Long Live Mongol Iranzamin

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On a sultry August day, sometime in the middle of the last decade, I happened to be walking up the narrow pathway of the Alamut castle, in Northern Iran. As I stood catching my breath, a father and daughter passed by me with the latter saying: "Dad, look: A Chinese!" As the father looked at me, I replied: "I'm not Chinese, I'm Mongolian!" Father and daughter simply continued on chatting among themselves, but it was the pair that was 30 steps in front that turned around. A man in civilian clothes wearing a wide hat and accompanied by a soldier asked "Are you really Mongolian?" He introduced himself as a professor of history at a university in nearby Qazvin and offered to give a tour of the castle.

My volunteer tour guide with his expert knowledge turned what would have been a rather boring walk among non-intuitive signs into a lively and imaginative fairytale of the past, and soon our group of three grew into several dozen. Just as our guide reached the point of 1256 when the Mongols captured the castle, a woman from Mashhad with strong almond eyes turned around to me angrily, pronouncing: "Thank you for destroying the castle!" The ensuing awkward silence was finally broken by a guy nearby shouting: "We shouldn't blame the Mongols, but must thank them for destroying the first Islamic terrorists!" Everyone in the crowd laughed. For context, this occurred during Iran's intervention in Iraq against ISIS and head of the Iranian Quds force, Qassem Soleimani, was all the buzz.

What the episode shows is not only the overwhelming perception of Mongols by Iranians, but also a deep amnesia around what Iranians believe to be their national narrative. The common narrative about the Mongols in the contemporary governments of the places they once conquered is one of genocidal bloodthirsty hordes taking over blooming Persian city-civilizations and creating a national trauma that informs them

to this day. Rivers ran red with blood, libraries were burnt, as barbarian rapists played on hills made of the heads and ears of their enemies.

This narrative is the mainstream both inside Iran, where a knock-off musical of the American film *300* was staged in 2022, but instead of the Persians, the Mongols are orientalized, and outside of Iran, among the diaspora, where policy wonks compare Trump's threats to bomb Iran to Chinggis Khan. The impact of events that occurred eight centuries ago so affects the minds of modern Iranians that many compare Chinggis and the Mongols to Hitler and liken Mongol "crimes" to the Holocaust.

God's secret plan or Mongol propaganda

Although, it is easy to disregard such accusations of genocide as the products of anachronistic imaginations, the discourse contains much more than a simple nationalistic construct. In order to decipher this discourse, first we need to set the stage with a deeper dive into the history.

Keeping in mind that names of areas and places are not set in stone but are ideas and constructs that evolve, we have to register what sort of place the territory of modern Iran was just before the arrival of the Mongols in 1220. In the late 12th century, the Seljuk Empire was in decline and the eastern reaches of modern Iran, modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and northern Afghanistan had come under the rule of the new and upcoming Turkic empire of Khwarazm. The mountainous region of northern Iran was ruled by the Ismaili order, while the principalities of southern Iran fell under the reasserted control of the Abbasids from Baghdad. The lands that are now Iran were then an extremely fragmented and evolving array of power struggles. However, as an idea and as a territory, the *Iran* of old was long gone, nor did it have a common denominator in race nor in culture. Late 11th-century sources identified *Iran* only as one of the former Sassanid territories

along with Baktar, Khorasan and Nimruz. At the dawn of the Mongol age *Iran* as such was a mere historical memory (ĒRĀN, ĒRĀNŠAHR n.d.; Durand-Guedy 2014, 70).

Secondly, we have to understand the qualitative differences among 13th-century Mongol military campaigns. When Chinggis invaded Khwarazm, he certainly wanted to incorporate the new territories as an administrative part of his empire. The seats of Khwarazm's power were destroyed and the cities that didn't yield to Mongol military conquest immediately were punished. Within this context the campaign of Subedei, which started in Transoxiana and took Mongol armies through to Northern Iran, the Caucasus, southern Russia and finally back to Mongolia, intended not to bring the new territories under administrative control, but to chase out enemy's political leadership, gather intelligence and strike alliances, often bypassing major cities and avoiding unnecessary battles.

