BACHELOR'S THESIS EXAMINER REPORT
PPE – Bachelor's in Politics, Philosophy and Economics
Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	Understanding the New Wave of Nationalism in Iran
Student's name:	Pouran Sepahvand
Referee's name:	Pelin Ayan Musil, PhD

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality)	**50**	36
	Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses)	**15**	10
	Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question)	**15**	10
Total		*80*	56
Minor Criteria			
	Sources, literature	**10**	**5**
	Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	**5**	5
	Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	**5**	5
Total		*20*	15
TOTAL		*100*	71

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria:

This thesis provides good historical overview of the nationalist movement(s) in Iran starting from the constitutional era until present day, the first and second Pahlavi eras and critical junctures such as the 1953 coup d'état and the 1979 Islamic revolution. The goal of the thesis is to understand the new (oppositional) wave of nationalism that has arisen in contemporary Iran against a repressive religious fundamentalist regime. The thesis presents a critical approach to this new wave which builds on the narrative of idealizing secularism in the Pahlavi era, Western influence and the 'significant advancements in 'infrastructure, education, women's rights, and economic development' (p.46). Before presenting this critical approach in the last section of the thesis, the student engages with the dominant understandings of nationalism within the constitutional and two Pahlavi eras with a focus on their democratic and authoritarian forms, the role of religion, ethnic identities and anti-western sentiments. These sections underpin the difficulties the Iranian regime went through within these eras to construct a united Iranian national identity in a centralized manner due to ethnic differences, religious-secular divide, a Western/anti-western cleavage.

The thesis is highly informative, and the student shows a rich understanding of the Iranian history and theories of nationalism, with the ability to take a critical approach to the shortcomings of each particular era, keeping the objective tone of thesis.

I find the thesis still somewhat descriptive, with the certain 'how' and 'why' questions that arise throughout the work unanswered. For instance, "the coup orchestrated by the US and UK in 1953" is mentioned 2-3 times in the thesis but its causes and consequences regarding its impact on the nationalist trends in the regime remain vague. We only have an implicit idea that the coup in 1953 creates a favourable understanding for Western intervention among the new nationalists in today's Iran in the last section of the thesis. The theories of nationalism, regarding works by Gellner, Anderson, Roy and Havel are used to understand the nationalisms in specific time periods, but we do not know why the student chooses to use these theories for those specific periods and not others. The thesis loses its focus of understanding the new nationalist wave in Iran when it delves into such a huge history while trying not to miss all the important political developments in each phase. The thesis could have benefited from presenting the causal connections that it tries to make more clearly from the beginning. Perhaps, it could have presented the new nationalist wave with its key narratives in the beginning of the thesis (i.e. its oppositional nature against a repressive regime, a nostalgic connection to the Pahlavi era, Western influence etc) and present how these narratives are constructed in relation to certain past events following the analytical approach of one or two specific theories of nationalism. In this way, the thesis would not present scattered arguments (all of which I find highly interesting) with lack of depth but follow a more focused approach to revealing the key connections with clear demonstration.

Proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F): 71 C

Suggested questions for the defence are:

1/ Your thesis argues that the new nationalist wave in Iran is built upon the narrative of the 'advancements' of the Pahlavi era in a way to oppose the current religious fundamentalist regime. As you note, this type of nationalist takes its strength from the nostalgia over the previous authoritarian regime. Discuss how this situation can influence the prospects of a future regime change in Iran (toward more authoritarianism or a potential democratic opening).

2/ Summarize the key features of the new nationalist wave in Iran. How many key features are there? Which one of these features is more salient over the others? Why? From which specific event or phase of Iranian history is this salient feature derived?

Grading Scale:

- A = 91-100 % – excellent
- B = 81-90 % – very good
- C = 71-80 % – good
- D = 61-70 % – satisfactory
- E = 51-60 % – minimal pass
- F = 0-50 % – fail