

Original Research Article

## This is not our right! Long-Distance Nationalism of Iranian Tourists in Turkey

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**Abstract** | Specific social, economic, or political conditions of a society can cause the emergence of a specific type of tourism or create specific behaviors and feelings among tourists. Traveling to Turkey, one of the main tourist destinations for Iranians arouses nationalistic feelings in many Iranian tourists. This situation seems to be the result of the current conditions of Iranian society and also the comparison that Iranian tourists make between the country of origin, Iran, and the country of destination, Turkey. Benedict Anderson's theory of Long-Distance Nationalism can explain this phenomenon among Iranian tourists in Turkey better than other theories. This research seeks to show the nationalistic feelings of Iranian tourists in Turkey and explain the reasons for the arousal of these feelings as well as the way they are expressed. This research was conducted using an ethnographic method. The most important data collection technique was in-depth interviews with Iranian tourists in the three cities of Istanbul, Antalya, and Konya in 2019-2020. In addition to interviews, participant observation, and documentary studies were also used. The author stayed in each of these cities for an average of two weeks to conduct this research, in addition to previous long trips and stays in these three cities. Based on the findings of this research, the nationalistic feelings of Iranians manifest themselves in five categories/sentences: 1- Iranian attractions are better than here. 2- These attractions are Iranian, not Turkish. 3- Why is our situation not like Turkey? 4- Why should we spend our money in Turkey? 5- We and the Turks are close.

**Keywords** | *Iranian Tourists, Turkey, Ethnography, Iranian Nationalism, Long-distance Nationalism, Benedict Anderson.*

**Introduction** | Tourism and nationalism can influence each other in different ways. For example, nationalism can prevent people from traveling from one country to another (Cheng & Wong, 2014) or encourage people from one region to travel to another region or country (Gholamian et al., 2021). On the other hand, tourism can strengthen nationalist sentiments among people in a country or region (Pretes, 2003) or only strengthen a specific type of nationalism and prevent the growth of other types of nationalism (Seyfi & Hall, 2020).

As a country with an ancient history where some of the most important civilizations of the ancient world such as Elam, Achaemenids, and Sasanians emerged (Takmil Homayoun, 2007), Iran has the grounds for the growth of nationalism based on

history and ancient symbols, which are some of the main reasons for archaic nationalism (Smith, 1991). Archaic nationalism in Iran was created in the mid-Qajar period (1796-1925) (Mirmohamadi, 2004) and reached its peak during the two Pahlavi kings (1925-1979) with government support. During this period, and especially during the second Pahlavi king, Mohammad Reza Shah, the government focused on developing tourism in pre-Islamic sites and artifacts (Seyfi & Hall, 2019). The invitation of world leaders to Persepolis, the magnificent capital of the Achaemenid dynasty, and the speech of Mohammad Reza Shah in front of the tomb of the founder of this dynasty, Cyrus the Great, are considered a turning point in this regard (Khazael & Raz, 2009, 454).

However, the Pahlavi government's emphasis on pre-Islamic Iran was one of the reasons for the

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dissatisfaction of religious groups of the people, including the clergy, which led to the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Following this revolution, the history of ancient Iran was marginalized and in many cases ignored. Instead, the Islamic-Shiite identity was emphasized and efforts were made to expand tourism to Shiite religious sites (Seyfi & Hall, 2020). But this time, another group was dissatisfied with this unilateral emphasis on Shiite identity and the neglect of their pre-Islamic identity. As Rajai (2006) writes, whenever the balance of the main elements of Iranian identity (which, according to him, includes the four elements of Islam, Iran, tradition, and modernity) is disrupted, Iranians experience an identity crisis. However, socio-cultural mechanisms attempt to restore this balance in various ways.

One of these ways is to express Iranian nationalist sentiments in less restrictive places. Although traveling abroad is not done with the direct purpose of expressing nationalist sentiments (at least not in this case study), it can also be considered indirectly. The open cultural and social space of some of Iran's neighboring countries (such as Turkey, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and Iraqi Kurdistan) has provided an opportunity for the middle classes of Iranian society to express some of their nationalist sentiments there. Also, sometimes observing the progress of these neighboring countries is effective in stimulating the nationalist sentiments of Iranians who consider themselves and their country worthy of more progress than what is currently happening in their country.

