

Chapter 1

The Azerbaijanis until 1920

The Azerbaijanis live in an area that has been a center of ideological activity, confrontation, and accommodation between different cultures. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, the delineation between their identities as Turks, Azerbaijanis, Iranians, and Muslims was not clear, and Azerbaijanis rarely referred to themselves as “Azerbaijani.” The development of the Azerbaijanis’ collective identity intensified and became a struggle toward the end of the nineteenth century, when a distinctive Azerbaijani national identity emerged as a political force. The polemics and competition over the identity of the Azerbaijanis were stimulated by revolutionary changes occurring in all the empires surrounding the Azerbaijanis, their increased exposure to the growing nationalism of the peoples around them, the idea of modern nationalism, and the political activities of various ideological movements that competed in the region at that time: Pan-Islam, Pan-Turkism, Iranian nationalism, and communism.

The competition between these rival ideologies further intensified in the first quarter of the twentieth century after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent disengagement of Muslim and Ottoman identities, and the division between Turkic cultural identity and Turkish state identity that occurred with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.

The change in the state identity of Iran also intensified the struggle over the identity of the Azerbaijanis. Until the establishment of the Pahlavi regime in the twentieth century, the identity of Iran was not exclusively Persian, but supra-ethnic. From the eleventh century until the founding of the Pahlavi regime, the political leadership of Iran was mostly Turkic, and both Turkic and Persian cultural elements influenced

the ethnic character of the regime and the culture of the country. The various Iranian empires were distinguished by cultural diversity.¹ Throughout much of this period, the capital cities of Iran were in Azerbaijan, and from the eleventh century until the 1920s, Tabriz was Iran's major commercial center. Once the Pahlavi regime began its policy of emphasizing exclusively the Persian character and composition of Iran—a policy that has been partly continued under the Islamic Republic—Azerbaijani or Turkic identity came into clear conflict with Iranian identity; this intensified the struggle over Azerbaijani national identity in Iran.

Advances in technology in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century also made the question of national identity more pressing. Vast improvements in infrastructure in both Russia and Iran increased the centralization of the empires and their ability to touch the lives of populations that had previously been virtually autonomous. In many cases, interaction between the center and the periphery created an awareness of differences and also contributed to the development of a sense of common identity among co-ethnics from adjoining areas, thus forming the basis for the development of a common identity separate from the identity of the state. In other cases, exposure to the center spurred the assimilation of some of the minority members into Persian culture in Iran.

This chapter and the next survey the historical events leading up to 1979–2000. This chapter covers the major waves of Turkic immigration into Azerbaijan in the tenth century, the establishment of the Safavid regime in 1501, and the first decades of Qajar rule in the late eighteenth century; the split of Azerbaijan in 1828, after the Russian conquest of north Azerbaijan, until 1905, the period when a separate Azerbaijani national identity began to emerge as a political force and in literature; and the period from 1905 until the establishment of the Pahlavi regime in Iran and the establishment of Soviet rule in north Azerbaijan. Chapter 2 looks at the period of Pahlavi rule in Iran, and Soviet rule through the late 1970s.

THE PERCEIVED ROOTS OF THE AZERBAIJANIS

Historians debate the ethnic-linguistic composition of the areas north and south of the Araz River and the historical borders of Azerbaijan before the major waves of Turkic migration in the tenth and eleventh cen-

1. Many historians see Turkic-Persian tension as a constant factor in the history of Iran. According to E.G. Browne, the history of Persia: "from the legendary wars between the Kiyanian kings and Afrasiyab down to the present day, is the story of a struggle between the Turkish races . . . and the Persians." See *A Year Amongst the Persians* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1959) pp. 109–110.

turies. Many Azerbaijani sources claim that much of the population was Turkic, or of other non-Persian origin; Persian sources generally maintain that prior to the tenth century the people were predominantly Persian.

This debate has been confounded by supporters of various ideologies—Iranian nationalism, Turkism, and Azerbaijani nationalism—who have attempted to manipulate historical materials to justify or deny the Azerbaijanis' "right" to certain identities, or courses of action, and as a basis for the claim that those living in the north and those living in Iran are not the same nation. In addition, many researchers base their claims on the works of the historian Ahmad Kasravi, whose ideological convictions and political goals tainted his research on Azerbaijan.² Some researchers have attempted to dismiss the idea that the populations on both sides of the Araz belong to the same people, claiming that the area north of the Araz River was not part of the historical territory of what has been called for many centuries "Azerbaijan," and that the people inhabiting this area are not part of the same people as those in Iranian Azerbaijan. In the pre-Islamic period the area in the north was known as Albania or Caucasian Albania, and after the Islamic conquest (639–643) as Arran. However, whether Arran was a separate entity from Azerbaijan or a subentity, it seems that they often interacted culturally as one region. In addition, at least since the Muslim conquest, the areas were administered together within most of the various empires that ruled the area, and were subject to similar influences until the division of the territory in 1828.³ Finally, territorial borders in the region were quite fluid, especially before the establishment of the Safavid regime in 1501.

The Islamization of Azerbaijan took place during the Arab conquest under 'Omar's caliphate sometime between 639 and 643.⁴ Zoroastrianism was prominent in both north and south Azerbaijan at the time of the Is-

2. Along with his own strong Iranian identity, Kasravi's unwavering commitment to eradicate any subidentities to Iranian identity calls into question his ability to conduct objective research on Azerbaijan. As Ernest Renan wrote: "Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation" (Renan, "What is A Nation?" p. 145). Kasravi himself claimed that historical materials on the origins of the Azerbaijanis in Iran were often manipulated to suit interested parties' needs in the political polemics raging in the area. (See Ahmed Kasravi, *al-'Irfan*, Tishrin I, 1922, pp. 121–123, Evan Siegal translation).

3. C.E. Bosworth, "Azerbaijan," in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989) p. 224; and Audrey Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks* (Stanford: Hoover Institute, 1992), p. 9. On the common administration of the territories in the Safavid period, see Javad Heyat, "Origins of the Name and Boundaries of Azerbaijan," *Reform*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 1995), p. 24.

4. Bosworth, "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, p. 225.

lamic conquest, and one of the Azerbaijani terms of capitulation was Arab agreement to respect the sanctity of the fire temples there.⁵

The conquest of Azerbaijan did not instill any universal Muslim identity. The region served as the base of the socially motivated revolt of Babak that began in 816–17 and lasted over twenty years. To Azerbaijanis, Babak and the revolt he led still symbolize resistance to foreign rule.⁶ His rebellion was glorified in the national museums of both Soviet Azerbaijan and the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the name Babak is common in north Azerbaijan and Iran.

