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SECTARIANISM IN IRAN FOREIGN POLICY

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

SECTARIANISM IN IRAN FOREIGN POLICY

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This thesis aims to understand the explanatory power of sectarianism regarding the international politics of the Middle East, with a specific focus on Iran's foreign policy. The findings of this study are as follows: Iran as a main "Shia power", uses any kind of identities beside Shi'ism if it fits into its agenda, however, it does not pursue a sectarian foreign policy. It has been following pragmatic policies according to its national interests largely free from religion. Iranian foreign policies that support other Shia groups or communities in the Middle East like Hezbollah or Iraqi Shias are not implicitly influenced by religious norms and affinities. Accordingly, the study addresses those policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which confute the sectarian explanations in international relations. Another aim of this work is to question the idea of Shia Crescent, whether such a religious coalition is trying to be created by Iran; why, and for whom it is "created". For this aim, the thesis analyzes the discourse through a critical approach and sees it as a securitization discourse as framed by the Copenhagen School. To have a deeper understanding of sectarianist explanations on Iran's foreign policy, in the last part of the work, Iran's foreign policy towards the Syrian Civil War is studied as a critical case.

Keywords: Sectarianism, Shia Crescent, Iranian Foreign Policy, Iran

ÖZ

İRAN DIŞ POLİTİKASINDA MEZHEPÇİLİK

Deniz, Nazlı Gül

Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

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Bu tez, Orta Doğu politikasını açıklamada, İran dış politikası ve Şii Hilali söylemlerinde mezhepçi yaklaşımın yeterliliğini, İran dış politikası özelinde sorgulamaktadır. Çalışmanın iddiası, “Şii gücü” olarak görülen İran’ın dış politikasında mezhep odaklı olmasının aksine ulusal çıkarlarına göre faydacı bir dış politika sergilediği; bölge Şiiilerinin vatandaşı oldukları ülkelerdeki devlete karşı değil, aksine ülkelerindeki otoriter yönetimlere karşı mücadele ettikleri ve bunlara karşı doğal haklarını savunduklarıdır. Hizbullah veya Irak Şiiileri gibi Orta Doğu'daki diğer Şii gruplarını veya topluluklarını destekleyen İran, dış politikasında iddia edildiği gibi zımni bir şekilde Şii norm ve yakınlıklardan etkilenmez. Bu doğrultuda tez İran’ın farklı dönemlerdeki dış politikalarını inceleyerek mezhepçi yaklaşımın uluslararası ilişkilerde açıklayıcı olamayacağını iddia etmektedir. Çalışmanın bir diğer amacı, Şii Hilali söylemini incelemek, İran’ın böyle bir gruplaşma oluşturup oluşturmadığını ve bu düşüncenin neden ve kimler tarafından ortaya atılmış olabileceğini sorgulamaktır. Bu minvalde, çalışmada bu gibi söylemler eleştirel biçimde analiz edilmiş ve Kopenhag Ekolü’nün Uluslararası İlişkilere kattığı güvenlikleştirme kavramı ile açıklanmıştır. İran'ın bölgedeki gerçek rolünü anlamak için, açıklayıcı bir vaka olarak İran’ın yıllardır süregelen ve uluslararasılaştırılmış Suriye İç Savaşı’ndaki rolü incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mezhepçilik, Şii Hilali, İran Dış Politikası, İran

To my dear family...

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMAL	: Afuaj al Muqawama al Lubaniya
CIA	: Central Intelligence Agency
FIS	: Islamic Salvation Front
FSA	: Free Syrian Army
GCC	: Gulf Cooperation Council
GIA	: Algerian Islamic Group
HAMAS	: Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-’Islāmiyyah
IRI	: Islamic Republic of Iran
IRG	: Islamic Republican Party
IRGC	: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISIS	: Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
ISSG	: International Syria Support Group
JCPOA	: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KDP	: Kurdistan Democratic Party
KSS	: Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada
MENA	: Middle East and North Africa
PIJ	: Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine
SAIRI	: Supreme Assembly for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq
SCIRI	: Supreme Council for Islamic Revoluion in Iraq
UAE	: United Arab Emirates
UIA	: United Iraqi Alliance
UN	: United Nations
US	: United States of America