Mongol warfare was also undeniably brutal and the records of historians working at the Mongol court also make a point of that brutality. The cities which initially submitted and then rebelled, such as Nishapur in modern Iran, Merv in modern Turkmenistan and Herat in Afghanistan, have a special place within these records. However, the job of a contemporary historian is to decode and demythologize history, but Mongol court historians' accounts of [millions](#) perishing under Mongol swords are often taken at face value when interpreted by modern Iranian historiography (Lane 2012, 247).

For example, the primary but post-factum source of the Khwarazm campaign, *Tarikh-e Jahangusha* or the *History of the World Conqueror* by Ata Malik Juwayni, was state-sanctioned propaganda about the Mongol Empire. It portrays Chinggis Khan as a "Scourge of God" for those who have sinned. For a book of that stature and ambition, a book that is intended to legitimize the rule of the Mongols over their Muslim subjects, the death toll for not yielding to the Mongol rule is exaggerated by millions, just like how any measures of

medieval populations is a guess at best (Guinnane 2023, 1).

Such exaggerations of the death tolls have long been debunked in academia, including the inability for the above-mentioned cities to house such huge numbers of people as well as the fact that technology of the 13th century didn't allow for the wholesale destruction of cities (Lane 2014, 149). Later historians like Rashid al-Din, also a Mongol court historian, formulated Chinggis's role as "God's great and mighty lord of fortune" and argued that the Mongol leader had been sent to cleanse the earth of evil, corruption and decay (Biran 2007, 113).

What we are not usually told is how the conquest of these cities [was not a one-off](link) onslaught that ended the city's life once and for all but rather a series of successful and unsuccessful sieges, rebellions, and switching of sides in a period of Mongol invasion where the numerous local Turkic and Tajik, to use the terminology of the 13th century, players all played their roles (Manz 2022, 200). A demonstrative example is the city of Sarakhs, which the leaders of which contributed forces to the general massacre of Merv, that originally submitted to Mongols, but then rebelled in the next year. That rebellion was then followed by a rebellion in Sarakhs itself while its commander was putting down Merv's rebellion.

Even during the most violent of episodes, Mongol violence was always an interlocking play between Mongol lords with Turkic military and Tajik advisors against a Turkic-dominated city with a Tajik or Arab governor with motives stemming from local grievances. The Mongol invasion never ended the lives of these cities once and for all, and subsequent records note the Mongol-appointed Kartid rulers led the rebuilding of the region. Similarly, the river civilizations of lower Amudarya and Syrdarya and the city of the Otrar were destroyed not because of the Mongols but as a result of [climate change](link) (White, 2020).

In many ways the Mongols are victims of their own successes, but misunderstanding of contemporaneous historic accounts remains a mainstay that anachronistically assigns motives based on modern identity politics, located in the use of terms such as Persian or Iranian, in place of the terminology of the day, such as Tajik. Such anachronisms confuse the true picture of the political warfare of the day.

Mongol Iranzamin

By the time of the second Mongol invasion of what is contemporary Iran, the political map of the region looked much different. In the late 1250s under the leadership of the Toluid branch of Chinggisids, the global Mongol empire was already attuned to tastes that corresponded to its ambitions of grandeur. People of various backgrounds were already making lucrative careers at the courts of Chinggisids across the ever-growing empire. These climbers include people such as the Persian-speaking Tajik officials like Juwayni himself. It was in this world that the city of Qazvin made an audacious political play by sending an embassy to the court of Great Khan Mongke.

In 1250 the notables from Qazvin sent an embassy led by the Qadi (judge) of the city to Mongke's court complaining about the Ismailis, and the inability of the Mongol commander Baiju stationed in Azerbaijan's Mughan steppe to bring order. Relying on the generations-old link between the rulers—the Qazvini Iftikhar family served as teachers of the Toluids—the Qazvinis exploited their knowledge of internal Mongol politics. They knew that the Golden Horde's Batu was trying to assert authority over Baiju, which in turn the Toluids wanted to prevent. It is thought that the Qazvin embassy made use of their influence and knowledge to make the choice of Hulegu to lead this invasion (Yildiz 2020, 47).

