remain consistent. By analyzing the texts of some Iranian diaspora scholars who have contributed to both the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World and Encyclopaedia Iranica, it becomes evident that some of them adopt different approaches

depending on the institutional context. This finding suggests that the role of institutions in Iranian Studies cannot be ignored. For example, in Iranica, in the entry on Iran–Egypt relations, Akhavi devoted several paragraphs to Egypt's position in supporting Iraq during the war[1], whereas in the entry on "Iran" in the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World, he did not mention the Iran–Iraq War at all (see: Akhavi, 2009). Kéchichian is also among the scholars who have contributed to both encyclopedias, and his tone when discussing Iran in Iranica[2] appears noticeably softer than in the Oxford Encyclopedia. Chelkowski, too, although he adopts an empathetic approach toward Iran in both encyclopedias, expresses this empathy more clearly and extensively in Iranica[3]. Therefore, in addition to the role of institutions, individuals themselves play a significant role in shaping discourses with distinct characteristics. Ultimately, while individuals can influence the discourse of Iranian Studies, the role of institutions remains decisive in the formation and framing of these discourses.

Although the role of the institution in Iranian Studies is important, the difference in individual views cannot be neglected. This difference in views is observable in the work of individuals belonging to the same group of Iranian studies scholars. For example, Baqer Moin and Hooshang Amirahmadi, both from the Iranian diaspora, have similarities in their view to Iran, but it seems that the differences outweigh the similarities. Among non-Iranian scholars, what Martin Kramer wrote is different from what Chelkowski writes about Iran. Therefore, in determining the characteristics of discourses in Iranian Studies, both the role of individuals as producers of knowledge and the role of institutions as sponsors and frameworks of research are essential. Nonetheless, in the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World, it appears that the discursive weight of individual researchers outweighs that of the institution itself.

4-5-2. Analysis of the Role of Iranian Studies Scholars

What can be observed in this encyclopedia regarding the views and approaches of scholars to Iranian Studies is that non-Iranian scholars' views toward Iran, as part of the Islamic world (or the East), tend to be more detached and ostensibly objective, as their

1. https://iranicaonline.org/articles/egypt-vii
2. For example, in: https://iranicaonline.org/articles/boundaries-iv
3. For example, in: https://iranicaonline.org/articles/tazia;
https://iranicaonline.org/articles/graphic-arts;

works generally present descriptions of a phenomenon external to the author. However, these descriptions may still reflect positive or negative discursive orientations; some non-Iranian authors who have had sympathetic experiences of Iran and Iranians have conveyed these experiences through a tone of empathy. In addition to personal experience, the factor of access to Iran and close familiarity with the country also significantly affects scholarly perspectives. For instance, compared with researchers who have never had direct exposure to Iran, the role of access is particularly evident in the more positive representations offered by scholars such as Algar and Chelkowski. Moreover, alongside Western researchers, scholars who are themselves Eastern or of Eastern descent may also approach other Eastern societies through a lens similar to Orientalism. Of course, there is a subtle distinction between classical Orientalism and these contemporary analyses, since such researchers often attempt to maintain an appearance of neutrality in order to avoid being labeled as Orientalists. Nevertheless, at times their writings contain negative connotations rooted in hostility or Iranophobia. This type of perspective may be characterized as neo-Orientalism.

For Iranian scholars, however, it is more difficult to separate themselves from the phenomenon of "Iran" and to analyze it independently of their personal experiences and emotions. Most Iranian diaspora scholars display features of nationalism, attachment to the homeland, and a tendency to regard Iran as the "self," distinct from its government. While some of these scholars may occasionally adopt an indifferent or detached view of Iran—similar to neo-Orientalist approaches—almost all of them simultaneously portray the Islamic Republic as the "other.". As a result, a clear dichotomy emerges in the perspectives of Iranian diaspora scholars: when they refer to "Iran," their narratives often exhibit characteristics of reverse Orientalism, whereas in their treatment of the "Islamic Republic," their discourse frequently contains elements associated with Orientalism.

The distinction between academic and journalistic approaches in Iranian Studies is also noteworthy. The use of language in academic writing differs substantially from that of the media, as most media practitioners employ language in a manner that allows implicit meanings to be readily discerned. Academic texts, by contrast, attempt to preserve neutrality, at least at the surface level of language, although deeper analysis often reveals underlying positive or negative connotations. That said, many Iranian scholars working

in Western political or academic institutions with political affiliations also have backgrounds in journalism, the influence of which is often discernible in their academic writings.

4-5-3. Definition of "Self" and "Other" Regarding Iran

First, it should be noted that in this encyclopedia, as a non-Iranian Western institution, Iran and Iraq are both considered "others." However, the approaches of individual scholars do not necessarily coincide with that of the institution; not all contributors are Westerners, and definitions of "self" and "other" in relation to Iran therefore vary from one researcher to another.

The way Eastern societies perceive one another sometimes exhibits characteristics of Said's Orientalism, because their knowledge of each other has at times also been mediated through Orientalist frameworks. Although some of these countries share long-standing historical and cultural ties, in the modern era it appears that they have developed a renewed understanding of one another through Western lenses, a process that occasionally reproduces elements of Orientalism and neo-Orientalism. The impact of such Orientalist perspectives can be identified in a number of research texts by non-Iranian scholars (including Arab, Israeli, and Turkish authors), in which several of Said's Orientalist propositions apply, such as the perception of fundamental differences between "self" and "other," and at times the subjective, rather than objective, representation of the other side. Furthermore, features such as fear of the other, concern over its perceived superiority, and hostility—whether real or imagined—can also be observed. This dualistic approach may be produced by individuals or the media and can sometimes result from direct confrontation. For example, for an Arab scholar who is himself part of the East or the Islamic world, Iran may be defined as the "other" in its entirety, whereas for a Western scholar this "otherness" may be less pronounced, as it is subsumed within a broader category of "otherness" (namely, the East or Islam). Similarly, for an Israeli scholar, this "other" is sometimes defined politically, in opposition to the Islamic Republic, and at other times as encompassing Iran as a whole.