Therefore, and related to what has been described, the main question of this article is what effect does the experience of Iranian tourists in Turkey have on their nationalist sentiments? Along with this main question, it seeks to investigate what understanding this experience gives the Iranian tourist of their own national identity. What are the implications of this experience in rethinking various dimensions of national identity? And finally, how are the nationalist feelings of Iranian tourists expressed or manifested after traveling to Turkey and observing that country's progress compared to Iran?

## Research Background

Many studies have been conducted on the relationship between tourism and nationalism from various angles, some of which will be discussed here. Some regions such as Wales or Scotland (Pitchford, 1995; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; Griffiths & Sharpley, 2012; Bhandari, 2016) have been the focus of these

studies. Perhaps because nationalism and separatism are strong in these regions. However, we are faced with a lack of studies in this field regarding Iranian tourists or tourists in Iran. Naturally, in the absence of studies on nationalism among Iranian tourists in Turkey, nationalism among Iranian tourists in general can be addressed.

Some studies that have addressed the relationship between politics and tourism in Iran (Mozaffari et al., 2017; Seyfi & Hall, 2020; Seyfi & Hall, 2019), a short or long part of them is related to the discussion of nationalist policies in pre-revolutionary tourism and religious policies in post-revolutionary tourism; since the main intersection of politics and tourism in Iran, especially after the 1979 revolution, has been the determination of tourism policy based on national identity or religious identity. For example, Seyfi & Hall (2020) in their article titled "Political Developments and Transitional Events in a Tourism Destination" have examined the consequences of the Transfer of political power in Iran on inbound tourism to the country. Although they focus on inbound tourism to Iran, which has no relevance to our research (Iranian tourists in Turkey), this study indirectly addresses the relationship between nationalism and tourism in Iran. In this article, they discuss the competition between the religious conservative current that prefers tourism in Iran solely for religious purposes (based on Shiite religious nationalism) and the proponents of other forms of tourism, especially tourism based on historical destinations of pre-Islamic Iran.

In another study, Gholamian et al. (2021) examined the ethnicism/nationalism relationship among Iranian Kurdish tourists traveling to Iraqi Kurdistan. Their method was in-depth interviews with 17 Iranian tourists who had traveled to Iraqi Kurdistan. Their findings show that ethnicity, along with some other issues such as social freedoms, proximity, and cheapness of travel to Iraqi Kurdistan, was one of the main reasons for their travel to this region. The experiences of these tourists on their trip increased their sense of Kurdish identity and reduced their sense of national solidarity with other Iranians. During this trip, they compared their situation with the residents of Iraqi Kurdistan and became dissatisfied with their situation in Iran. Of course, the contemptuous view of Iraqi Kurds towards them (mainly due to the poor economic situation of Iranian Kurds) was annoying for them despite their common ethnicity. However, they were proud of Iraqi Kurdistan and being an autonomous state with Kurdish symbols and flags.

The present study differs from previous studies in

several ways: first, it deals with the nationalism of Iranian tourists in Turkey for the first time. Second, it shows for the first time that a destination can arouse nationalist feelings in some Iranian tourists and at the same time arouse ethnic feelings in some other Iranian tourists.

### Theoretical Framework

Nationalism is one of the hot topics that many theories have been proposed in its analysis. Ozkirimli (2004) mentions three categories of nationalism theories: primordialism theories that consider nationalism as a permanent and eternal phenomenon; modernism theories that consider nationalism as a result of modernism; and finally, ethno-symbolism theories that say that although nationalism is a modern phenomenon, it is nourished by the fountain of symbols and cultural heritage of the past nations. In each of these categories, many sub-categories can be seen that have similarities and differences with each other.