The Qazvini noblemen wanted to put an end to the peripheral status of their realm. The political decision to invade Iran

that was upon the Mongols was not of necessity, and the relationship of the Mongols with the Ismailis was of [tolerable, though untrustworthy, allies](#) (Dashdondog 2020, 310). Therefore, it took a great deal of convincing for the Mongol elite to give Hulegu the mandate to bring the lands beyond the Amudarya into the empire. As the invasion neared, fugitives and polymaths within the Ismaili Alamut castle were already hatching plans to help the Mongols. These included none other than the polymath Nasir al-din Tusi and family members of the historian Rashid-al-Din (Lane 2012, 4).

Once Hulegu's army crossed the Amudarya, it faced little resistance from mixed Turkic and even from the Khitan-Qutlughkhanid lords of southern Iranian cities. Hulegu was overwhelmingly received as a liberator who would bring an end to decay and division, where many of these ruling dynastic families even survived after the fall of Ilkhanate. The sacking of Alamut in 1256 freed political prisoners such as Nasir al-Din Tusi, who became Hulegu's advisor and continued on with the Mongol army against Baghdad. But contrary to popular opinion, even the capture of Alamut does not seem to have ended the Ismaili state, which remained in northern Iran and even managed to retake the castle in the 1270s.

When Hulegu's army reached Baghdad in 1258, it was already an amalgamation of various ethnic groups and polities including the Armenians, Georgians, Kurds and many city-states of southern Iran (Lane 2012, 17). Here again, contrary to mainstream beliefs, the Mongols didn't burn libraries or resort to universal slaughter. Instead, the books of Baghdad libraries were safeguarded, borrowed in the Islamic tradition and transferred to the observatory in Maragha for further use by Nasir al-Din Tusi. After the death of Tusi, these books were returned to Baghdad by Tusi's trainee librarian Ibn Fowaji. A closer examination of Ilkhanid Baghdad also indicates a quick rebound and thriving book culture of the city under the Ilkhanids (Biran 2019, 466).

In the same way, the Urmia-born Baghdadi district governor Urmavi's experience with Baiju *noyan* is never told (Biran 2018, 16). The former's obedience and gathering of loot as a payment paved the way for his further career at the Mongol court. Even though some non-contemporaneous accounts claim that most of Baghdad's population was massacred during Hulegu's campaign, other accounts of the time indicate artisans, religious minorities, a merchant class, scholars and men of talent being purposefully spared and many Baghdadi elite found employment under the new governor of Baghdad, Ata Malik Juwayni (Biran 2023, 187).

After taking Baghdad, Hulegu reappointed Abbasid officials and ordered the artisans and imperial workshops to reopen. Similarly, he used Abbasid military commanders to gather and incorporate the caliphate's troops into the Mongol army. Baghdad also retained its status as a center of trade, ideas and artisanal might, and became the winter capital of the Ilkhanate, flourishing under the even more cosmopolitan empire. During the Mongol rule of Baghdad, some of the most magnificent Islamic arts works were produced including lavish Qurans that still adorn art exhibitions and museums today, often in the service of the fight against Western Islamophobia (Brinkmann 2008, 11; Larson 2016).

At times it feels as though modern people forget that human history is violent and that the very foundations of the state are ultimately based on the ability of one group to apply a monopoly of power and hierarchy against one another. Hence, as conquest theory states, the formation of state and territory required conquest, which by definition is violent (Munkh-erdene 2023, 289-322). In the case of Iran, the rebirth of the Sassanid idea of *Iranzamin* required an outside conquest by the Mongols with the support of most local actors. All the political concepts of *Iran* dating from then on were derivations of the Mongol notion of Iran (Fragner 2018, 468).

Instead of a universal onslaught against the identity and the

country of Iran, the reality was that inhabitants of the area, now known as *Iranian* or *Persian* became the nuts and bolts of the Mongol Empire. They encouraged the integration of the territory into the Mongol Empire. In the same way, claims of Mongol animosity towards Islam, written largely by non-contemporaneous Arab writers, ignore the agency of the Muslim Qara-Kitai in Central Asia who welcomed the Mongols as liberators (Lane 2014, 144).

