

DĀNESH

THE OU UNDERGRADUATE
JOURNAL OF
IRANIAN STUDIES

Volume 4 (2019)



COLLEGE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA





The UNIVERSITY *of* OKLAHOMA
College of International Studies
FARZANEH FAMILY CENTER
for IRANIAN and PERSIAN GULF STUDIES

DĀNESH: The OU Undergraduate Journal of Iranian Studies

Published under the auspices of:
The OU Farzaneh Family Center for Iranian and Persian Gulf Studies,
the Department of International and Area Studies, and
the Boren College of International Studies at
the University of Oklahoma

Volume 4 (2019)

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From the Faculty Advisors

Since its founding in 2016, *DĀNESH* has sought to provide a forum to showcase the original research produced by undergraduate students at the University of Oklahoma's Iranian Studies program. This fourth volume of the journal was produced through the able editorial leadership of **Corey Standley** (BA, 2019) and **Kayleigh Kuyon** (BA, 2019). As with their work on volume three, Corey and Kayleigh have ensured that *DĀNESH* has continued to thrive as a forum for the study of all aspects of the history, culture, society, and politics of Iran and the Persianate world.

The name of the journal, *DĀNESH*, comes from the Persian word meaning *knowledge, learning, and wisdom*. We believe this is a fitting name for a journal that seeks to foster deep and compassionate understanding of one of the world's most culturally rich and historically complex civilizations. It is with this in mind that we present this volume of *DĀNESH*.

Afshin Marashi

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From the Editors-in-Chief

We are proud to present to you the fourth volume of the University of Oklahoma's Undergraduate Journal of Iranian Studies, *DĀNESH*. Through the past three editions of the journal we have seen wonderful presentations on varying regional topics, spanning the breadths of history and social strata. In the tradition of the meaning of *DĀNESH*, or knowledge, we present these articles as an offering to expand the collective dialogue on the understanding of the Iranian and Persian state. We are pleased to have worked on this edition with a group of driven authors to present an edition comprising of submissions focusing on both historical issues and events as well as contemporary issues that Iranians are currently facing.

This work is a collective effort among our undergraduate authors and editors. We would like to extend a humble thanks to our Associate Editors, without whom we would not be able to produce such a successful and professional journal. It would also be remiss of us to not extend a heartfelt thank you to the Farzaneh Family, for without their continued support of the Iranian Studies program none of this would be possible. The University of Oklahoma's Libraries and Printing Services are the unsung heroes of this endeavor, as without their support we would not have the ability to make *DĀNESH* so accessible, both our print and digital versions. Thank you to the tireless, diligent work of our authors, who have crafted these amazing works that we are proudly sharing with you.

And finally, we are wholly indebted to the continued and unwavering support of Dr. Afshin Marashi, whose guidance and advice was invaluable in this journal's creation and continuance. This work, and so much of the growth of the Iranian Studies program as a whole, would not be possible without your faith in us, and our institution. Your academic guidance, advice, and friendship have been invaluable to us.

Corey Standley (BA, 2019), Editor-in-Chief

Kayleigh Kuyon (BA, 2019), Editor-in-Chief

Tur and Iraj: Azeri Turks and ‘Persian’ Iran

Daniel McAbee*

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Despite the prominence of the Middle East and Islamic world in Western news media, it is a region that suffers from severe misunderstanding. Out of the countries in those regions, Iran is perhaps the most poorly understood of all. This ignorance extends beyond popular misunderstanding to include policy and scholarly circles. This is evident in Western discussion of ethnicities in Iran, which often results in an inaccurate understanding of the matter. While some of this misunderstanding can be attributed to faults in the West—to Orientalism, to natural hatred and misunderstanding that develop between mutual enemies, and to the inaccurate universalization of Western cultural and social paradigms—Iran’s unique history certainly complicates Western perceptions and understandings.

Not only has Iran had indigenous aspects of self-identification and self-demarcation develop from neighboring people, but it has also interacted with modernity and imperialism differently than the majority of the non-Western world. These indigenous, pre-European processes focused around indigenous literature, its position within the Islamo-Persianate world, and its religious distinctiveness of being a majority Shi’a. Iran’s interaction with Western modernity, as well as Western imperialism, differed from most other places in the non-Western world in that it never formally lost its independence. While Iran certainly suffered repeated invasions and was forced to operate within certain guidelines presented by imperial powers, the Iranian plateau never suffered the imperial subjugation experienced by the Americas, Africa, and other parts of Asia. This means that Iran’s interaction with modernity, while certainly brutal and destructive, was done more on its own terms,

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causing the Iranian experience with modernity and its current state to be difficult to understand in a Western framework.

