
David N. Yaghoubian’s Ethnicity, Identity, and the Development of Nationalism in Iran is both less and more than what it claims to be. It is less, because the title suggests that the book is some broad examination of the development of nationalism in Iran, while in fact it focuses on a specific minority: Armenian Iranians. Yet, it is more than a study of Iranian nationalism, because the author makes very captivating inroads into topics as diverse as social relations in the Cossack Brigade, the twists and turns in the lives of early truck drivers, and the reasons behind Mohammad Reza Shah’s fondness for scouting. And, of course, the book is a treasure trove of historical analyses and anecdotal facts about Armenian Iranians. This reviewer cannot overstate how much he enjoyed reading this book and how stimulating he found it.

The study of Iranian nationalism has now come of age. Long gone are the days (which lasted until the 1990s) when the only literature available mechanically peddled the most clichéd primordialist claims of Iranian nationalism, rather than approach them critically. Among the many authors who have helped advance this field of study are Mostafa Vaziri, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, Afshin Marashi, and Rasmus Christian Elling. It is a shame that Yaghoubian does not fully engage with this literature, as he repeats that the topic is understudied. However that may be, there is something very particular and worthwhile about his book: its social-biographical methodology.

Yaghoubian deploys social biography to study the dialogical relationship between minority identity as experienced by Armenian Iranians, on the one hand, and state nationalism, on the other, in a period from approximately the early Qajar era to the Islamic Republic, with significant emphasis on the reign of the two Pahlavi monarchs (1925–1979). The five core chapters of the book are thus short biographies of five individuals selected by the author and extensively researched through interviews and the study of family archives. These individuals are Iskan- der Khan Setkhanian, the Cossack colonel; Hagob Hago- bian, the truck driver; Sevak Saginian, the community leader and member of Parliament (MP); Lucik Mora- diance, the female engineer and scientist; and Nejde Hagobian, the scout master.

On either side of these core chapters, Yaghoubian offers theoretical discussions to ground his findings into the field of nationalism studies. The introduction is particularly thought-provoking, even brilliant. The author takes one specific event, a 1953 parade in honor of the Shah’s birthday, and analyzes it from the perspective of each of the most influential theories of nationalism (Ernest Gellner’s theory of nationalism as a by-product of modernity and industrialization, John Breuilly’s emphasis on nationalism as a political ideology inseparable from the state, Elie Kedourie’s focus on nationalism as anticolonial struggle, Eric Hobsbawm’s invention of tradition as applied to state rituals, Benedict Anderson’s nation as a community existing in the realm of the imagination, and Anthony D. Smith’s ethno-symbolist reaction against the modernism of all of the above).

Yaghoubian’s use of social biography forces us to climb down from the ivory tower and its illusory promise of the “big picture,” and descend into the granularity of individual identity. We thus shift from broad historical processes and the deeds and thoughts of ah-e divan va qalam (state and literate elites)—important as they are in their own right—to more personalized questions such as: Was it Setkhanian’s pro-Russian proclivities that made him oppose the constitutionalists? Why did Saginian and Hagobian feel such loyalty toward the Shah when a democratic leader (Mohammad Mosaddeq) was being toppled? What emancipated Mora- diance, her Armenian upbringing or the state’s promotion of women at university and in the workplace? More broadly, why would individuals who did not speak Persian at home develop a sense of Iranian nationalism?

The historiography of Iran is plagued by several issues: its nationalist bias, its lack of comparative perspectives, its disconnection from theoretical debates, and its almost complete lack of engagement with some of the more innovative methods of history-writing. In this context, Yaghoubian’s study of the lives of five ordinary Iranian individuals must be praised as one of the first attempts at a history of Iran from below. At long last we are freeing ourselves from the worldviews of the presumed “great men”—the shahs, viziers, clerics, intellectuals, and ideologues—and investigating Iranian nationalism from the perspective of four ordinary men and one woman from a small, though important, religious and linguistic minority.

Social biography allows the author in his own words to offer “details about the lives and experiences of individuals that can be used to respond to the questions about meaning, receptivity, feelings, participation, and agency generated by the theoretical discourse” (279). Social biography therefore supplements theory by providing illustrations that can occasionally run counter to theoretical claims, providing a more nuanced analysis.
Criticism can of course be leveled at the author. Some will find the methodology unusual, and would prefer a more conventional study. One could criticize the author’s sample. Why five and not twelve? Why only one woman? Why do all these Armenians have Dashnak sympathies and none is a Communist? Why has Yaghoubian not attempted to include Iranians of non-Armenian background in his social biography?