The subsequent history of prosperity under Pax Mongolica, especially during the late Ilkhans such as Ghazan and Oljeitu, benefited immensely the people who are now called *Persian* and *Iranian*. Not only did the Mongol era revive the concept of Iranzamin, but also that term also came to redefine historic Iran, placing the idea of the place in the minds of people once and for all. The stellar careers of Tajik bureaucrats, such as the entire Juwayni family, Malikan of Tabriz, Rashid-ad din and his family and Tusi just to name a few, stretched throughout the Mongol empire, leading to the establishment of the historic Tajik community in Hangzhou. The Persian language replaced Arabic as the language of historiography and the Persianate sphere spread along with subsequent Mongol and Chinggisid lineage heirs such as the Timurids and the Mughals. The prominent role women occupied in the Mongol empire spread to Iran, and the life and poetry of Jahan Malek Khatun, the Injuid princess of Shiraz, is certainly a result of the considerable freedom women of high status enjoyed in Ilkhanid society (De Nicola 2017, 247). Instead of ethnocentric siloes that support the modern identity construct, for most of the second millennium the Chinggisid order and the Persianate were the mutually beneficial, inseparable sides of the same coin.

The *Shahnameh*, the essential book for the source and definition of everything Iranian was returned from its obscurity during the late Seljuk and Khwarazmid era and became a potent propaganda tool at the service of the Mongols, featuring almond-eyed heroes in Mongol clothes in a visual language legitimizing the Mongols (Melville 2018). The

appreciation of the artistic, narrative and poetic qualities of the *Shahnameh* came only with Mongol rule (Melville 2016, 201). Today, all the major and better-surviving manuscripts of the *Shahnameh* are those produced under the Ilkhanids and subsequent Mongol dynasties with similar dynastic visual language. It was only in this period that Persian-language historiography truly started to flourish, whereas it had been totally overshadowed by Arabic previously (Meville 2012, 156).

The end of the Ilkhanids was sudden, but the model of Ilkhanid Iranzamin brought by the brothers Ghazan and Oljeitu, would leave a deep mark on the history of Iran. Oljeitu's Mihrab in Isfahan's Friday Mosque is one of the most ornate mihrabs of the Islamic world. Oljeitu's mausoleum, which was initially built to transfer Shia relics from Kerbala, is another example of their contributions, as are Sultaniya.

Subsequent conquests of Iran by the Turco-Mongol dynasties of the Jalayrids, the Chupanids, the Timurids, the Ak Koyunlu, the Safavids, the Afsharid and the Qajars all employed variations of the same idea of Irana Turco-Mongol nomadic political and military elite ruling over the cosmopolitan administrative structure of Iran (Fragner 2018, 468). In fact, until the rise of Safavids in the early 1500s, Chinggisid lineage remained the key to claims of legitimacy in the area. The Safavids and Timurids also preserved Mongol taxation systems (Biran 2007, 118). For the immediate successors of the Ilkhanids, the city of Tabriz was the imperial seat and the biggest prize of Iran (Zakrzewski 2020, 45, 66). One very demonstrative piece of long-lasting Mongol impact remains the unofficial monetary term *Toman*, originally referring to ten thousand dinars from Ghazan Khan's reforms, still in use in Iran. Timur's realm contained both *Iran* and *Turan* just like how both the *Tajik* and the *Turk* were complementary parts of a single polity.