The Azeri Turks provide an excellent case study in this peculiarity. The description of the Azeris as a well-integrated, well-treated minority shows a misunderstanding of the history of Iran, the position of the minorities in Iran, and their relationship to the Iranian state.¹ The core of the difficulty arises from a misunderstanding of the relationship between the Persian ‘primary’ ethnicity and Iran.² As will be discussed in detail, tribes, and particularly tribes from Azerbaijan, frequently formed the kingmakers of modern Iranian history and were generally the strongest military force in Iran.³ Pre-Pahlavi Iran, while not free of nationalism and chauvinism, was highly decentralized with little ethnic prioritization or preference, due in part to the weakness of the state, as well as little ideological basis for ethnic prioritization.⁴ It was during the Pahlavi period that the state shifted towards an ideologically nationalist, Persian-centric focus. The relative late coming of modernity to Iran meant that the processes necessary to destroy the traditional order and replace it with modernity had not had sufficient time to take effect. Though it is beyond the scope of this essay, the revolutionary overthrow of the modernizing and Westernizing Pahlavi regime and its replacement by an Islamic Republic additionally hindered cultural modernization, though did not totally reverse the processes and changes begun by the Pahlavi state.

Ethnicity in Iran

Western discussion on ethnicity in Iran frequently begins with a disclaimer stating that records regarding ethnicity and ethnic self-identification are scarce, which problematizes the accuracy of their statements.⁵ Western narratives on Iranian ethnicity then lay out the following picture: Persians, the dominant and primary ethnicity, constitute approximately 50% of the population, with minorities such as Azeris, Arabs, Baluchis, Turcomen, and Kurds constituting the remainder.⁶ The variation between one source and another can be quite noticeable, in part due to the lack of sources recording

¹ Rasmus Christian Elling, *Minorities in Iran: Nationalism and Ethnicity after Khomeini* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 29.

² *Ibid.*, 29.

³ Massoume Price, *Iran's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clío, 2005), 65-66.

⁴ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 172-173.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

ethnic self-identification but more importantly, the problematic nature of the metric itself. The “ethnic common sense,” to borrow a term from the scholar Rasmus Christian Elling, used in the West cannot be readily imported to other parts of the world, such as Iran.⁷ What Elling convincingly argues is that, while ethnicity is considered an innate and static characteristic of an individual or a people, it should be understood as “a processual, situational, relational and contextual dynamic of identification.”⁸

The question of identity, and more specifically, self-identification, is a complex topic in Iran due in large part to Iranian history. Ethnicity as an individual’s primary self-identification, and a feeling of connection to all of one’s fellow co-ethnics, is relatively recent in Iran and is not universal.⁹ Until the last century, tribes constituted a significant portion of Iran’s population and there existed a significant degree of linguistic diversity wherein various members spoke various dialects of Persian, Kurdish, Turkish, or other languages.¹⁰ Primary self-identification through one’s immediate community was not limited to tribes, who were largely eliminated during the Pahlavi period, and existed also among sedentary peoples.¹¹ Thus, many people from the region of Khorasan might primarily self-identify as Khorasani and see themselves as distinct from other Iranians based on their being from Khorasan.¹² This identification can extend even down to individual cities, such as Dezful, Shushtar, and Behbahan, where many of their inhabitants primarily self-identify as “Dezfuli,” “Behbahani,” and “Shushtari” respectively.¹³

Questions of identity have not always been centered on ethnicity even in Europe itself.¹⁴ Rather, identity centered around ethnicity was constructed and evolved out of a particular set of historical processes occurring in early modern Europe. Europe’s early experience with modernity was also incredibly destructive, similar to non-Western experience with modernity.¹⁵ In order for Western ethnic common sense to describe reality accurately, a certain degree of modernization must take place within a region. It was during

⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹ Ibid., 21.

¹² Ibid., 21.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ David N. Yaghoubian, *Ethnicity, Identity, and the Development of Nationalism in Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 19.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

the Pahlavi dynasty's destructive imposition of modernity that the Western approach to identity along racial and ethnic lines gained power and traction in Iran. While the Pahlavi state represented the high water of attempted Westernization of identity, this process had a history in Iran, albeit largely confined to Iranian intellectuals.¹⁶ The introduction of Western approaches to identity interacted with indigenous approaches to identity, which in tandem contributed to the creation and imposition of Persian nationalism.