The nationalism of Iranian tourists in Turkey is closer and more similar to Benedict Anderson's concept of "Long-Distance Nationalism" (Anderson, 1998) than other concepts and theories. Anderson, who is best known in Iran and the world for his book "Imagined Communities" (Anderson, 2014), in an article called deals with the example of the famous short story of Mary Rowlandson, who is briefly captured by Indians in 1682. Mrs. Rowlandson sees "English lands" where Indians quickly settled after the evacuation of British troops. She also sees "English cattle" in that land. Benedict Anderson explains how these revived nationalist feelings for Mrs. Rowlandson, even from a distance. Seeing the lands where British troops were once stationed, and also seeing the English cattle, Mrs. Rowlandson is not only reminded of her homeland, England, but also laments why the field is now empty of English troops to be replaced by Indians.

This pattern is remarkably comparable to Iranian tourists in Turkey, especially in places like Konya where Rumi is known as an Iranian poet present in Turkey, and of course, since Iran has vacated the space, Turkey has filled it well.

It can be said that traveling to a foreign destination like Turkey, although not consciously aiming to defend Iranian culture and Iranian nationalism, inadvertently creates situations in the Iranian tourist's mind that are related to it. Self and identity are social products that are formed and maintained through encounters with others (Higginbotham, 2012, 191). Gellner by Ozkirimli (2004) says that migrant workers

who encounter people other than their countrymen and become aware of the indifference or hatred of others towards their culture, try to increase their self-awareness and love their own culture more. In tourism, although these encounters occur in a different environment, they have similar consequences. These attitudes cause tourists (here, Iranians in Turkey) to reconsider their culture and national identity. Iranian tourists in Turkey encounter attractions and products that remind them of similar attractions and products in Iran. It is precisely at this point that, like Ms. Rowlandson, they envy why the arena (in Iran) has been emptied and Iran cannot show its cultural and civilizational attractions and richness to others as it should and perhaps should.

### Research Method

This research was conducted by an anthropologist using the ethnographic method. In the anthropological tradition, ethnography is the most important method and requires a relatively long-term presence of the researcher in the research area and closeness to the lifestyle and experiences of the people being studied (Angrosino, 2007). Therefore, the most important data collection techniques in this method are participant observation and in-depth interviewing, both of which were used in this research.

The research area was three Turkish cities, each of which is preferred by a group of Iranian tourists as their travel destination: Istanbul for shopping and entertainment tourists; Antalya for nature and recreation tourists (Nikjoo & Ketabi, 2015); and Konya for cultural and literary tourists.

From March 19, 2018, to April 2, 2018, which roughly coincides with the two-week Iranian Nowruz holiday, fieldwork was conducted in Istanbul. All interviews were conducted in tourist locations such as Istiklal Street, Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace, and some shopping malls such as Cevahir, which are popular among Iranian tourists. A total of 70 interviews were conducted in Istanbul, of which 58 were usable.

The researcher also spent two weeks in Antalya from July 4 to 28, 2019, collecting field data. He spent 11 nights at the Expo Royal Hotel in the city center and two nights at the Grand Park Hotel in Lara. If there were no cost constraints, the researcher would have spent the entire two weeks at hotels such as the Grand Park, Titanic, Rexos, etc., which are mostly frequented by Iranian tourists. He conducted about 40 interviews in Antalya, of which 31 were usable.

Regarding the destination of Konya, it is also worth noting that mainly Iranians go to Konya for the "Shebi

Arus” (Bride’s Night) ceremony, which is held on the occasion of Rumi’s death anniversary from December 7 to 17. The researcher conducted about 18 interviews in Konya during the same 10-day period in 2019, all of which were usable.

Even though six years have passed since this field research, the data is still valid. Given that the social/cultural and economic contexts of the formation of Iranian tourists’ long-distance nationalism in Turkey are still intact (and are discussed in detail in the findings section), the data is still usable and citationable.

All interviews were first converted into text. In the second stage, the collected data was managed. For this purpose, all notes and texts were read. Then, the data were categorized. Initially, categories were created based on the explanations and conversations of the tourists, and then, the categories, which were large in number, were combined again and, of course, re-divided into some parts where necessary. If some explanations remained outside these categories, the researcher had to make sure that the classification was okay. If not, it was edited again. But if the classification was correct, it was examined whether the remaining statements were exceptions and whether they could be of another type. As Dey (2005, 102) states: “The development of a set of categories allows the data to be organized through a variety of different distinctions. Data within each category can then be compared. If necessary, further distinctions can then be drawn within each category to allow for a more detailed comparison of data organized within a set of sub-categories.”