Safavids, the beloved of Perso-centric and Iranian Shia-centric narratives, also legitimized their rule in the style

of Chinggisid and Timurid universal rule. The Safavid cataloguer Qadi Ahmad frequently quoted the wisdom of Chinggis and Ghazan alongside the other exemplary rulers in his *Tarikh-e Nigaristan* written for Shah Tahmasp (May 2020, 822). Even after the Safavids, the founder of the Afsharid dynasty, Nader shah went back to the Turco-Mongol tradition of seeking legitimacy from a Kurultay by ascending the throne at the Mughan steppe coronation ceremony. Nader used to address the Ottomans in letters written in Turkic in which he stated a common genealogy going back to the times of Chinggis Khan. Nader had his court poets write poems foretelling that he would repeat the deeds of Chinggis (O'Brien 2022, 29). The Qajars, whose own dynasty traces its lineage to Qajar Noyan, the son of a general in the Mongol army, placed paintings of Chinggis painted in the Qajar style in the palace (Farmanfarmaian 2022, 199). In the late 17th century, a Mughal Indian bureaucrat Mohammad Mofid of Iranian origin, wrote a report on his home country in which he reiterated the concept of Iranzamin and praised the Safavids for reuniting the Turkoman-Western and Timurid-Eastern part of the country and reestablishing the Ilkhanid conception of Iran (Fragner 2019, 67). There is a direct line of historiography writing between Juwayni's *Tarikh-e Jahangusha* to the Qajar-era *Jahan Goshaye Naderi*, which was modelled after the former (Amanat 2012, 297).

Iran's collective amnesia

Modern Iranian historiography denies all this in favor of a Perso-centric view, which erases and denies the Turco-Mongol nomadic people's agency. In their view, these nomads did not belong to the superior sedentary civilization of Iran. Even the BBC documentary *Art of Persia* falls into this Perso-centric view of Iran's history, falsely assuming Iran survived the Mongols thanks to the designs of its Persian-speaking bureaucrats (Hart 2020). 20th-century Iranian historiography gives more agency to the Persian-speaking bureaucrats, while

the Mongols have become synonymous with devastation and traumatic alien conquest. Iran's survival is attributed to the Mongols' failure to destroy the *indestructible phoenix* of Iranian nation's culture (Biran 2007, 131).

The narrative that the Mongols eventually accepted the supremacy of Islam and Persian culture again assigns an anachronistic importance to religion, language or Persian-ness. The culture co-developed and nurtured by Turco-Mongols is attributed exclusively to the Persians. The 13th-century Islamic conversion of Mongol Khans in no way indicated their repudiation of their Mongol roots or Mongolian-ness in favor of any other, and even then, the Islam that Mongols took on, was first and foremost the Islam of their Turco-Mongol subjects who laid the blueprint for the Chinggisid conversion (Lane 2022, 289; Pfeiffer 2016). Similarly, just like the obsessive financing of observatories, religions were just another way of searching for the eternal questions on the minds of Mongols, to which the *wisdom bazaars* of Chinggisid polities attest to (Lane 2016, 235).

The narrative that scapegoats Mongols and other nomadic people, finds early examples in the writings of Al-Afghani, who, while in Cairo in 1859, wrote that Chingissid, Timurid and other Tatar governments were barbarian robbers (Kenny 1966, 22). Qajar historian Reza Qoli Hedayat wrote that the Qajar attack on Kerman represented a renewal of Chinggis and Hulegu's massacres (Amanat 2012, 317). In the years following WW1, during the Pahlavi era, the Zoroastrian past was idealized, while the Turks began to be referred to as the *yellow hazard* (Atabaki 2020, 72). The demonstration of cultural superiority of the *Persians* against the Arabs and Turks became the norm with the Pahlavi dynasty, who Persianized their surname as they abandoned their clan name Palani.

When we discuss about Perso-centric historiography, we largely refer to Pahlavi-era writings of non-trained historians and of

Abbas Iqbal in particular, who in 1933 wrote his comprehensive history of Iran. It is in his writing that we truly see the beginnings of a trope ubiquitous in contemporary Iran today: that the Mongols had failed to destroy the great Persian culture along with that of China's and that the great Iranian and Chinese nationalities rose to spread Islam and Buddhism. Historians of the Islamic Republic of Iran do not differ much in their accounts of this process because they have only built on the works of Pahlavi-era historians. The official historian of the Islamic Republic of Iran Rasul Jafariyan treats the Ilkhanid era as an interruption between pre- and post-Mongol Islamic eras and authors like Bayani replace Iranian cultural superiority with the Shiite champion of independence who fought and conquered the oppressors with his pen (Pistor-Hatam 2021, 17).