Under Seljuk rule in the tenth and eleventh centuries, major waves of immigration of Oghuz Turks into Azerbaijan created a clear Turkic majority and unified the ethnic basis of both north and south Azerbaijan. More Turks came during Mongol Ilkhanid rule from the thirteenth through the fourteenth centuries, and during the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu Turkmen dynasties in the fifteenth century, which had their capital in south Azerbaijan, at Tabriz. In north Azerbaijan, a native Shirvanshah dynasty ruled through the sixteenth century. Historians give varying dates for the establishment of this dynasty, beginning with the ninth century.

In this period, Turkic and Persian cultural elements were quite fluid. Until the nineteenth century, Azerbaijani cultural figures wrote in both Persian and Azerbaijani, and throughout most of this period there was no formal separation between the Azerbaijani and Turkish languages. During the twelfth century, the most prominent Azerbaijani poet, Nizami Ganjevi, wrote in Persian. His epic work *Khamsa*, a collection of five poems including the classic love story of “Khosrow and Shirin,” is highly esteemed by Azerbaijanis. Hassan-oglu Izzeddin, wrote in both Azerbaijani and Persian.⁷ Nasimi Imadeddin, a fourteenth century author, wrote in Azerbaijani, as well as Arabic and Persian.⁸ Azerbaijanis attach special meaning to the works of Muhammed Suleiman-Oglu Fizuli, and his poem, “Leyli and Majnun,” written in Azerbaijani in the sixteenth

5. Urmiya (in southern Azerbaijan) is considered to be the birthplace of Zaratushta. Christianity was also present, especially in Nakhchivan and Tabriz.

6. Gholam-Reza Sabri Tabrizi, *Iran: A Child's Story, a Man's Experience* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, Ltd., 1989), pp. 143–144.

7. Nizami (1141–1209) was a native and resident of Ganja, today in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Izzeddin lived at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century, in Asfarain, a town near Khorasan.

8. Imadeddin was born in 1369 or 1370. According to some sources, he was born in Shamakhi, which is in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

century, is especially revered in the contemporary national culture of Azerbaijan.⁹

AZERBAIJAN-BASED RULE IN IRAN: SHI‘A IMPOSED ON THE PEOPLES OF IRAN

The establishment of the Safavid regime in Tabriz in 1501 had a major impact on the development of the identity of the peoples of the region and the events of the time. Under the Safavids, Iran returned to local rule and to its larger pre-Islamic borders, and regained its position as a major regional power. The Safavids united the peoples of Iran under the ideology of Shi‘i Islam, which they established as the state religion of Iran, forcibly imposing it on its peoples, who were predominantly Sunni.¹⁰ While the ethnic roots of the Safavid dynasty’s founder, Shah Isma‘il, are under debate,¹¹ he was raised in Ardebil and was a native Turkic-speaker,¹² as attested to by his poetry written in Azerbaijani under the pen-name of Khata‘i.¹³ Shah Isma‘il’s poetry set a precedent in the development of Azerbaijani literature because he was one of the first major writers to use the colloquial language, and generally avoided the Perso-Arabic vocabulary.¹⁴ He based his regime on the power of the *Qizilbash* Turkic tribes, who shared his language. Indeed, these linguistic ties formed one of the main bases for unity between them. At the Safavid court, Azerbaijani Turkish was predominant, especially among the early rulers of the dynasty, and during this period Turkic grammar and words influenced Persian and vice versa.¹⁵ In the Safavid period, an estimated 1,200 Azerbai-

9. Fizuli Muhammed Suleiman-Oglu (1498–1556) lived in Baghdad and died in Karbala, today part of Iraq.

10. Roger Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 29.

11. See A.H. Morton, *The Early Years of Shah Isma‘il in the Afzal al-tavarikh and Elsewhere*, Pembroke Papers 4 (1996), pp. 27–51; and Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, p. 2.

12. Shah Isma‘il reportedly only learned Persian as a young adult. See E. Denison Ross, “The Early Years of Shah Isma‘il,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1896), p. 288.

13. Vladimir Minorsky, “The Poetry of Shah Isma‘il I,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1942), p. 1007a. Not only was his poetry in the Azerbaijani language, but its form was also influenced by Azerbaijani folk poetry, and the traditional *‘āšeq* style. See H. Javadi and K. Burrill, “Azeri Literature in Iran,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, p. 251.

14. A. Caferoğlu, “Adhari (Azeri),” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, (New Edition) Vol. I, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), p. 193.

15. John R. Perry, *Persian in the Safavid Period: Sketch for an Etat de Langue*, Pembroke Papers 4 (1996), pp. 272, 279.

jani words entered Persian, mainly those dealing with administration and military spheres, areas that were chiefly in the hands of the Turkic peoples in Iran at this time.¹⁶ The dominant ideology of the regime was Shi'i Twelver Islam. Yet, despite this banner of unity, Turco-Persian tensions characterized the Safavid regime.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Shi'i identity and identity with the Iranian Safavid state were strong enough that during the various periods of confrontation with the Ottoman Empire there were few incidents of desertion to the Ottoman side, with whom the Turks of Iran shared a Turkic language.¹⁸ The advent of the Safavid regime was an important event in the development of Azerbaijani national identity. The Safavids, considered by many Azerbaijanis today as an "Azerbaijani" dynasty, and portrayed as such in Azerbaijani historiography, serve as an important symbol of Azerbaijani identity and power.¹⁹ At the same time, the Safavid imposition of Shi'i on the peoples of Iran and the regime's antagonism and rivalry with the Ottomans and Uzbeks, and the major Turkic regimes competing with them during the period, divided the Azerbaijanis from the rest of the Turkic peoples and increased their ties to Persians. However, being the only major Turkic people of Shi'i domination, over time, bound the people north and south of the Araz River, and contributed to the formation of their distinctive and common Azerbaijani identity.

Between 1514 and 1603, and again from 1722 to 1728, Tabriz and other parts of Azerbaijan were frequently attacked and occupied by the Ottomans. Due to its vulnerability to Ottoman attack, the capital of Iran

16. G. Doerfer, "Azeri (Adari) Turkish," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, p. 246.

17. See Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, p. 31.

18. In contrast, there were some incidents of desertion to the Uzbek dynasties (which are also of Turkic origin), especially during periods of heightened confrontations during the Safavid period.