In the end, five categories were extracted from the perspective of Iranian tourists that reflected their nationalist sentiments. Finally, we analyzed these categories by referring to analytical texts related to nationalism in Iran and also by taking help from theories related to nationalism.

## Findings

Tourism can be a type of identity product or service. An identity product, as defined by Fakouhi (2009, 201), is “a product whose production or consumption is positively or even negatively associated with belonging to an identity or avoiding such an identity.” In this perspective, tourism can also be a type of identity product. In fact, by using “our heritage,” the tourism industry becomes a tool that creates concepts related to nationality (Palmer, 1999, 313). Therefore, although tourism is a means of discovering and affirming identity, usually no one travels with the direct aim of affirming their identity, and this is an indirect effect.

In fact, tourism generally causes us to reconsider our identity (Higginbotham, 2012, 199). In any case, the specific social, economic or political conditions of a society can give rise to a specific type of tourism (Stronza, 2001).

Because of its long history of cultural relations with its neighbor Iran, Turkey has many cultural signs and similarities with Iran, a visit which can awaken nostalgic feelings in Iranian tourists, and sometimes these feelings are expressed in the form of national expressions.

Here, an attempt is made to identify and introduce the manifestations of nationalism or ethnicity in Iranian travel to Turkey. Among Iranian tourists, nationalism can be seen better in some statements and behaviors, which are:

### • These are ours

The greatest manifestation of this belief can be seen among Iranian tourists in Konya. Where many say that Rumi was an Iranian poet who wrote his poems in Persian, the literary, historical, and official language of Iran. This Persian language is one of the main reasons why Rumi is considered Iranian. Iranian tourists wonder or sometimes sneer that if Turkey says that Rumi was Turkish, then why didn’t he write a poem in Turkish? And if the Turks say that he is our poet, then why can’t they read even a line of his poetry in the language he wrote? When President Erdogan introduced Rumi as a Turkish poet in 2008, it provoked a lot of criticism in Iran and many media outlets in Iran criticized him for these statements.

However, Iranian criticism of the confiscation of Rumi is more directed at the Iranian government than at Turkey. Although the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, was interested in Islamic mysticism, the majority of Shiite clerics are opposed to mysticism and Sufism, and some prominent clerics (Modarresi Yazdi, 2007; Amili, 2012) have written many books criticizing this movement. In another example, recently, the name of Rumi was removed from one of the poems in the ninth-grade Persian school textbook, and “poet” was written instead. That is, the sentence “Rumli said this...” was changed to “Poet said this...”.

This is while Sufism can be considered one of the pillars of Iranian identity (Nafisi, 2017, 202; Naraghi, 2003, 184). Zarrinkoob (2004), who has written many books on Sufism and mysticism in Iran, considers Iran to be one of the main sources of Sufism, which was introduced into Islam by Zoroastrians who converted to Islam from their previous religion. Sufism in Iran, especially after the Mongol invasion and the

destruction they caused, became popular in Iran and became a common discourse system in the field of Iranian thought, and Sufis became the intellectual class of the Iranian people (Tabatabaei, 2001, 313). Some researchers, such as Naraghi (2003, 13), consider the prevalence of mysticism and the mystical poems of great Iranian poets among these people to be the criterion for the religiosity or irreligiosity of today's Iranians; because mysticism has entered the lives of Iranians through the poems of these poets, and Nasr (2007, 189) considers the richness of Persian literature in the field of mystical poems to be unparalleled in the world. Of course, some events strengthen these feelings among Iranian tourists in Konya. Based on the author's participant observations in Konya over the years, many Turkish tourists and citizens of other countries who come to Konya for the anniversary of Rumi's death (Shebi Arus) trying to find out which lobbies of hotels have Iranians holding poetry reading, dhikr or sama ceremonies so that they can also participate in these ceremonies. This interest of Turks and tourists from other countries in attending Iranian ceremonies in Konya gives Iranian tourists a sense of pride and strengthens the feeling of "Rumi is ours" or "Masnavi is ours" among them.