Identity

Indigenous literature dealt with questions of identity, generally judging them vis-à-vis neighboring peoples and regions.¹⁷ While Iran as a concept did exist within Persianate literature, it was relative and connected to neighboring regions, not demarcated by borders.¹⁸ In this indigenous literary world, a region's topography and climate heavily influence the temperament of a people.¹⁹ An individual's birthplace or even lineage did not decide individual identity; instead, an individual's relationship to genetically unrelated people, organizations, or schools of thought could define their identity.²⁰ The relationship between various parts of the Persianate world illustrates this. Borrowing Mana Kia's use of contemporary terminology, Turan (the land of Turks), Hindustan (South Asia), and Iran constituted Persianate civilization, wherein educated elites communicated through shared culture expressions and literary language.²¹ This Persianate civilization represented the most refined civilization among all civilizations.²² Despite constituting one civilization, the regions were still distinct, as the continued use of different names suggests.

Competition between Iranian poets and Hindustani poets began to flare in the 18th century.²³ A new style of poetics, *bazgasht*, began to rise in certain Iranian circles, which began to challenge the hegemonic *tazeh gu'i* style.²⁴

¹⁶ Ibid., 33-34.

¹⁷ Mana Kia, "Imagining Iran before Nationalism: Geocultural Meanings of Land in Azar's *Atashkadeh*," in *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, edited by Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 90.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 94.

²⁰ Ibid., 90-93.

²¹ Ibid., 90.

²² Ibid., 98.

²³ Ibid., 92.

²⁴ Ibid.

Hindustan was the center of 17th and 18th century poetics following particular actions of the Safavids, which caused many poets to flee to Mughal courts in Hindustan.²⁵ *Bazgashtis*, in seeking to empower their own circles, attempted to re-center the poetic world on Iran, where they were based, and link themselves to the old masters.²⁶ As previously mentioned, an individual's school of thought could serve as a primary self-identifier, so the introduction of a new poetic style introduced a new division in the identity of the Persianate world. This occurred concurrently with growing European encroachment into the Persianate world and political fragmentation, which furthered the distancing of Turan, Hindustan, and Iran from each other.²⁷

Pre-nationalist indigenous histories of Iran relied on two distinct narratives, here termed Qur'anic and Shahnameh.²⁸ Qur'anically based history sought to place Iran and the Iranian plateau within the historical framework presented in the Qur'an, whereas Shahnameh inspired history placed Iran in its own historical framework, with significant pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian influence.²⁹ The Qur'anic history generally attempted to place Iran within a Qur'anic framework by finding connections between generally accepted historic Iranians and figures mentioned in the Qur'an.³⁰ These histories would tend to spend a great deal of time focusing on Iran shortly before or after the Arab-Muslim conquest, continuing into the time contemporary with the writer.³¹ Qur'anic histories would generally portray the Sassanian Empire as corrupt and decadent, in contrast with the pure and honest Arabs, carrying the banner of Islam.³² Shahnameh inspired histories focused on Zoroastrian accounts of history and the origins of Iran, the rebirth of which was due in part to the introduction from Indian Pارسis of new, supposedly authentic sources from pre-Islamic Iran.³³ These allowed the "projecting [of] an Iran-centered universal historical narrative that subordinated the Biblico-Qur'anic 'mythistory' to its own all-encompassing framework," which later Persian nationalists would use to "reconfigure the pre-Islamic past as a 'golden age' coming to a 'tragic end' with the Muslim

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 96.

²⁸ Kia, "Imagining Iran," 93-94.

²⁹ Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Contested Memories of Pre-Islamic Iran," *The Medieval History Journal* 2, no. 2 (1999): 246.

³⁰ Ibid., 248.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 246.

³³ Ibid.

conquest.”³⁴ These dual histories, one Islamic, one Iranian, allowed for different ways of conceiving Iranian history. The Shahnameh inspired histories would take on a significant importance in later times.