19. For official historiography in the Soviet period, see "Shah Ismayıl" in *Azərbayjan Sovet Ensiklopediyası*, Vol. 10 (1987), p. 473–474, and "Iran," *Azərbayjan Sovet Ensiklopediyası*, Vol. 4 (1980), p. 504. Other works from the Soviet period: I.A. Huseinov, *Ismail Sefevi* (Baku, 1943); and O.A. Efendiev, *Obrazovanie azerbaidzhanskogo gosudarstva Sefevidov v nachale XVI v.* (Baku, 1961). Examples of the Safavids being termed an "Azerbaijani government" in the post-independence period: Oqtay Efendi, *Azərbayjan Sefeviler Dövləti* (Baku: Azerbaijan State Government Publishers, 1993), Mahmud Ismayıl, *Azərbayjan Tarikhi* (Baku: Azerbaijan State Government Publishers, 1993); p. 151; and *Azərbayjan Tarikhi: Ən Qədim Dövlətdən XX Əsrin Əvvəllərinə Qədər* (Baku: Elm, 1993), p. 164. In 2001, the five-hundredth-year anniversary of the dynasty was celebrated in the Republic of Azerbaijan at official state functions. In addition, the Safavids are often venerated in Azerbaijani literature and art forms, especially carpets. One of the central pieces in the Baku State Carpet Museum is a carpet depicting the Safavids.

was moved from Tabriz to Qazvin, and later on to Isfahan. This last move strengthened Persian language in the Safavid court, although Turkish was still of great consequence.²⁰

Following the demise of the Safavid regime in 1722 and the assassination of its first successor, Nadir Shah, in 1747, the Iranian empire fell into chaos. Lack of central rule in the eighteenth century led to a period in which various groups vied for power; in south Azerbaijan the chief contenders were Afghan groups, Qajar chiefs, and local Kurdish chiefs.²¹ Principalities were formed in Tabriz, Urmiya, Ardebil, Khoi, Maku, Karadagh, and Maraga.²² In the north, local leaders took advantage of the power vacuum to assert their independence, establishing local khanates in Baku, Kuba, Sheki, Shamakhi, Karabagh, and Nakhchivan. Regional identity was strengthened in this period. The khans who ruled these states in the north were of Turkic origin.²³

Central rule was reinstated in Iran in 1779 with the establishment of the Qajar dynasty.²⁴ The Qajar drive to reimpose rule on the khanates in northern Azerbaijan led to conflict with Russia, which also aspired to incorporate them. Under Qajar rule, Azerbaijan became the residence of the heir apparent, and Tabriz, with its location on Iran's major trade routes with Russia and Europe, was the major commercial capital of Iran. Thus, the Azerbaijanis were exposed more than other peoples in Iran to foreign ways and ideas. Many foreign states had consulates in Tabriz, and Azerbaijanis formed a large percentage of Iran's representatives abroad.²⁵

During the Qajar regime, Turkish was the predominant spoken language at the Iranian court, while Persian was the predominant literary language.²⁶ Linguistic diversity was characteristic of the Qajar re-

20. E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 4: *Modern Times (1500–1924)* (London, 1924), p. 14.

21. See Bosworth, "Azerbaijan," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, p. 230.

22. Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1995), p.2.

23. Audrey Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institute, 1992), p. 8.

24. The Qajar Turks had served in the Safavid administration as lords and local governors. See Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 300.

25. Hasan Taqizadeh, "The Background of the Constitutional Movement in Azerbaijan," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 14 (1960), p. 457.

26. Henry D.G. Law, "Modern Persian Prose (1920s–1940s), in Thomas M. Ricks, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Modern Persian Literature* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984), p. 132.

gime.²⁷ The position of the Azerbaijani language and of the Azerbaijanis themselves was so significant that all of the students first sent abroad in the beginning of the nineteenth century from Iran to study in Europe were from Azerbaijan.²⁸ To the astonishment of their hosts abroad, most had not even mastered Persian.²⁹

THE SPLIT OF AZERBAIJAN

In the early nineteenth century, Russia and Iran fought for control of the Caucasus and southern Azerbaijan. Iran was defeated in the first military campaign. The sides concluded the Treaty of Gulustan in 1813, and Iran ceded a large part of the Caucasus to Russia. Major confrontation erupted again in 1825, and once more Iran was defeated. In February 1828, the Treaty of Turkmenchay was signed, and Iran lost the rest of the Caucasus. The border was set at the Araz River, thus dividing the Azerbaijanis under two separate regimes. In the eyes of many Azerbaijanis, this treaty symbolizes the separation of the people, and how one felt about it became an indicator of national identity. This section focuses on the Azerbaijanis north of the Araz River, since they became incorporated into the Russian Empire while those in the south remained under the same rule.

As part of the Turkmenchay agreement, Russia gained special economic rights in southern Azerbaijan, and so exerted its influence over this territory as well. Despite the formal division of Azerbaijan, direct ties between the Azerbaijanis on both sides of the border continued, especially due to the active economic interaction between the two areas. Iran and northern Azerbaijan seemed to remain one intellectual and cultural sphere. Mutual influences were quite significant, and important thinkers and activists constantly moved between the territories of northern and southern Azerbaijan. Mutual cultural ties continued and common poetry, songs, and fables developed among the Azerbaijanis on both sides of the Araz.³⁰ Moreover, the split gave the Azerbaijanis a unique role as conduit

27. Ervand Abrahamian, "Kasravi: The Integrative Nationalist of Iran," in Elie Kedourie and Sylvia G. Haim, eds., *Towards a Modern Iran: Studies in Thought, Politics and Society* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), p. 99. Toward the end of the Qajar dynasty, Persianization of the court and the elite occurred.

28. Pierre Oberlang, "Iran," in Margaret Bainbridge, ed., *The Turkic Peoples of the World* (London: Kegan Paul, 1993), p. 151.

29. Major Southerland, report from July 16, 1812: P.R.O., F.O., 60, in David Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 49.

30. Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, p. 21.

of ideas among the three empires around them, especially since they could read texts published in Turkish and Russian (among them works translated from European languages) and could pass on the ideas in them to their co-ethnics in Iran. They could also pass along ideas prominent among Iranian intellectuals, Muslims in the Russian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire.

Muslim groups in the Russian Empire were the first Muslims to fall under European colonial rule. As part of Russia's colonial policy, most of the powers of the Muslim clerical establishment were usurped. Freed from the constraints of the ulama (clerical establishment), the Azerbaijanis and other Muslims in Russia became a beachhead of secularism and strong proponents of modern education in the Muslim world.

Three major trends in the collective identity of the Azerbaijanis emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. First, the majority of the political activists seemed to possess a Muslim identity that was chiefly supra-ethnic and was especially identified with a greater Muslim sphere that included Iran, the Russian-occupied Caucasus, and parts of the Ottoman Empire. Their careers often spanned different parts of this zone, and their ideological works seemed to be concerned with the situation in all these areas. Azerbaijanis could consider themselves as both Turks and Iranians, or Russian subjects, with little conflict. Some were active in political movements in all three of the regions, concurrently or at different times of their careers.

Second, regardless of the nature of the political movement to which they belonged, many prominent Azerbaijani intellectuals advocated liberal values. Many rejected authoritative rule, including that led by Muslims, and supported freedom of thought and the establishment of modern education, free from the limitations of the traditional Muslim religious establishment. Many Azerbaijanis attempted to merge liberal values with ideologies such as Pan-Islam, which was particularly attractive to Azerbaijanis as a way to bridge the gap between their unique combination of identity as Shi'i and Turks.