Of course, this view is not shared by all Iranian tourists in Konya, and unlike two groups of Persian literature researchers and ordinary tourists (meaning non-literary and non-mystical) who emphasize that Rumi is Iranian, for Iranian mystics and Sufis, Rumi's nationality and ethnicity are not very important and they consider him a cosmopolitan figure. But they are also critical of the limitations of Sufism in Iran.

The situation of Shams Tabrizi (the master of Rumi) is similar. For several years, the Turkish government has installed a sign in front of the Shams Mosque (about a kilometer from Rumi's tomb) that says that some say that Shams was thrown into a well under the mosque after being killed by jealous students of Rumi. This story has no evidence, but the Turkish government is slowly emphasizing this story. The dominant and historical story so far has referred to Shams' tomb in Khoy, Iran. That is why it was audible to hear the conversation of two Iranian tourists in the square in front of Rumi's tomb. The first: "Does anyone know where Shams' tomb is? I heard it is close to here." The second responds with an annoyed expression: "Why are you here, madam? Do you want to see Shams' tomb? Go to Khoy! The Turks have opened a shop here. We don't say anything, they take whatever they can get their hands on, saying that this is ours too."

In another example, the Chaharshanbeh Suri

celebration is celebrated with great enthusiasm among Iranian tourists in Istanbul. Turkey has made it possible for Iranian tourists to ignore some of the restrictions in Iran (such as dancing and stomping around the fire). A young Iranian tourist who witnessed Iranians celebrating Chaharshanbeh Suri from afar on a cruise ship in the Bosphorus Strait said: "I don't understand why we should celebrate a holiday that belongs to us in another country?" He meant why there are restrictions on holding such celebrations in Iran.

#### • Ours is better

The nationalistic feelings of Iranians in any destination in Turkey are generally expressed by comparing that destination with similar destinations in Iran. Below are these comparisons in all three destinations.

In Konya, it was mentioned several times by various tourists that we in Iran have many tombs of Iranian poets such as Ferdowsi, Hafez, Saadi, Khayyam, Attar or famous mystics such as Bayazid Bastami, Abolhasan Kharghani, Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardebili, etc. But why couldn't we act like Konya? On the Telegram channel called "Aali Jenab" with nearly half a million followers, this comparison has been written several times in different forms. For example, its author once wrote:

This is the umpteenth time I have written this post: Turkey earns more than \$<sup>2</sup> billion annually from tourism to the tomb of the great Persian poet Rumi. That is, Iran can earn more than oil sales with only 9 of the world's great celebrities (Avicenna, Cyrus the Great, Razi, Khayyam, etc.)!

Although the argument presented in this Telegram post is incorrect, it well reflects the expectations of Iranians for the development of tourism to destinations similar to Konya in Iran, along with the complaints and criticisms of Iranian tourists in Konya.

Iranian tourists in Antalya also compared this city to northern Iran, the coastal cities of the Caspian Sea, and the dense Hyrcanian forests, and sometimes introduced it as superior to Antalya. The city of Ramsar has been mentioned several times in interviews as a competing, equal, or even better destination than Antalya. For example, one tourist in Antalya said: "The city of Ramsar is really more beautiful than Antalya. One side is the forest and the other side is the sea. The view of its hotels is much more beautiful than the hotels in Antalya. But unfortunately, it was neglected after the revolution."

Some tourists even said that unlike Antalya, the

Persian Gulf coast in southern Iran is warm in winter and can host domestic and foreign tourists, but it has never been able to experience proper tourism development.

In Istanbul, Iranian tourists also remember cities like Isfahan, Shiraz, etc. that have many historical monuments and are of course registered as World Heritage Sites. Then they ask why we have not been able to attract tourists to those cities like Istanbul. Comparing Istanbul with Isfahan is more common than any other city between Turkey and Iran. As Asadzadeh (2017) says, when Istanbul was the capital of the Ottomans, Isfahan was also the capital of the Safavids, and both have many similarities. Several interviewees in Istanbul described the city of Isfahan as much more beautiful than Istanbul. A Tabrizi interviewee said: "If there were no restrictions in Isfahan, it would attract more outbound tourists [from Iran] than Istanbul. We would go to Isfahan instead."