Penetration by European scientific and racial discourse affected Iranian intellectual life, most particularly for those interacting with Westerners. The recently discovered philological connection between Indo-Iranian languages, such as Persian and European languages, was of particular importance because it took on racial significance.³⁵ Scientists began to believe that speakers of Indo-European languages belonged to one unified race: the Aryans.³⁶ Europeans began believing that Indo-Europeans were originally centered somewhere around Iran or India and therefore became very interested in pre-Islamic Iran, particularly the Achaemenid Empire.³⁷ Referred to in Greek sources as the Persian Empire, it became envisioned as a great empire of the Persian people whose direct descendants were the Persian speakers of Iran.³⁸

Iranian intellectuals, now aware of their “true identity,” began approaching Persianate literature from a new, racist-nationalist perspective.³⁹ They began reading the elite Persianate works as evidence of the Persian nation, stretching back to the Achaemenid Empire. Zoroastrianism became a distinctly Persian religion because of its Achaemenid associations.⁴⁰ The Persianization of the Zoroastrian religion allowed for a new reading of Persianate literature. The fall of true Persiandom, embodied in the ancient Iranian empires, could be traced in Shahnameh inspired histories to the Arab-Muslim conquest of Iran.⁴¹ The different regions of the Persianate world became racial divisions. Perhaps building off *bazgasht* attempts at self-aggrandizement, the contributions of poets from Turan and Hindustan to Persianate culture were signs of dilution.⁴² The conflicts in the Shahnameh between Iran and Turan became additional evidence for the primordial nature

³⁴ Ibid., 246; Ibid., 247.

³⁵ Ali Reza Asgharzadeh, *Iran and the Challenge of Diversity: Islamic Fundamentalism, Aryanist Racism, and Democratic Struggles* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 65-66.

³⁶ Ibid., 66.

³⁷ Ibid., 67.

³⁸ Ibid., 61.

³⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁰ Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2012), 22.

⁴¹ Tavakoli, *Contested Memories*, 249.

⁴² Kia, “Imagining Iran,” 92

of Persian-Turkish rivalry, further cementing the link between Turkic rule and foreign rule.⁴³ Perhaps if non-Persians were a sufficiently small portion of the population, they would have attempted to remove them from “Persian Iran.” It is perhaps due in part to the size of the non-Persian population that the nationalist attempts were primarily ones of “enlightenment” and “reclamation” instead of genocide; thus, they attempted to rewrite the histories of most non-Persian Iranians to misguided Persians.⁴⁴ Rewriting of Azeri history, for instance, provides an excellent example of this phenomenon. In the distant past, one of the languages spoken in Azerbaijan was an Iranian language, Azari.⁴⁵ Using the historical existence of this language, Persian nationalists began characterizing Azeris as misguided Persians who had been corrupted by Turkic influence.⁴⁶ They encouraged Azeris to abandon their “false” ways and rejoin Persiandom.⁴⁷ In response to this, Azeri nationalists began to construct their own histories and thus identities, often with similar ethno-linguistic primordialist techniques that contemporary Persian nationalists used to construct their histories. One such example was the belief among some that the Azeris actually represented a pre-Indo-European *Turkic* civilization that had always existed in Azerbaijan.⁴⁸ Azeri identity was not formed in sheer opposition to Persian nationalism, but rather as a result of certain historical processes and events which provide an interesting insight to the development of nationalist identity.

Azerbaijan

The Safavid period provides a useful and effective starting point to begin a narrative on Azerbaijan and the development of identity in the Iranian context. The Sufi Safavid Order was founded by an Ardabili named Safi al-Din among the Turkic speaking populations of the northern Middle East.⁴⁹ Over the next hundred years, the Safavid Order developed a fighting force of

⁴³ Asgharzadeh, *Challenge of Diversity*, 132.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴⁵ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 28.

⁴⁶ Asgharzadeh, *Challenge of Diversity*, 151.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 33.

⁴⁹ Price, *Iran's Diverse Peoples*,

66.

tribesmen collectively referred to as the Qizilbash.⁵⁰ Under Ismail I, the Safavid Order gained Azerbaijan, then the rest of Iran, ultimately Shi'afying the majority of the population.⁵¹ After their fall, a variety of conquerors sought to re-establish the state created by the Safavids. None succeeded in establishing a dynasty until Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, himself a member of the Qajar Qizilbash tribe originally from Azerbaijan.⁵²

Due in part to the cultural importance of Azerbaijan, as well as the governing practices of the Qajars, which tended to place family members in governorships, the heir-to-be of the Qajars would govern in Tabriz and gain valuable administrative and military experience.⁵³ That the Qajar heir governed here suggests additional importance of the province which is pertinent to the current discussion. In major part, its importance lay in its prosperity which continued until the last decades of the 19th century. Azerbaijan was not only a major agricultural center in Iran, but it also provided a significant portion of the Qajar fighting force.⁵⁴ Azerbaijan, due to its position as a crossroads of trade, had a significant merchant class that traded extensively with neighboring Ottoman Anatolia and Russian Caucasia.⁵⁵ It was this merchant class which would prove most receptive to European ideologies.⁵⁶ The Qajars lost control of much of Iranian Caucasia to Russia, and it is in the Russian controlled Caucasus that Azeri nationalism began to develop into a more popular movement.⁵⁷