The otherization of the Islamic Republic is a recurrent feature in contemporary Iranian Studies. The 1979 revolution in Iran has likely played a decisive role in shaping these varying definitions of "self" and "other." For many Iranian diaspora scholars, the "self" consistently corresponds to Iran. But who, then, constitutes the "other"? For Iranian diaspora scholars—and possibly for some

Iranian scholars within Iran who are not aligned with the Islamic Republic—the Islamic Republic and its authorities represent the "other." The "self," by contrast, is constructed as an ancient and beloved homeland, imbued with nostalgic qualities and portrayed as an idealized mental image. One explanation for this dichotomy may lie in the diaspora's need for an "other" through which to define itself. In this framework, the "other" is constituted by the Islamic Republic and endowed with negative attributes, rather than by the Western societies in which diaspora communities reside and which have increasingly become part of their "self." At the same time, a component of the Iranian "self" remains firmly rooted in the original homeland, which is consistently described in positive terms. It should also be noted that since 1979, Western actors—and at times other Eastern societies—have frequently produced negative representations of the Islamic Republic (and occasionally of Iran more broadly). The Iranian diaspora, however, resists identification with this negative image; the distinction between "self" and "other" thus functions as a mechanism to prevent the diaspora from being conflated with the Islamic Republic's unfavorable portrayal.

An examination of the encyclopedia suggests that, contrary to classical Orientalist assumptions, Western scholars tend to emphasize Iran's "otherness" (even when negatively framed) less strongly than scholars from other Eastern countries. In the writings of some Middle Eastern or neighboring-country scholars, Iran as a country—regardless of its government—and the Islamic Republic are both constructed as "others" and are at times represented in predominantly negative terms.

Conclusion

In general, the questions related to defining the discourses in the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World—namely, "who? what? when? in which context? for whom?"—can be answered as follows: "Non-Iranians, including Westerners and Easterners, as well as Iranian diaspora scholars; about the Islamic world, of which Iran is a part; over the last three decades; produced largely outside Iran; and intended for both Iranian and non-Iranian audiences." The main participants in this encyclopedia include the institution itself (along with the individuals and officials supporting it), the authors, and the audience.

In this discourse, Iran is positioned on the periphery of the Islamic world, while the Islamic world itself is given priority over Iran. While the encyclopedia covers most of the territory of Iran within today's political borders, it also occasionally addresses the

influence of cultural Iran beyond these borders. The content related to Iran spans the fields of history, politics, culture, and art. Of course, considering the title, scope, and structural limitations of the encyclopedia, this relative brevity regarding Iran appears both normal and justifiable.

Within this encyclopedia, as an active institutional actor in Iranian Studies, Iran's position in relation to international issues and contemporary developments receives particular attention. Naturally, in topics that are specific to Iran—such as languages, religions, history, and literature (the traditional and classical domains of Iranian Studies)—the internal situation of Iran (and at times that of cultural Iran beyond today's political borders) is examined in greater depth. However, in the fields of political and social Iranian Studies and contemporary issues, research—particularly that produced within Western institutional frameworks—tends to focus more on international contexts and the global implications of Iran-related issues.

Beyond the dominant discourses, several sub-discourses can also be identified. For example, within the broader discourse of non-Iranian scholars, the sub-discourse of Arab scholars differs from that of Western scholars. Additional sub-discourses with distinct characteristics can likewise be identified among Western researchers themselves. These boundaries and characteristics are relative rather than absolute, and it is therefore not possible to attribute identical features to all scholars or studies. In practice, each sub-discourse in Iranian Studies exhibits certain shared traits, while variations emerge due to individual scholarly perspectives.

Another important distinction within Iranian Studies discourses—particularly among non-Iranian works—is that between academic and journalistic approaches. Especially in contemporary Iranian Studies, journalistic narratives and viewpoints are often highly visible and are sometimes intermixed or conflated with academic discourse. In some cases, journalists are regarded as specialists or scholars of Iranian affairs simply because they have written extensively on Iran. Moreover, in situations where access to academic experts on Iran is limited, individuals with only general knowledge of Iran, or even those who are merely Iranian by origin, may be labeled as Iranian Studies scholars.

Two additional conclusions emerge from the analysis. First, the growing prominence of Iranian scholars in the field of Iranian Studies over recent decades is evident. Second, there is increasing scholarly attention to contemporary Iranian issues. Contrary to the

outdated perception that Iranian Studies consists primarily of Western scholarship on Iran, today both within Iran and abroad, Iranians themselves produce a substantial share of research on Iran. At the same time, other Eastern scholars—particularly those from Iran's neighboring regions and from the broader sphere of "cultural Iran"—have also made significant contributions to the field. While traditional areas of Iranian Studies, such as linguistics, history, and archaeology, continue to attract scholarly interest, in many countries—and especially among scholars engaged in Iranian or Middle Eastern studies in recent decades—the study of contemporary Iran has become increasingly central.

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