All of these questions are valid. However, this reviewer is reminded of a point he has often made in the past: that we cannot speculate about the identity of premodern ordinary individuals, because they left no written sources behind. All written material has been bequeathed us by the literate few, and represents their view of the world. If in the case of these five individuals, painstaking research has allowed Yaghoubian to form an even approximate idea of their stance vis-à-vis prevalent discourses of the Iranian nation, then as students of nationalism we must delve into this material and praise the effort.

To conclude, this book should be of interest to students of nationalism in Iran, the history of Armenian Iranians, and of course the highly understudied issue of minorities in the country. It is innovative and original, in addition to being highly informative, and in places even a pleasant read (not a given in this field). While nationalism studies may offer macro theories about the emergence and development of particular forms of nationalism, it very rarely attempts to seriously investigate how nationalism is lived, experienced, personalized, and expressed by individuals beyond the limited circle of ideologues, agitators, and state officials. This is what Yaghoubian offers: a history from below that gives voice to ordinary individuals, because they left no written sources behind. All written material has been bequeathed us by the literate few, and represents their view of the world. If in the case of these five individuals, painstaking research has allowed Yaghoubian to form an even approximate idea of their stance vis-à-vis prevalent discourses of the Iranian nation, then as students of nationalism we must delve into this material and praise the effort.

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It is always a pleasure to welcome a new addition to the growing list of works on the history of enslavement in Muslim-majority societies; it is doubly so when the book is such an excellent work as the one authored by Matthew S. Hopper. The current cycle in enslavement studies has been characterized by a comparative approach that—over the past decade and a half—has opened up an expanding interest in non-Atlantic bondage to younger scholars, as well as to more established ones and graduate students. In *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire*, Hopper covers enslavement and the slave trade in the Arabian-Persian Gulf and East Africa between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Addressing precisely the convergences and divergences between the Indian Ocean and Atlantic “models,” the book looks at a period that begins with the height of the traffic and ends with its demise. It brings out the fascinating story of a labor-driven coercion of enslaved Africans into markets that produced dates and pearls for a global economy. The author convincingly shows how that flourishing production created the demand for unfree labor, and how its collapse, due to the emerging production of dates in the U.S. and pearls in Japan during the 1920s and 1930s, brought about the end of enslavement in the region.

*Slaves of One Master* consists of nine elements: a preface, an introduction that takes the reader to the time-space context of the book, six thematic chapters, and a conclusion that is, appropriately, a discussion unto itself and not a mere summary of the main arguments. Because Gulf enslavement and the traffic are mentioned but not adequately interrogated and analyzed by scholars of slavery in the Middle East, Hopper had to start almost from scratch. Having to set out the basics of the trading network and the enslaving system, he begins by describing who the enslaved were, where they hailed from, how they were brutally ejected from their communities, what routes the enslaver-traffickers took, and how and for what purposes the enslaved were interjected into Gulf and Zanzibari labor markets. This Hopper does in a highly engaging and effective manner.

Hopper then delves into the fascinating story of how the region was being globalized through the date and pearl industries. Chapters 2 (dates) and 3 (pearls) lay out in minute detail how these products were being produced, their harvesting, packing, and exporting to markets across oceans and continents. Nonetheless, the human aspect is always present, the author never losing sight of the enslaved, their enslavers, or the business entrepreneurs. Hopper weaves stories about real people, their experiences, their selfhood, their suffering, and their humanity, all culled from a broad array of archival and narrative sources, including over ninety manumission files compiled by the British. He is thus able to give the reader a sense of reality that braids the microhistorical with the “big picture,” and that big picture rests on a thorough, intelligent use of the latest studies in economic, global, imperial, and regional history.

Chapter 4, “Slavery and African Life in Arabia,” is arguably the best in the book, offering an insightful analysis of the day-to-day experience of being enslaved in the Gulf in the period under discussion. It is here that Hopper joins the current reviewer, as well as Eve Troutt Powell, Madeline Zilfi, and Y. Hakan Erdem, who over the past decade have developed methods to extract voices and teasing meaning out of case records. While difficult to decipher and interpret, such court registers, consular files, diplomatic correspondence, commercial archives, and narrative sources provide invaluable testimonies of enslaved lives. *Inter alia*, Hopper skips three important works that are relevant and instructive for his book: Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (2013); Ismael M. Montana, *The Abolition of Slavery in Ottoman Tunisia* (2013); and Y. Hakan Erdem’s chapter “Magic, Theft, and Arson: The Life and Death of an Enslaved African Woman in Ottoman Izmit,” in Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-