Caucasian Muslim interaction with Western political thought and modernity more broadly encouraged the development of a nationalist ideology and the creation of distinct identity. Cut off politically from Muslim states, the Muslims of the Caucasus were put in the position of Others, living

⁵⁰ Richard Tapper, "Nomads and Commissars on the Frontiers of Eastern Azerbaijan" in *The Boundaries of Modern Iran*, ed. Keith McLachlan (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 22.

⁵¹ Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (New York: I.B. Taurus Publishers, 2000), 11.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵³ Tapper, "Nomads and Commissars," 26.

⁵⁴ Richard Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 169.

⁵⁵ Tapper, "Nomads and Commissars," 29.

⁵⁶ Tadeusz Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Azerbaijan, 1905 – 1920," in *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change*, edited by Ronald Grigor Suny (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 212.

⁵⁷ Tapper, "Nomads and Commissars," 28.

as subjects of a Western Christian power. This began a quest for identity among the Muslims of the Caucasus, including those speaking Azeri Turkish. The Russian Empire's approach towards the Caucasus, though conciliatory at first, ultimately attempted to remodel its possession on the Russian sociopolitical system.⁵⁸ In response to religiously-backed dissidents, they began to institutionalize and bureaucratize the Sunni and Shi'a *ulema* which only served to discredit those that collaborated.⁵⁹ Russian control of the region relied heavily on turning different religious and linguistic communities against each other, though Christian communities such as the Armenians did tend to receive support more often than Muslims.⁶⁰ Tensions between the various communities escalated until brutal, inter-communal violence broke out.⁶¹ This inter-communal conflict contributed to segregation and the development of distinctive identities among the large mosaic of different communities in the Russian Caucasus.⁶² Additionally, through the destruction of the formerly independent polities of the region and their consolidation into merely two provinces, intense local particularism began to fade away.⁶³ Thus, the Azeri Turkish language, which had served as a *lingua franca* for the peoples of these various polities, began to become a marker of identity.

Some Caucasians blamed the Russians for the violence as the belligerent communities had lived relatively peacefully together for centuries.⁶⁴ These forces represented the radicals in the Caucasus and centered in the city of Ganja.⁶⁵ The wealthier oil city of Baku, with a powerful Azeri bourgeoisie, tended to support a more autonomist approach towards the Russian Empire.⁶⁶ In addition to these were pan-Turkic and pan-Islamist sentiments.⁶⁷ These events and intellectual trends had an impact in Iranian Azerbaijan due to the great deal of interaction between these regions.⁶⁸ This flow was not one way as the events in Azerbaijan proved particularly interesting for all Azeris living in the Russian Caucasus, such that there were a number of Caucasian Azeris

⁵⁸ Firouzeh Mostashari, *On the Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2006), 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶⁰ Roudik, *Culture and Customs*, 28.

⁶¹ Swietochowski, "National Consciousness," 215.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁶⁸ Ansari, *Politics of Nationalism*, 122

who fought in the Tabrizi *Mojahideen* during the Constitutional Revolution.⁶⁹ These lines of contact, as well as the movement of trade and tribes, allowed for a sense of community across the imperial borders.⁷⁰

The comparative political progressiveness foretold the Azerbaijani position in the coming century; particularly, the number of individuals originating in or having connection to Azerbaijan who were involved in reform movements and the Constitutional Revolution.⁷¹ This progressiveness stemmed from a confluence of factors, many of which relate to Azerbaijani proximity to outside powers. More generally, the proximity and Turkish connection to the reforming Ottoman Caliphate of the *Tanzimat* period provided an example of a reformist approach to politics.⁷² Conversely, due to the relative isolation of the Caucasus from St. Petersburg, the Caucasus and northwest Iran served as a haven for Russian radical Leftists, particularly in Baku which had significant interaction with Iranian Azerbaijan.⁷³ Outside influence alone could not explain a broad region-wide progressiveness, despite the openness of the Azeri bourgeoisie to Europeans. The material factors producing Azerbaijani progressiveness began particularly after the closure of the Russo-Iranian border. Most immediately, this disrupted the movement patterns of nomadic tribes, such as the Shahsevan.⁷⁴ Raiding became increasingly common as Iranian preference to maintain tribal groups as loyal buffers and troops against outside powers discouraged tribal settlement.⁷⁵ In the interest of maintaining instability in Iran, Russia contributed to and encouraged tribal raiding while also demanding Iran settle the tribes. Settling would only be partially worked towards with no real effect outside of worsening state-tribal relations.⁷⁶ This also encouraged Qajari reliance on Russian military aid against intransigent tribes and made Russian occupation and annexation of territory more possible.⁷⁷ Additional Russian economic penetration, especially in the form of Russians purchasing Iranian villages and tracts of land through Iranian intermediaries, encouraged a more