#### • We are better

This statement was especially expressed in words that indicate ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is one of the topics that has attracted the attention of anthropologists in tourism (Putova, 2018, 73). Of course, this phenomenon is generally expressed by people who have a more developed country than people whose country is less developed. While here Turkey is more developed than Iran, some Iranian tourists have an ethnocentric view of Turkey. This can be related to the same negative feeling of Iranians and their dissatisfaction with the position they currently have. That is, Iranians feel that their country's rightful position should be higher than Turkey's. Kock et al. (2019) have shown that one of the reasons for ethnocentrism among tourists is their desire to develop domestic tourism in their country.

There was a famous example in this regard among Iranian tourists. Of course, the author has heard this example many times among non-tourist Iranians, too. This story says that before the Islamic Revolution, tourists traveling from Iran to Europe by land would pass through Turkey, and at that time Turkey was underdeveloped and the situation of its people was deplorable. Now, Turks have become more developed by the force of their government; otherwise, their real status is lower than Iranians. A 70-year-old Iranian male tourist in Istanbul says: "Before the revolution, we wanted to go and buy a second-hand car from Germany. When we were passing through Turkey, in some places we had to throw cigarettes out of the car window at people around us so that they wouldn't

break the car window with stones. Now where are they and where are we?"

Another Iranian tourist in Istanbul says: "Iranians are smarter than Turks, it's a pity that the conditions have limited us."

Of course, contrary to this view, most Iranian tourists believed that Turks had worked harder to achieve such a position in tourism and other aspects and deserved development. However, given that the focus of this article was on the nationalist views of Iranian tourists in Turkey, we will not discuss them further.

#### • Why here?

All three questions above, and in fact, the criticism, led to the criticism that why should we come to Turkey and spend our money here? If we spent the same money in Iran, it would help the Iranian economy and create jobs and income for our compatriots. For example, a 39-year-old man states that his purpose in coming to Istanbul is to attend a concert by a singer from Los Angeles (an Iranian singer living in Los Angeles, USA). He says that this is the second time he has come there for this singer's concert. Then he continues bitterly: "Isn't it unfortunate?! An Iranian singer, I am also Iranian, I have to come to Turkey to see his concert."

This argument, which is entirely within the realm of "economic nationalism," is common worldwide (Chuin & Osman, 2017; Rawwas et al., 1996; Ant et al., 2016). Iranian tourists were more critical of buying clothes from famous brands that do not operate in Iran. While most of them buy Turkish-made clothes such as LC Waikiki, some tourists go to the branches of Western brands in Turkey. On the other hand, they also pointed out that the money they generally spend on traveling to Turkey (airfare, hotel reservations, etc.) could have been spent in Iran. Another Iranian tourist in Istanbul said that for several years he has been coming to Istanbul once a year to both have fun and to buy a year's worth of clothes for himself, his wife, and his children. During the interview, he said that he brought along four thousand dollars for shopping, especially clothes. Then he explained that if these same global brand stores were in Iran, we would shop in Tehran. But brand names are either fake in Iran, or you have to buy them for several times the real, global price. So it is more economical for him to come to Turkey and shop directly.

Overall, it seems that these criticisms are not related to the principle of traveling to Turkey, but rather to the large number of Iranians traveling to Turkey and the "shopping tourism" of Iranians in Turkey.

This argument was also used by Iranian tourists as a justification for the need to develop tourism in Iran.

• **We are close to each other**

A significant portion of Iranian tourists who go to Turkey are Azeri. However, the relationship between this group's nationalist feelings after traveling to Turkey can be different from other Iranians. For some Iranian Azeri, Turkish ethnicity is important. Of course, there was no clear indication of this in the interviews, but at least three of the interviews expressed implicit indications. All three of them had one thing in common: that Azeris were better received than other tourists due to their linguistic proximity to Turkey, or that they enjoyed their trip more due to their better understanding of Turkish culture. For example, one of them says with a sense of pride: "The hotel reception gave us a discount as soon as they found out that we were Turkish too." Another of these Azeri tourists says: "We don't feel like foreigners here. We speak the same language and communicate easily." On the other hand, it can also be considered that some Azeri tourists may refrain from expressing their overt and very positive feelings towards Turkey due to accusations and labels that may be applied to them by other Iranians.

