



Interethnic relationships and its effect on national identity in Iran

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Abstract

In multiethnic societies, existence of economic, political and socio-cultural relationships among ethnic groups is a major prerequisite for forming a societal community and guarantees national integration. In such societies, with an increase in the intensity and symmetry of social interethnic relationships, a sense of belonging and commitment to the nation (national identity) will be strengthened among members of different ethnic groups and the binaries us/them, internal group/external group, insider/outsider will be undermined. Consequently, the way will be paved for more ethnic groups to join the national community. Mutual and symmetrical interethnic relationship is an obstacle to ethnic hegemony and monopoly in the societal community. In view of that, all ethnic groups will be more or less on a par in terms of social status and prestige. In a symmetrical condition, the communicative capital of ethnic groups, i.e., equality between the interest of any ethnic group to be in contact with others and others' interest to be in contact with the ethnic group, will be mutually increased. As such, the intensity and mutuality of interethnic relationships can bind and merge all groups, leading to the emergence of a societal community as a base for national identity. Based on the data collected from a vast survey conducted on 8 major ethnic groups in Iran in 2001, this paper analyzes the hypothesis raised above. Results indicate that first, interethnic cooperative relationships consisting of cultural, affective and economic relationships strengthen national identity whereas conflicting interethnic relationships undermine national identity. Secondly, among three cooperative interethnic relationships, affective relationships influence national identity more than cultural and economic relationships. Thirdly, different ethnic groups in Iran enjoy different capacities of integrating in national community based on their communications with other ethnic groups.

Keywords: ethnicity, ethnic groups, national identity, societal community, interethnic relationships