⁶⁹ Swietochowski, "National Consciousness," 217.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁷¹ Price, *Iran's Diverse Peoples*, 144.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷³ Swietochowski, "National Consciousness," 218.

⁷⁴ Tapper, "Nomads and Commissars," 31.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

exploitative and extractive relationship between landlord and peasantry, encouraging class conflict and calls for land reform.⁷⁸

During the Constitutionalist period in Iran, Azerbaijan was a center of activity among the Constitutionalists due to the factors discussed earlier. Tabriz established a local council for elected representatives to the *Majles* in Tehran.⁷⁹ By this point, Tabriz already had a history of social democracy and movement organization, which improved the efficiency of and confidence in the council. This confidence can be seen in its choice of name: initially *Majles-e Melli*, meaning “Council of the Nation.” It received strong condemnation from the *Majles* in Tehran, which accused it of secessionism.⁸⁰ The council in Tabriz flatly denied this, and began to call itself the *Anjoman-e Tabriz*, “Council in Tabriz,” or *Anjoman-e Iyalati-ye Azerbaijan*, “Council of the Province of Azerbaijan.”⁸¹ The *Anjoman* frequently called on the *Majles* in Tehran to take bolder steps and to question the sincerity and commitment of the new Shah, Mohammad Ali Mirza.⁸² Their fears were shown reasonable when, on account of regional councils causing chaos, Mohammad Ali Mirza brought the *Majles* in Tehran to an end and called on regional councils to follow suit.⁸³ Tabriz refused and created a self-defense force.⁸⁴ Rapidly, the city split between the Monarchists and the Constitutionalists, who were led by a Sheikhi named Sattare Khan, taking the name the *Mojahideen*.⁸⁵ Tabriz’s resilience won it the admiration of much of Iran, and it served as a beacon of hope in the fight against the Monarchists.⁸⁶ The Constitutionalists eventually won, capturing Tehran and deposing Mohammad Ali Mirza to replace him with his 12-year-old son.⁸⁷

The buildup to World War I proved a tumultuous time in Iran. The period of the Second *Majles* was the period of political parties.⁸⁸ Of particular note was the Social Democratic party *Ferqeh-e Demokrat-e Iran*. This party evolved out of a variety of Social Democratic movements, which included

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*, 29.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 30.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 31.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁸⁸ Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 70-71.

many groups of Tabrizi and Bakuian origin and Azeris.⁸⁹ This party had strong representation in the *Majles* and engaged in frequent street clashes and violent political action.⁹⁰ This destabilization weakened the national government and the political process in Iran.⁹¹ Perceived strategic need, as well as broad support for Germany, encouraged the Entente to take action against Iran.⁹² An incident involving a Russian soldier and a tribesman in Azerbaijan provided a pretext for the Russian invasion and occupation of Tabriz, which ultimately ended the *Anjoman-e Tabriz*.⁹³ The Ottomans then followed suit, invading Azerbaijan, turning it into a bloody battleground in the war.⁹⁴ All sides exploited inter-communal tensions, promising independent states to the various communities in Azerbaijan.⁹⁵ The Ottomans particularly attempted to reach out to the Iranian Azeris to little avail.⁹⁶ Ottoman mismanagement did little to endear the Azeris, and their pan-Turkist appeals fell flat in large part due to the centrality of Shi'ism in the identity of people in Tabriz and Azerbaijan.⁹⁷ The Ottomans broke up the Democrats in Tabriz and exiled its leadership from Iran.⁹⁸ This betrayal by Tehran, and supposed foreign support, would have great impact on the upcoming events in Azerbaijan.

Among the leading Social Democrats exiled from Tabriz during the First World War was Mohammad Khiyabani, an ardent reformist and preacher.⁹⁹ In the post-war return to normalcy, Khiyabani and others were elected to represent Tabriz in the *Majles*.¹⁰⁰ Unhappy with the election results, the Iranian state sent troops to rectify the election results.¹⁰¹ The populace of Tabriz took up arms and formed an autonomous council.¹⁰² Accusations of separatism began immediately, but Khiyabani, the leader of this movement,

⁸⁹ Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*, 36.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹² Keddie, *Roots and Results*, 73-74.; Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*, 40-41.