Third, some Azerbaijanis were beginning to write about local Azerbaijani nationalism. Most of them viewed Turkic cultural identity as an important component of Azerbaijani identity and most advocates of Azerbaijani national identity in this period referred to themselves as Azerbaijani Turks. The most important expression of the emerging Azerbaijani nationalism was the appearance of the Azerbaijani language press toward the end of the nineteenth century. In this period, Azerbaijani nationalism was significantly more prominent in north Azerbaijan, proba-

bly because of Russian authorities' discrimination against them, especially in the economic field.³¹

THE IMPACT OF RUSSIAN COLONIAL RULE ON AZERBAIJANI NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE NORTH

Within fifteen years of its conquest, Russia abolished the khanate (local principality rule) system and the *tül* land allocation system in the parts of Azerbaijan under its rule.³² These reforms, while upsetting the traditional administrative and legal systems, contributed to the internal cohesion of the Azerbaijanis of the Caucasus; they removed a level of division that had promoted local particularism and they facilitated the economic integration of northern Azerbaijan.³³

In contrast to British and French colonial rule in the Arab East, the Russian Empire struck at the power of the Muslim clerics in the areas it ruled, denying them control over education and personal status. Much of the Muslim clerical assets and properties were confiscated and the functions of the Shari'a courts were limited. Many mosques and madrasas (Muslim schools) were closed, and the remaining clerics were expected to show loyalty to Russia.³⁴ Although this policy generated animosity among many of the Azerbaijanis, it also released them, at an earlier stage than most of the Muslim world, from the constraints of the traditional clerical establishment and enabled the introduction of secular education.³⁵

As subjects of the Russian Empire, Azerbaijanis in the north were allowed to study in the institutions of the Russian civil service, and in the 1840s a group of professionally trained Azerbaijani bureaucrats emerged who had been exposed to European-style education. In addition, the Azerbaijanis learned about and participated in limited local government.

31. The Russian authorities extended more rights to the Christian Armenians than to the Muslim subjects in the Caucasus. The Armenians often served as facilitators of Moscow's policies in the area. See Alexandre Bennigsen, "Azerbaijan" (paper prepared for conference of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, The Wilson Center, May 1979), p. 4.

32. The *tül* is the traditional system of land allocation between the local nobility (*bey*s and *agha*s).

33. Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, p. 16. Strong regional identity still persists among the Azerbaijanis, in both north and south Azerbaijan.

34. Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran 1780–1828* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 1980), p. 150.

35. Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, p. 18.

The Russian Empire Municipal law of 1870 provided for the formation of local assemblies (Duma); the election of mayors and municipal councils, and in 1878, in Baku, a local government council was formed. This exposure to small-scale self-rule may have influenced the co-ethnics in Iran; Azerbaijanis in Tabriz were later the driving force of the Constitutional Revolution and the subsequent movements to preserve its accomplishments.

Russian education also led to the emergence of an Azerbaijani “intelligentsia”³⁶ who had received a Russian version of European-style education. The emergence of this secular, educated class was exceptional at this time in the Muslim world, especially in neighboring Iran, where very few had been exposed to this type of education. Thus, the Azerbaijanis began to emerge as the spearhead of many important movements for change in their part of the Muslim world. In fact, two of the main political thinkers influencing Iran at the time, Mirza Fath ‘Ali Akhundzade and ‘Abdul al-Rahim Talebzade, were Azerbaijanis who lived most of their lives and published primarily outside of Iran, in the Caucasus.³⁷ There, Muslims were free from the threats of the ulama cleric establishment and could produce more radical writings, as well as read Western writings.

As Muslims, Azerbaijanis were denied the right to become full citizens of the Russian Empire, making cultural and political assimilation within the Russian Empire unattainable. Therefore, most continued to see themselves as part of the Muslim world; their writings reflected this and tended to concentrate on the situation in the greater Muslim world, not just in Russia. This combination of anti-clericalism and radicalism, plus their concern for the plight of Muslims elsewhere, made their political writings unique and significant.

Mirza Fath ‘Ali Akhundzade is an important national figure in both Iran and Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijan, he is venerated as the founder of the modern literary Azerbaijani language, while in Iran he is considered one of the chief Iranian enlightenment ideologists. His writings and those of thinkers influenced by him, such as Malkum Khan and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, had an important impact on the Constitutional Revolution in

36. Until the Soviet takeover of north Azerbaijan, migration between the north and south was very frequent and many Iranian Azerbaijanis as well as northern were educated in the Russian-held Caucasus.

37. Mirza Fath ‘Ali Akhundzade (Akhundov), 1812–1878. He was born in Sheki. At the time of his birth, it was part of Iran. After the Turkmenchay Treaty, Sheki came under Russian rule. ‘Abdul-Rahim Talebzade (Talebov) (1834–1909). Talebzade was born in Tabriz and emigrated with his family to the Russian-held Caucasus at age sixteen, where he resided mainly in Tbilisi, Georgia, which at the time had a large Azerbaijani population.

Iran.³⁸ Akhundzade was one of the most prominent Muslim advocates of secular education. He felt that it was necessary to break the hold of the Muslim clerics on the population and expressed his atheism in very strong terms for the time. Akhundzade campaigned for a major reform in the Arabic alphabet. Akhundzade wrote many of his works in Azerbaijani, which he referred to as *Türki*, in order to best communicate his liberal ideas to the masses.³⁹ His decision to write in Azerbaijani was an important precedent that broke the prevailing custom among the Azerbaijani elite of using Persian for publications.

In 1850–55, Akhundzade published in the Azerbaijani language the first European style plays in the Muslim world. These plays satirized the problems in Azerbaijani society, which he claimed were rooted in religious superstition and ignorance. Akhundzade's plays were written predominantly in simple colloquial Azerbaijani, and have been depicted as "full-scale portraits of the customs and mores of the people of Azerbaijan."⁴⁰ They were first performed by pupils in state schools in Azerbaijan toward the end of the 1870s.⁴¹ The production of his plays in Baku was an important indication of the emerging Azerbaijani native cultural revival.

Akhundzade's career and activities epitomized the fluidity and often multi-layered collective identity among the Azerbaijanis at the time. He served as a Tsarist official, yet had a great interest in Persian culture, and emphasized the greatness of pre-Islamic Iran in his writings, which became a basis for the development of modern Iranian nationalism. He also used the term "vatan," a word of Arabic origin meaning homeland, to relate to both Iran and Azerbaijan, yet his writings in Azerbaijani played a major role in sparking the modern literary revival of the language and the consequent cultural and national assertion of Azerbaijani identity.

38. Further evidence of the magnitude of Akhundzade's impact on Iran was the discovery that some of Akhundzade's works were incorrectly attributed to Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani. For instance, Akhundzade's first volume of "Three Letters" of the strongly anti-Islamic "Kamal od Dowleh and Jalal od Dowleh" was erroneously credited by E.G. Browne to Kermani. See the note by Nikki Keddie and 'Abdul Hossein Zarrinkub in Taqizadeh, "The Background of the Constitutional Movement in Azerbaijan," p. 459.

39. Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 26.

40. Hasan Javadi, *Satire in Persian Literature* (London: Associated University Press, 1988), p. 258.

41. "Akhund-Zada," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, p. 332.

‘Abdul-Rahim Talebzade, also of Azerbaijani origin, lived and worked in the Caucasus, and had a substantial impact on the liberal political awakening that took place in Iran. Like Akhundzade, he was exposed to Western thought through Russian translations and evidently Turkish publications as well. While Talebzade advocated constitutional restraints, he supported strong central government and large integrated state structures.⁴² Writing in the Russian Empire, away from the threats of the ulama, Talebzade was, like Akhundzade, strikingly explicit in his support for the rule of secular law and anti-clericalism. He presented the ulama as a reactionary force whose unscientific approach “delayed human development,” and he called the high-ranking clerics hypocrites.⁴³

In contrast to Akhundzade, Talebzade published exclusively in Persian. His writings were read throughout Iran and the Caucasus. While Akhundzade seemed to possess a multi-sided identity, Talebzade apparently identified chiefly with Iran, which he stated should be united as one country, one nation, under one religion.⁴⁴ Yet, many of his ideas were influenced by his particular perspective as an Azerbaijani—he had the opportunity to work outside of Iran, where he could write strongly critical and anti-clerical treatises.

Talebzade played an important role in conveying ideas from Azerbaijan to Iran; he established, in Baku, the first Muslim school based on a modern secular curriculum, which later served as a model for the *Jadidist* schools in Iran that included Western, technological, and secular subjects in their curricula.

The rapid growth of the oil industries brought a major influx of foreigners to the area, and affected the formation of the identity of the Azerbaijanis in both the Russian Empire and Iran.⁴⁵ By the 1870s, Baku became a multi-ethnic commercial center. Contact with large numbers of non-Muslims strengthened the distinctive identity of the Azerbaijanis: the social discrimination they endured from the non-Muslims and their second-rate legal status in the Russian Empire helped cement the ties between the Azerbaijani elites and masses and fostered philanthropical

42. This idea was later advocated in a more extreme form by Ahmad Kasravi.

43. Quoted in Mongol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), p. 157.

44. Talebzade is quoted in M. Reza Ghods, *A Comparative Historical Study of the Causes, Development, and Effects of the Revolutionary Movements in Northern Iran in 1920–21 and 1945–46*, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1991), p. 109.

45. By 1891, Baku supplied half of the world oil consumption.

work by wealthy Azerbaijanis. In addition, the discrimination made left-wing political ideologies attractive to some Azerbaijanis.

A separate Azerbaijani identity was further strengthened by the economic differentiation of the oil industries. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Russians and other non-Muslim foreigners owned the majority of the wells, Armenians filled most of the white-collar positions, and Azerbaijanis performed most of the menial, blue-collar jobs and were over all the poorest segment of the population.⁴⁶

The oil boom in Baku also intensified contacts among the Azerbaijanis because a huge influx of Azerbaijani laborers from Iran came in search of jobs. While this strengthened the connections between the north and south, it also led to some animosity between the local population and the immigrants, who resented the superior financial position of the indigenous Azerbaijani population.⁴⁷

This migration significantly strengthened the transmitting role of the Azerbaijanis. The migrant population was exposed to political ideas being developed among the Azerbaijanis in the Russian Empire, especially constitutionalism and socialism. Azerbaijani activists in the north subsequently mobilized this migrant Azerbaijani population and formed cells of many of their political movements within Iran.

A second generation of Azerbaijani intelligentsia emerged in Baku in the 1870s. Like the first generation, they generally advocated liberal and enlightened political thought, and stressed education, secularism, and constitutionalism. However, this group was highly influenced by the *Tanzimat* (constitutional reform, 1856–76) in the Ottoman Empire. This attraction to the *Tanzimat* seemed to augment their interest in their Turkic roots and strengthened their Turkic identity.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, ethnic tension between the Turkic and Persian speakers was evident, even among the religious Shi'i. Najaf, in Iraq, is the major center of Shi'a holy places and educational institutions. Muslim students came from around the Islamic world to study there. Islam recognizes no ethnic differences among believers, but evidence shows that even at this Islamic center ethnic differences af-

46. Ronald Grigor Suny, "Nationalism and Social Class in the Russian Revolution: the Cases of Baku and Tiflis," in R.G. Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), p. 244.

47. While the local Azerbaijanis held predominantly unskilled jobs, their lot was better than that of the transient Azerbaijani population from the south. A small group of Azerbaijanis owned oil wells and industrial plants and were among Baku's wealthy residents.

fect behavior. The sojourn to Najaf, instead of binding the Azerbaijanis to other Shi'i, often accentuated their differences and strengthened separate ethnic consciousness.⁴⁸ In Najaf, Azerbaijanis overwhelmingly tended to emulate Azerbaijani ayatollahs, such as Sheikh Husayn Najaf, while the Persian students there usually followed ayatollahs of their ethnic origin. Donors to the institutions in Najaf tended to earmark funds for students from their regions or ethnic group, a practice that reinforced separation on the basis of ethnic groups. In addition, interethnic marriages were very rare among the ulama families. The Azerbaijani ("Turk") students in Najaf experienced ethnic discrimination. They complained to the Azerbaijani ayatollahs that they suffered at the hands of Arab and Persian ayatollahs, and suggested that the Persian and Arab students should not be treated equally by the Azerbaijani clerics.⁴⁹ In Najaf, students were generally housed only with members of their own ethnic group and a madrasa was built for Azerbaijani students after they had protested that they suffered discrimination by Persians. Even the *ashura* processions, the supreme unifying symbol of Shi'i Islam, were often conducted separately on an ethnic basis in Najaf.⁵⁰

POLEMICS ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the internal debate over the national identity of the Azerbaijanis accelerated. Polemics were waged between differing ideologies that often espoused clashing identities. The Azerbaijani-language press, which emerged in Baku at this time, became a major arena for polemics.

In 1875, proponents of particularistic Azerbaijani identity began publishing the newspaper *Akinchi* (The Cultivator). Written in the style of the spoken Azerbaijani language, it caused much controversy on both sides of the Araz. *Akinchi* was circulated among the Azerbaijanis in Iran. Many local proponents of Pan-Islam protested against publishing a journal in any language but Persian. *Akinchi's* editor, Hasan bay Zarbadi, often coined new words in Azerbaijani to avoid using Persian and Arabic terms. In 1877, *Akinchi* was forced to close down by the Russian authorities, on the premise that a Turkic-language newspaper should not be published in Russia during the Russian-Ottoman War.

48. Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The 'Ulama' of Najaf and Karbala* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 31.