Until the 19th century, Mongol genealogy was integral method of claiming legitimacy for all Iranian dynasties. The current Perso-centric view of Iran's history is a fiction of permanent victimization. Therefore, Chinggis should be treated as one of the creators of the Islamic world and Persianate sphere, much as how in modern Mongolia Chinggis is treated as a proliferator of Buddhism.

Persian, Russian and Chinese chauvinisms of Inner Asia

There are many ways to explain Iranian views on Mongols, but the underlying narrative of the Perso-centric mainstream is that the Mongols were a threat to Persian self-containing civilization (Fragner 2006, 69). In retrospect, Iranians, who neither lived nor experienced the events of the 13th century, seem to feel deep shame in admitting that their supposedly superior Iranian ancestors required outside help in order to remain and become *Iranian* or *Persian* again.

A trauma like the one modern Iranians say the Mongols inflicted on their nation occurs only when a collective group is convinced that they have been subject to an indelible mark

leaving trauma on their group consciousness (Alexander 2004, 1). These types of traumas are not particularly useful in peaceful times but in times of crisis they are recalled, relived and re-encountered in the face of a new enemy, much like how Saddam Hussein attempted to mobilize historical trauma by comparing the 2003 American invasion to the Mongol invasions.

Hence the function of the "Mongol genocide" trope and what it does to the collective psyche of Iranians or Persians, is a classic case of "chosen trauma", a trauma where the historical veracity of events become blurred and somewhat unimportant (Volkan 2021, 1). In other words, the exact number and backgrounds of the people who supposedly perished under the so-called *Mongol genocide* becomes peripheral, and the people who subscribe to the trauma do not necessarily distinguish or even know the subjects who suffered. Despite being distant and dubious, such chosen traumas inform people's actions in the present.

Just like how the Iranian musical *300*, which orientalizes the Mongols, does not care to dress its actors in historically accurate clothes for their roles, it is an example of how Iranian historiography anachronistically assigns contemporary terms and identities to the past to serve contemporary political purposes. This is the fiction of coherence of Iranian historiography, and it is fictional because the trauma at the hands of Mongols is in the service of Persian chauvinism.

This fictional narrative can be employed in various ways including justifying a certain hierarchy, which themselves construct social knowledge (Toomey et al 2023, 4). Another important aspect of the chosen traumas is that they create imperatives for the reversal of the trauma, through dramatic ideologies or national projects of restoration (Volkan 2021, 1). In our case it is the Persianization project that justified the erasure of Turkic, Mongolian and nomadic

contributions to Persian history. This project later, under the Islamic Republic of Iran, became an Islamic one but nevertheless retained its strong Persian-centric inclinations. Together with the other traumas and humiliations of the "indestructible nation," the Mongol trope is an irreplaceable part of the grand narrative and collective meaning of Iranian/Persian-ness (Hirschberger 2018, 2). The frequent reproduction of this chosen trauma puts the onus to Iranian historiographers to correct their historical propaganda and erase these blind spots in their history.

Without digressing into the definition and epistemology of *genocide*, it is easy to see the usefulness of such narratives today. Having an *other* defined in terms of inferiority helps a nation define itself on what it is not and build a sense of identity and a hierarchy vis-à-vis others. In other words, when a contemporary Iranian complains about the Mongols, it is a first sentence of a paragraph that justifies Persian supremacy over Iran's minorities and continued repression of their cultural and linguistic rights. As much as some members of the Iranian diaspora like to call for democracy at home, their adherence to this *chosen trauma* at the hands of Mongols hints at a justification of an empire antithetical to their professed democratic beliefs.

Most know already that Persian-centric Iranian nationalism is inspired by racist ideas such as Aryanism. However, for our purposes it is also necessary to explain the specific ways the Persian-centric narrative is racist against Mongols, Turks, and other Inner Asian nomadic people. Within wider Eurasian space and the macro-history of nation-states replacing empires over the last two centuries, such othering and scapegoating of the Mongols has served as a useful tool to many, mostly of those on the periphery of the Continental Eurasian Heartland and continues to do so today. In the case of Iran, it was exactly this process that contributed to the Persian-centric worldview, which erases a much more cosmopolitan history of Iranian dynasties.