At times, their opinions were both ethnic and nationalistic. For example, almost every third Azeri tourist mentioned that Iran has more attractions than Turkey, but the government does not pay attention to tourism in Iran. In fact, they were in line with other Iranians in this regard.

A similar study focusing on the identity of ethnic tourists (Gholamian et al., 2021) showed that tourists' experiences of traveling to ethnic lands affect their post-trip behavior. The authors showed that Iranian Kurds when they travel to Iraqi Kurdistan and see the developments in the region, are proud of being Kurdish and feel close to Iraqi Kurdistan. However, on the other hand, they distance themselves from their Iranian identity after comparing their situation with Iraqi Kurds. Therefore, it is not far-fetched that after traveling to Turkey and observing the progress of that country, several Azeris would feel more ethnically and close to Turkey and distance themselves from their sense of being Iranian. Even if they do not distance themselves from their Iranian identity, they may reconsider their identity. Maruyama et al. (2010) found that contrary to other studies on post-travel tourism identity, second-generation Chinese-American tourists still considered the United States as their homeland after traveling to China, but in their identity, they needed to redefine it.

This group of Iranians is close to genealogical tourists. Higginbotham (2012, 190) distinguishes between two groups of "roots-seeking" and "lineage-tracing" tourists: Roots-seeking tourists usually travel to the region in search of their ancestral homeland. While a lineage-tracing tourist may not necessarily have traveled to their ancestral homeland, they are everywhere—even where it may not be their ancestral homeland—looking for traces of their genealogy or ancestral memories. A trip to Turkey and experiencing a few days of tourist life in a land that is at the forefront of promoting the Turkish language and culture could be placed in the second category (lineage-tracing tourists). According to Cohen (1979, 192-193), if such a trip arouses a sense of belonging to the destination, it will lead to an existential experience in the trip, which is the deepest tourist experience.

This latter group is more likely to be within the framework of Turkish nationalism than Iranian nationalism. This is while Iranian nationalism is generally opposed to Turkish nationalism. Iranian nationalists regularly warn of the dangers of Pan-Turkism for the unity of Iranian identity and territory and have written or Translated many books and articles from other languages (Soltanshahi, 2009; Roohi, 2002; Fateminasab & Hosseyni, 2013; Ebrahimi, 2015; Bahmani Qajar, 2007). The main fear is the concern about the separation of Azeri-populated areas by Turkey, an old fear that has taken root among some Iranian people and officials (Esendal, 2011, 40).

## Discussion

Tourism is a situation that highlights the "self" versus the "other." These two concepts, as central concepts in anthropology, lead to the formation of identity or rethinking it (Fakouhi, 2022, 22). Every nation may be forced to rethink its identity at historical critical moments. Iranians have also faced this rethinking and questioning of its identity many times throughout history. The nature of this rethinking, at least in the last two hundred years, has been the confrontation of the "Iranian self" with the "Western other" that has had the upper hand militarily, politically, and economically. Therefore, the question that has been raised in the minds of Iranian thinkers for about two hundred years is the search for the reasons for the inequality between this self and the other. Perhaps its turning point is the question that Abbas Mirza, the Qajar prince asked the French ambassador after the defeat against Russia: "What is the reason for your progress and the reason for our constant weakness?" (Mojtahedi, 2010, 99). That day, Abbas Mirza and other thinkers posed this