49. Ibid., pp. 33–34.

50. Ibid., p. 34.

One of the other newspapers founded in this period was *Kashkul* (Dervish's ritual dish). *Kashkul* introduced in writing the term "Azerbaijani Turk," and dealt directly with the question of Azerbaijani peoplehood and the ties between the Azerbaijanis on both sides of the Araz, while drawing a distinction between the nation and the religious community. In *Kashkul*, authors criticized the use of the term *millet* to denote both nation and community.⁵¹ An imaginary dialogue published in *Kashkul* reflects the exploration of identity in Azerbaijan:

Question: What is your nationality (*millet*)?

Answer: I am a Muslim and a Turk.

Question: Are you an Ottoman?

Answer: No, I am *bijanli* (a play on words in Azerbaijani meaning "soulless").

Question: Where is the land of the *bijanlis*?

Answer: As far as I can tell, on the other side of the Araz live the Azeris—on this side the *bijanlis*. Together, it makes Azerbaijan. But separately we are *bijanlis*.

Question: Your language is Turkic so you are a Turk?

Answer: There is no word to describe my position. I am a Turk, but *bijanli*.

Question: Instead of being a *bijanli* Turk, why don't you solve your dilemma by calling yourself an Azerbaijani Turk?⁵²

The post-*Akinchi* press in Azerbaijan was written predominantly in Ottoman Turkish and turned away from the colloquial Azerbaijani language.⁵³ The written use of colloquial Azerbaijani received a decisive blow in 1891, when the Russian government ordered the closing of *Kashkul*.

Until 1904, no other Turkic-language journal received permission to publish in the north, but Azerbaijanis continued to air many social questions in the Russian-language *Kaspîi*. The majority of its contributors advocated self-government for the Muslims of the Caucasus, within the framework of a liberalized and reformed Russia. Yet, in its liberal spirit, *Kaspîi* printed articles reflecting a variety of orientations, including those espousing Pan-Turkism. *Kaspîi* was edited by 'Ali Mardan-bay Topchibashi,⁵⁴ and was published under the sponsorship of the Baku oil baron Zeynal 'Abdin Taghiyev.

51. *Kāshkūl*, No. 22 (1891), quoted in Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan 1905-1920*, p. 32.

52. Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan 1905-1920*, p. 32.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

54. 'Ali Mardan bay Topchibashi (1868-1934).

The Azerbaijani-language press was renewed with the publication of *Sharq-i Rus*. Its editor, Mehmed Agha Shakhtakhtinskii, was a proponent of secular nationalism as the means for progress for Muslims.⁵⁵

In Iran as well, some Azerbaijanis took an interest in the literary revival of the Azerbaijani language. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Mirza Shadiq Asadulla-oglu published a book advocating the use of Azerbaijani as the language of instruction in elementary schools, and he wrote textbooks in the language.⁵⁶

In the second half of the nineteenth century, some Azerbaijanis espoused Pan-Islamic ideology,⁵⁷ and many of the supporters of Pan-Islam identified with Iran at this time. In addition, many Azerbaijanis were interested in their Turkic identity in a cultural sense, but few supported political unity with other Turkic peoples.⁵⁸ However, some Azerbaijanis played an important role in the development of Pan-Turkism in Istanbul. The most significant was 'Ali bay Huseynzade (1864–1941). In Istanbul, Huseynzade became one of the founders of *Ittihad-i Osmaniyye*, which was a forerunner of the Young Turk movement. Huseynzade's poem, *Turan*, was the first poetic call for unity among all ethnic Turks.⁵⁹ The chief ideologist of the Pan-Turkist movement, Ziya Gökalp, cited Huseynzade as one of his most important teachers, from whom he adopted the slogan "Turklashtirmek, Islamlashtirmek, Avrupalashtirmek" (Turkify, Islamicize, Europeanize).⁶⁰ Ziya Gökalp's use of this slogan was embraced as one of the main mottoes of the Pan-Turkist movement.

55. See Edward J. Lazzerini, "Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani from the Perspective of a Russian Muslim," in Kedourie and Haim, *Towards a Modern Iran: Studies in Thought, Politics and Society*, p. 57.

56. Mirza Shadiq Asadulla-oghli, quoted in Sakina Berengian, *Azeri and Persian Literary Works in Twentieth-Century Iranian Azerbaijan* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1988), p. 47.

57. Many Azerbaijanis claim that Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani, the first modern proponent of Pan-Islam, was actually of Azerbaijani origin. Afghani was born in the late 1830s in an Azerbaijani-speaking village outside Hamadan, which indicates that he grew up in an Azerbaijani-speaking area. See Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 62.

58. Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, p. 33.

59. Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, p. 69.

60. Ziya Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism* (Leiden, 1968), pp. 5–6; and U. Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp* (London: 1950), pp. 107–108, quoted in Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, p. 34.

Azerbaijani political attitudes were influenced by the confrontations with the Armenians during the Armenian-Tatar War (1903–05) that waged in the Caucasus.⁶¹ It also affected the Azerbaijanis in Iran, for many of the Muslim victims of the violence were migrant Azerbaijani workers from the south.⁶² In response to these events, a clandestine Azerbaijan self-defense organization, *Difai* (defense) was formed in Ganja, which represented an important shift away from dependence on Russian protection. This was one of the first developments in a series of events that gave Ganja a more pronounced Azerbaijani nationalism than Baku, among the cities in the north.⁶³

THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA, 1905–20

In 1905–08, three major political revolutions occurred in the areas surrounding the Azerbaijanis: the 1905 Russian Revolution, the Constitutional Revolution of Iran in 1906, and the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. Many Azerbaijanis played a role in these events, which also catalyzed developments in their own national identity and orientation. These three revolutions were followed by further revolutions and counterrevolutions in these three countries, a world war, and periods of brief foreign occupation of parts of Azerbaijan by Ottoman and later British forces.

This period is marked by a number of substantial political developments. First, an Azerbaijani left-wing movement emerged. Second, an all-out Azerbaijani nationalism developed, which is best illustrated by the foundation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in the north. Prior to the establishment of the republic, it seems that few Azerbaijanis felt complete independence was attainable, and had coupled their nationalism with an orientation toward a foreign power which they would join in a federation or confederation that could provide protection. Third, and in contrast to the north, many Azerbaijanis in Iran identified with and participated in the general Iranian revolutionary movements, and many advocated embracing Persian culture and language. Fourth, the role of the Azerbaijanis as conveyors of ideas and activists was especially pronounced in this period in Russia, Turkey, and Iran; activists in each of these countries passed the lessons they had learned to an adjoining arena. Finally, in almost all the movements they joined, the Azerbaijanis contin-

61. This was a series of intensive violent clashes between the Muslims and Armenians in the Caucasus. In the Russian Empire, non-Muslims referred to Azerbaijanis and many other Muslim groups by the misnomer “Tatar.”

62. Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, p. 40.