Before the 1970s, international and national Iranian historiography was more or less in dialogue, and the view of historians of the time show that such relegation of Inner Asian nomads in national historiography was the norm. The famous French historian Rene Grousset likened Inner Asian nomads to a "pack of wolves" living on the edges of great ancient civilizations (Sneath 2023, XI). Denis Sinor wrote in his *Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, that the history of Inner Asia was a history of the barbarian (Sinor 1990, Frontmatter).

Similar to the above Eurocentric views of history, the founder of Iranian nativism, Jalal Ahmad argued that only settled peoples could create written scripts and that the Achaemenids took up a script only once they settled (Pistor-Hatam 2007, 570). Abbas Iqbal, the first Iranian historian who published an official Pahlavi-era history of the Mongols believed that Iranians were sedentary, sophisticated, civilized, and highly cultured, while Mongols were dark, wild, yellow-skinned Tatars, uncivilized, uncultured nomads. Iran's many nomadic invaders or simply traders are labeled infidels, and only once they are Iranized by converting to Islam and adopting Persian are they treated as locals. Likewise, in Ali Shariati's essay *Red Shi'ism and Black Shi'ism* the Mongols play the central role of the *other* and *enemy* (1974). In popular culture such as in the pre-revolutionary film titled *The Mongols* the relentless penetration of television into rural Iran is compared to the Mongol invasion (Mogholha n.d.).

In academic research there is a principle of mutual recognition, meaning international researchers must recognize the existence of each other's works and maintain a dialogue with their scholarship (Pistor-Hatam 2014, 295). In part thanks to this new paradigm Western academia has made great strides during the last several decades, correcting the Eurocentric tropes vis-à-vis Mongols and other Inner Asian nomadic people as the many references of this essay show. Iranian authors who write about the Mongol period have

consciously remained outside this international academic discourse on the study of Mongol imperial history. In short, by doing so modern Iranian historiography remains an ideology, not a science, and the diaspora who reproduce such tropes are repeating ideology, not science.

In 2023, Iran is not the only place that others and erases the history of Inner Asian nomads. Contrary to conventional opinion settler-colonial imperialism is active and thriving across Eurasia (McNamee 2023). If Russia is a settler colonial empire that attained most of its territorial accession at the cost of Chinggisid order, China is a Sino-centric empire that has appropriated the cosmopolitan past of Manchu Qing Empire. Similarly, Iran is a land kept together through a supranational ideology but one that is still akin to Russia and China's. It has appropriated a cosmopolitan past in the service of a chauvinist assimilationist autocracy, erasing and denying the history and heritage of Inner Asian, Turkic and Mongolic from its historiography. As deep as the memory of suffering at the hands of Mongols is interwoven into the Iranian psyche, the Iranians of the diaspora are also afraid to imagine an alternative historical narrative fit for its diversity.

When the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art organized a 2003 exhibition titled "The Legacy of Genghis Khan," a member of the Iranian diaspora community, Ahmad Jabbari wrote a letter complaining how the exhibit hurt the community's feelings. He suggested that the title read like "The Legacy of Hitler" (Jabbari 2003). In 2020 when Chateau du Nantes wanted to organize a similar exhibit with the Inner Mongolia museum, China demanded censorship of words the "Chinggis" and "Mongols" from it. The refusal to yield to Chinese demands resulted in the cancellation of the exhibit; it opened only in October 2023 with support from the Mongolian government (Chrisafis 2023). Because Sino-centric and Persian-centric approaches to history are singular in their goal of othering and erasing Inner Asian nomads, we have to understand

that the value systems that inspire these actions, either by the Iranian diaspora community or the Communist Party of China, work hand in hand to erase and assimilate people like Tibetans, Uighurs, Manchurians, Mongols, Kazakhs or to deny the linguistic and Cultural rights of Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Turkmens, Baluchis, etc.

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