⁹³ Tapper, "Nomads and Commissars," 33.

⁹⁴ Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran*, 271.

⁹⁵ Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*, 41.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹⁷ Price, *Iran's Diverse Peoples*, 171.

⁹⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 59.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*, 46.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 49.

firmly denied these charges.¹⁰³ He called for radical reform for Iran nationally and for greater regional autonomy.¹⁰⁴ It was these calls in conjunction with his absolute refusal to accept foreign assistance that would eventually cause the destruction of his movement.¹⁰⁵ His support for regional autonomy put him at odds with the pro-centralization reformers, who believed that the only way to enact national reform would be through a strong centralized state.¹⁰⁶ He was also at odds with those reformers in favor of regional autonomy as they generally sought foreign assistance.¹⁰⁷ The centralizing reformers gained control of the state and ordered the Cossack Brigade to quell Khiyabani's movement.¹⁰⁸ They proved successful, killing him and then putting down the next two autonomist movements that rose up shortly thereafter.¹⁰⁹

Eventually Reza Khan, leader of the Cossack Brigade, deposed the Qajar dynasty and became the first Pahlavi Shah.¹¹⁰ His reign marks a restorative period in Azerbaijani history, not due to policies of accommodation, but due to his overwhelming military might. Gaining power through the support of the centralizing reformers, this peasant born Mazandarani assumed their ideological positions as well.¹¹¹ Worried about division of Iran by outside powers, these reformers believed that a centralized state could maintain Iran's territorial integrity.¹¹² They sought this through homogenization and modernization.¹¹³ These policies worked hand in hand as Reza Shah put down the various tribes and opposition movements that worked against state centralization.¹¹⁴ He then began a policy of forced Persianization through national education programs and banning of local, non-Persian languages.¹¹⁵ These Shah-appointed intellectuals sought to tear Turkic languages out of

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran: The Pahlavis and After* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), 18.

¹⁰⁷ Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*, 50-51.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Keddie, *Roots and Results*, 86.

¹¹¹ Ansari, *The Pahlavis and After*, 38.

¹¹² Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 47.

¹¹³ Abrahamian, *Modern Iran*, 84 – 85.

¹¹⁴ Keddie, *Roots and Results*, 91.

¹¹⁵ Asgharzadeh, *Challenge of Diversity*, 87.

Iran, root and stem.¹¹⁶ They also sought to de-Arabize the Persian language, creating an institute to “purify” the language, relying heavily on Persianate literature such as the *Shahnameh* to discern the “pure” from the “impure.”¹¹⁷

Conclusion

The development of Azeri identity began in the 19th century and was firmly established by the 20th century. Prior to that, the Azeri language did not really serve as a source of identity, but more as a *lingua franca* for the various people in the region. For the majority of its history after the rise of the Safavids, Turkish and Persian had served as the two major languages of the Iranian plateau. To explain simply, Turkish dialects were the languages of the tribes whom were the primary fighting forces in Iran, while Persian was the language of administrators, culture, and the intelligentsia. The languages spoken “on the ground” varied and were not necessarily guided or influenced by the “high” languages. “Normal” people themselves were less interested in their linguistic-based “ethnic” identity, but with their religion, their tribe, their village and town, or their Sufi lodge.

The Muslim Turks of the Caucasus found themselves subject to the Russian Empire following the Russian annexation of the Iranian Caucasus, as well as the various small khanates of the region. In response to the destruction of traditional sociopolitical systems from the Russian Empire’s “civilizing mission,” its divide and rule practices, and its discrediting of established religious systems, Azeri speaking Turks, particularly the intellectuals, became interested in finding new ways to maintain and identify their community. One notable example is Mirza Fathali Akhuzadeh’s encouragement of the creation of a popular literary version of the language as a means of maintaining their identity. The intellectuals of this time went further than the general populace, who still focused more on their religious identity than their ethno-linguistic identity.

The Russian Empire brought modernity through their attempts to standardize administrative practices, establish educational institutions, and restructure existing political orders. The discovery of oil in Baku assisted this by bringing significant capitalist development to the region, further disrupting traditional power structures. These events contributed to the development of a linguistically-based Azeri identity through the previously discussed effects of modernization on identity. Due to the porousness of the borders between the Russian Empire and Iran, these ideas easily spread into Iranian

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 105.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 153.