63. By 1897, the local population in Ganja had begun to call themselves “Azerbaijani Turk.” See Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, p. 79.

ued to be at the forefront of Muslims advocating the adoption of liberal values and enlightenment. One example of this is the insistence on the emancipation of women advocated by political parties in both north and south Azerbaijan.

Revolutionary reforms in Russia, Iran, and Turkey ushered in a period of relative freedom that allowed the airing of views that had previously been censored. Indeed, the revolutionary events not only helped to shape the ideas of the Azerbaijanis, but also allowed their publication.

Following the 1905 limited constitutional Russian Revolution and the end to the ban on Turkic-language newspapers, a plethora of Azerbaijani newspapers, both in the local Azerbaijani vernacular and in modified Ottoman Turkish, began to appear in north Azerbaijan. The press reflected the Azerbaijani engagement with the question of self-identity, and the related polemics, such as the debate over what should be the preferred language and the appropriate remedies for improving their social situation. Among the terms that began to appear at this time in the Azerbaijani press are *milliyatchilik* (nationalism), and the foreign loan word, *nasyonalizm*.⁶⁴

The choice of language generally reflected the political and often the national identity orientation of the newspaper. The newspapers *Sharq-i Rus*, *Taza Hayat*, and *Hayat* were written in Azerbaijani, and espoused a liberal, secular, ethnic-nationalist position. *Fuzuyat*, which was written in modified Ottoman Turkish, reflected the authors' secular-liberal orientation and support for strong ties with Turkey and Pan-Turkism. It was edited by 'Ali bay Huseynzade, who returned to Baku from Istanbul following the Young Turk Revolution. Huseynzade wrote that the Azerbaijanis, as Oghuz Turks, were basically the same people as the Ottoman Turks, and thus there was no need for separate identification.

Many of the Azerbaijani journals had an extensive following and much influence in Iran and the Muslim world. The most important and well-known journal was *Molla Nasreddin*, which rejected writing in foreign languages, such as Persian and Russian, and Ottoman Turkic grammar. It supported Azerbaijani in the style spoken by most of the people. One of the famous caricatures from the journal depicts an Azerbaijani man and three foreigners (representing Russian, Persian, and Arabic) trying to stuff tongues into his mouth; he responds, "Hey, brothers, I was not born tongue-less that you have to stuff my mouth with these tongues."⁶⁵

64. Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920*, p. 57.

65. *Molla Nasreddin*, December 22, 1906.

After restrictions were relaxed in north Azerbaijan and after the 1905 revolution in Russia, the local intelligentsia led a cultural revival that included the founding of additional Azerbaijani-language schools. One of the highlights of this cultural revival was the staging in 1908 of the Azerbaijani opera, *Leyli and Majnun*, based on the poem of the famed Turkic poet, Fizuli, set to the music of the native composer Uzeir Hajibayli. This was the first Western-style opera performed in a language of a Muslim people. At this time, many Azerbaijanis expressed a desire to educate their children in the Azerbaijani language. In 1906, the Conference of Muslim Teachers convened in Baku and addressed the issue of the “nationalization of primary schools.”⁶⁶ The teachers stressed the need to use Azerbaijani as the language of instruction in the schools and the importance of developing Azerbaijani-language textbooks, and pointed out that Muslim parents opposed sending their children to Russian-language schools. In addition, in July 1913 workers held a strike; one of their main demands was the establishment of Azerbaijani-language school.

In the Russian Empire, Azerbaijani national identity was affected by the discrimination of the Russian authorities against Muslims, and the competition and tension with the Armenians, who were granted preferential treatment by the imperial authorities. In addition, separate Azerbaijani identity was fostered by both the Muslim and Russian political parties, which tended to emphasize the Azerbaijanis’ disadvantageous position in an effort to recruit them into their various movements.⁶⁷ Violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis erupted a number of times in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and this affected the identity and political development of each of the sides.

Following the first Russian Revolution in 1905, leftist political forces became prominent among Azerbaijanis, especially in Baku. Among the most important of them was the *Himmet*, which drew its members chiefly from Azerbaijanis in Baku and the migrant workers from Iran. It was the predecessor of the communist parties of both Azerbaijan and Iran. Within the *Himmet*, a separate section, *Adalat*, was formed for the migrant workers from Iran, which later served as the basis for the socialist movement within Iran. *Adalat* published the bilingual Azerbaijani-Persian newspaper, *Hurriyet*. The *Himmet* was associated with the Russian Social-Democrat Workers’ Party (RSDWP). The Azerbaijanis attained a unique status for the *Himmet* among the socialist organizations operating in the Russian

66. Quoted by Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, p. 201.

67. Mangol Bayat, *Iran’s First Revolution: Shi’ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 79.

empire: At the time of its founding in 1904, Lenin sanctioned their request that the *Himmet* retain its ethnic character and remain an all-Muslim group. In contrast, the Jewish Bund's request to retain exclusively Jewish membership was denied.⁶⁸

The unique nationalistic character of the Azerbaijani left is also illustrated by the activities of some of its activists, such as Nariman Narimanov, one of the founders of the *Himmet*, who later became the Chairman of the Government of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. Narimanov worked for the language rights for the Azerbaijanis, and in 1906 served as the co-chairman of a committee set up in Baku to address language rights in education.⁶⁹ At the time of the Soviet takeover of Baku, Narimanov asked the Russian Bolsheviks that Azerbaijan be granted independence.⁷⁰ Another *Himmet* leader, Azizbeykov, was also active in trying to set up educational institutions in the Azerbaijani language.

An additional sign of the national cohesion of the Azerbaijani left is that Azerbaijani workers showed little signs of class solidarity or cooperation with Russian or Armenian workers; clashes between them were frequent. During the period of the independent Azerbaijani Republic (1918–20), *Himmet* restricted its membership to Muslims. Even after the Soviet takeover of Azerbaijan, many Himmetist supporters sought to sustain Azerbaijani autonomy within a Soviet framework.⁷¹

At this time, no important figures in Azerbaijan called for the adoption of Russian cultural identity. In any event, the extreme Russian discrimination against Muslims effectively blocked assimilation. Some liberal bourgeois figures, such as Topchibashi, advocated close cooperation with Russia after the 1905 Revolution, although he did not express any form of self-identity with it. Even Topchibashi, after his expectations of achieving Muslim equality under Russian rule were not met, turned to Azerbaijani nationalistic activity. Most activists in north Azerbaijan had an ambivalent relation toward Russia, an important trend throughout the twentieth century. While they resented the Russian discrimination and condescension, they appreciated Russia's role as a conduit of secular and

68. Bennigsen, "Azerbaijan," p. 7; and Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 12.

69. Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, p. 55.

70. Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union*, p. 56. Narimanov claimed that as an independent country, Azerbaijan would be a role model for communist revolution in other Muslim-populated states.

71. Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan 1905-1920*, p. 194.

scientific education. Since most groups in north Azerbaijan then believed that full Azerbaijani political independence was infeasible, many felt that some sort of federative relationship between Azerbaijan and Russia was inevitable.