question to developed countries that were not only technologically, militarily, and economically distant from Iran, but also geographically distant. But in the last few decades, some of Iran's neighboring countries have also been surpassing Iran in economic, technological, cultural, and other areas. This time, the Iranians' question remains the same old question: "Why did they progress but we didn't?", but the "them" has changed and the audience is another: some neighboring countries. This time, it is Iranian tourists who, with every trip to a neighboring country, repeat the question of two hundred years ago: "Why didn't we progress as much as they did?". Taking refuge in Iranian nationalism seems to be a temporary answer to calm the restless hearts of Iranian tourists from seeing the progress of neighboring countries. But this question and the answer to which they cannot find, remain in their souls and minds. Iranian tourists are in a suspended state when traveling. According to Van Gennep (1960), they are in a state of Transition, and according to anthropologist Victor Turner et al. (2017), they are in a liminal situation, neither here nor there. However, after returning from this trip, these tourists experience mental changes about who they are and their identity. Lacan explains that when a child sees his image in the mirror for the first time, he gains a coherent image of himself. Before that, he had a vague and fragmented image of himself. With the help of Lacan's words, Arabestani (2019, 45) raises the issue of a coherent image of Iran when Iranians encounter people from other countries; traveling to countries such as Turkey is a phenomenon in which Iranians become disappointed.

We had a similar experience in Iran about one hundred and fifty years ago; When many intellectuals, politicians, students, etc. went to Europe or the Ottoman Empire and saw their progress compared to Iran. According to Seyyed Javad Tabatabaei (2001), during the Qajar era, travel writers who went to other countries became Iranian thinkers. At that time, nationalist feelings were also aroused among Iranians who traveled to Western countries, including the Ottoman/Turkey. During the Constitutional era, Iranian intellectuals, journalists, and freedom fighters who traveled abroad reconsidered their identity on the one hand and the relationship between themselves, Iran, and its rulers on the other hand after returning to the country. It seems that a relatively similar situation has now prevailed in the minds of Iranian tourists in Turkey (and some other neighboring countries). Therefore, it is not far-fetched to expect that these foreign trips to neighboring countries such as Turkey

will gradually cause dramatic changes, first in the mindset of Iranians and then in their social, cultural, and political life, the scope of which may encompass the entire space of society and the country.

## Conclusion

Iranian tourists who travel to the neighboring countries feel this distancing more than anyone else. Some of these older tourists had traveled to these neighboring countries decades ago, and now that they are traveling again, they realize the speed of their progress and their surpassing Iran in some areas. This is where nationalistic feelings become a refuge that Iranian tourists resort to, unconsciously trying to either hide the superiority of those foreign destinations or to complain critically about the speed of their growth and development.

In this regard, in this study, it was shown that Iranian tourists who go to Turkey express at least five statements that have a nationalistic flavor when faced with the development of Turkish tourism which itself can also indicate development in other sectors: 1- Iranian attractions are better. 2- These attractions are Iranian, not Turkish. 3- Why is our situation not like Turkey's? 4- Why should we spend our money here? And 5- We and the Turks are close.

At least the first four propositions, i.e. the propositions related to Iranian nationalism, can be summarized in one proposition: "This is our right" that Turkey now enjoys. That is, "it is not our right" to have such a situation in Iran now. On the other hand, the fifth proposition, which is related to Iranian Azeri tourists, unlike the previous four propositions, instead of strengthening Iranian nationalism, leads to strengthening ethnicism, which is the opposite of nationalism.

On the other hand, even Iranians who call themselves "nationalists" hate Pan-Turkism and are concerned about Turkey's actions against Iran, continue to travel to Turkey. The question is how can one be an Iranian nationalist and travel to a country that we are concerned about encroaching on our country's soil? Perhaps three reasons can be given for this contradiction: First, the discussion of Pan-Turkism, nationalism, etc. is generally raised in the intellectual atmosphere of Iran, and many ordinary Iranians, although they are very interested in Iran, may not have entered into such discussions even once in their lives or have not even heard of terms such as Pan-Turkism. Second, almost no Iranian tourist travels to Turkey with the conscious purpose of nationalism. As mentioned, few tourists in the world travel with such

a conscious purpose. The second reason is that even some Iranians who are familiar with the phenomenon of Pan-Turkism and feel threatened by it probably separate traveling to Turkey from the discussion of Pan-Turkism. This is consistent with the findings of Cheng & Wong (2014) that a group of Chinese tourists prefer to travel to this country even after the border dispute with Japan, even if they consider themselves Chinese nationalists. According to them, tourism

should be separated from political issues. The third reason is probably related to the very limited options and choices for Iranians to travel abroad; therefore, they have no foreign destinations other than Turkey and one or two neighboring countries.

### Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he had no conflicts of interest in conducting this research.

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