Azerbaijan. However, they were weaker than in the lands north of the Araxes River.

Development of a distinct Azeri identity in Iran began in the Constitutional Period. Centralizing reformers were interested in empowering the center in order to enact reforms across the country. Among some, there was interest in homogenization through Persianization, as well as Persianization due to racial ideology. Many movements expressed their interest in autonomy by demanding the respect of Azeri Turkish as a language with a place in Iran. It was not until the Pahlavi monarchy that Azeri identity as a separate ethnic group in Iran fully bloomed. Reza Shah's empowerment and centralization of the state far exceeded anything done in the constitutional period, more effectively imposing the ideology and policies of Persian nationalists. Not only did the state ban Azeri Turkish and teach Persian in the schools, but the Shah and Persian nationalist intellectuals attempted to characterize the Azeri as merely Persians who had been Turkified and encouraged them to return to their "original" language and culture. This resulted in intellectuals in this increasingly distinct group looking to discredit the Pahlavi narrative, inciting the construction of Azeri national histories and further developing a distinct Azeri identity.

What the Azeri case illustrates is the importance of the destruction of traditional power structures and ways of living in the creation of identity along "modern" ethno-linguistic lines. These ideas of ethnic nationalism are rarely popular in origin. They instead represent ideas formulated by social elites as a means of unifying a community whose traditional life has increasingly been under assault and destroyed. Comparing the importance of Azeri identity in the Russian Caucasus to Iran tells this particularly well. While not the most "advanced" of European states, Russia was significantly more modern than Iran. Russian colonial policy destroyed the pre-existing political structures of the region and discredited the religious leadership of the Muslims in the Caucasian portion of its Empire. Being politically disconnected from the remainder of the *Ummah*, intellectuals in particular sought to create some means of maintaining their identity. Additionally, the Russian tendency to play off religious groups against each other, such as Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, further encouraged pursuit of a non-religious identity. What resulted, worsened through Soviet policies that exist outside the scope of this paper, was a fiercely nationalistic Azerbaijan.

The Azeris in Iran, though met with modernity, encountered it differently. Rather than imposed on them by a distinctly foreign power, it was imposed on them by one group originating in a community which they were a part of: Iran. Iran had seen two language groups exist in essentially coequal

complimentary positions for some time. Their identity as Iranians was not in question, but rather, they had to redefine it in relationship to a rising hegemonic group within Iran, the Persians. Their continued allegiance to Iran could possibly be explained by the resilience of traditional power structures. The power of traditional structures was significantly tested. For instance, the tribes that had been so important in Azerbaijan as political and military forces were absolutely decimated by the Pahlavi state. The Pahlavi state failed, however, to eliminate the *ulemaic* power structure which was of particular importance due to the significance of religious self-identification among these Shi'a Turks. Additionally, the continued self-identification with Shi'ism discouraged widespread support for pan-Turkism. It was the failure of modernity to erase traditional social structures, such as the *ulema* and Shi'a religious practices, that allowed for some partial continuation of traditional self-identification and the blurring of ethno-linguistic lines.

Queer Theology: Theological, Theocratic, and Secular Influences on Iran's Relationship with Transgender Bodies

Adam Oberlitner *

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On November 13, 2005, the Iranian daily newspaper *Kayhan* published a story about the public execution of two young men named Mokhtar and Ali. The charge that brought them to the gallows of Shahid Bahonar Square, alleges international advocacy organization Human Rights Watch (HRW), was *lavat*, a word loosely translated by many as “sodomy,” which refers to criminalized sexual acts between men.¹ As is often the case, the hangings provoked condemnations from such human rights organizations as HRW, but the agitation over these hangings, and several other such cases that year, effected no marked change in policy, neither immediately nor over the course of the following years.² There is a widespread Western perception of Iran as viciously anti-queer and without reservation in its anti-queerness—a reputation it continues to cultivate, one might argue, as Amnesty International’s 2017-2018 report on the country concludes with “some same-sex conduct [remains] punishable by death.”³ However, keeping this in mind so as not to trivialize the state-sanctioned violence faced by gay Iranian men and women, this all-encompassing conclusion is short-sighted.

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¹ “Iran: Two More Executions for Homosexual Conduct,” *Human Rights Watch*, November 21, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/11/21/iran-two-more-executions-homosexual-conduct>.

² *Ibid.*

³ “Iran 2017/2018,” Amnesty International, accessed March 27th, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/>.