Between 1905 and the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, some Azerbaijanis supported the establishment of a political federation with other peoples of the Caucasus. When the Russian Empire collapsed, Azerbaijan joined the Transcaucasian Federation, which fell five weeks after its founding. No major proponents of Caucasian identity emerged at this time.

After the 1908 Young Turk Revolution in Turkey, the language debate and the question of the identity of the Azerbaijanis as Turks intensified in north Azerbaijan. In Baku, Pan-Turkists advocated that all the Turkic peoples adopt the newly modified Ottoman Turkish, now devoid of many of its Arabic and Persian words. In 1912, Azerbaijanis who supported the adoption of Ottoman Turkish as the literary language of the Azerbaijanis began publishing *Shalala* in the new Ottoman Turkish. The declared goal of the newspaper was to “serve the cause of the unification of Turkic peoples on the basis of the Ottoman dialect used by the most advanced of all literatures in the Turkic-speaking world.”⁷²

The Azerbaijanis were singled out for special attention by the Ottoman Turks, due to their special affinity with them; their languages stem from the same Turkic group, the Oghuz. During this revolutionary period, a new ideological movement, *oghuzism*, emerged in Istanbul, stressing the special ties within this Turkic group. Some of the Azerbaijanis living in Istanbul were active in this group, while others there joined the Pan-Turkish movement that emerged after the Young Turk Revolution. A prominent Pan-Turkish proponent was Ahmad bay Agaoglu.⁷³ He became the leading writer of one of the most important Pan-Turkist journals, *Türk Yurdu*. Agaoglu’s articles on Pan-Turkism and the Turkic nation in *Türk Yurdu* reflected the special Azerbaijani desire to bridge the Shi’a-Sunni split, which was especially important to the Azerbaijanis since they were both Shi’i and Turks, and were strongly anticlerical, as were many Azerbaijani intellectuals.

A few Azerbaijanis were active at this time in the Pan-Islamic movement in the Russian Empire, and especially in the formation of the *Ittifaq al-Muslim*. The Azerbaijanis’ activities within this movement reflected

72. *Shälälä*, No. 21 (1913), quoted in Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan 1905–1920*, p. 62.

73. Earlier in his career, Agaoglu had advocated Pan-Islamist ideology. Agaoglu is often referred to with a Russian name ending as Aghayev.

their unique perspective; they called for the need to put aside sectarian Sunni-Shi'i divisions, and for the Muslims of Russia to unite in the struggle to attain their rights within the empire. The members of this movement opposed Turkic nationalism and any form of particularistic Azerbaijani nationalism.

GROWING AZERBAIJANI IDENTITY: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AZERBAIJAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The Young Turk Revolution in Turkey in 1908 gave impetus to Turkic cultural identity and to local nationalist trends that were emerging among the Azerbaijanis in the Russian Empire. These trends were accelerated by the return of absolute rule in Iran, which made Iran less attractive. The disillusionment with the Revolution of 1905 in Russia, which failed to end the extreme discrimination against the Muslims in the Russian Empire, also strengthened this process. Nevertheless, few Azerbaijanis called for full political independence; most saw this goal as unrealistic until the collapse of the Russian Empire during the 1917 Russian Revolution.

The rising Azerbaijani identity was embodied in the *Musavat* (Equality) Party, which was founded in 1911. Its first published platform included a commitment to secular Turkic nationalism and the establishment of an autonomous Azerbaijan in association with Russia, within a federation of free and equal states.⁷⁴ *Musavat* strove to encompass Muslims of different political orientations and create unity among them. The use of both phrases, "autonomous" and "free and independent," in the different platforms suggests that the authors were not clear on the actual degree of independence they desired for Azerbaijan, or at least they feared to call forthrightly for independence. *Musavat* formed cells within Iran, especially in Tabriz, Rasht, Ardebil, Khoi, and Maku, and also in the border area.⁷⁵ The collapse of the Russian army in the Caucasus during the Revolution gave the *Musavats* the opportunity to establish an independent state, initially as part of a Transcaucasian federation. When the federation dissolved, Azerbaijan became an independent state. During the period surrounding the declaration of the new state, Nasib bay Ussubekov, one of the chief activists of *Musavat*, expressed reservations about proclaiming a state in north Azerbaijan without the south, at a time when he estimated that Azerbaijani nationalist sentiments were high there as well.⁷⁶

74. Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, p. 62.

75. Ibid., p. 129.

76. Ibid., p. 65.

On May 28, 1918, the Azerbaijan Provincial Council proclaimed the establishment of the new state, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (Azerbaijan *Khalq Jumhuriyet*). The declaration stated that:

1. Azerbaijan is a fully sovereign state; it consists of the southern and eastern parts of Transcaucasia under the authority of the Azerbaijani people.
2. It is resolved that the form of government of the independent Azerbaijani state will be a democratic republic.
3. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic is determined to establish friendly relations with all, especially with the neighboring nations and states.
4. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic guarantees to all its citizens within its borders full civil and political rights, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, class, profession, or gender.
5. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic encourages the free development of all nationalities inhabiting its territory.
6. Until the Azerbaijani Constituent Assembly is convened, the supreme authority over Azerbaijan is vested in a universally elected National Council and the provisional government responsible to this Council.⁷⁷

The retention of the name Azerbaijan fostered fears in Iran that the new republic intended, with Ottoman support, to detach south Azerbaijan from Iran. In an attempt to allay Iranian apprehension, the government referred to the new republic as the *Caucasian Republic of Azerbaijan* in much of its correspondence abroad.

The constitution of the new republic declared equal rights for all citizens regardless of religion, ethnic origin, or gender, making Azerbaijan the first Muslim state to grant women the vote.

Polemics continued to be waged over the national identity of the new state. Azerbaijan's external orientation shifted rapidly, mostly on the basis of which foreign state seemed willing to support the fledgling state's independence, and less on the basis of ideological factors or as a result of national identity.⁷⁸ The republican government declared Turkish the

77. Näsib Näsibzadə, *Azərbaycan Demokratik Respublikası* (Baku: Elm, 1990), pp. 43–44.

78. Some Azerbaijanis unsuccessfully attempted to create an alliance with Great Britain, while others initiated negotiations with Iran toward confederation, mainly out of a desire to achieve ties with south Azerbaijan. See Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920*, pp. 157–158.

official language of the state. State employees were to conduct all business in that language within two years, in an attempt to end the predominance of Russian. A debate was conducted over whether to adopt Azerbaijani Turkish versus Ottoman Turkish. The *Musavat* Party Program, issued at the Second Party Congress in December 1919, stated that the Ottoman dialect would be mandatory in Azerbaijan's high schools. Turkic language instruction was introduced at all levels in all the schools in Azerbaijan, and the study of Russian history was replaced by the history of the Turkic peoples. One of *Musavat's* early goals was the opening of a university in Baku with instruction in Azerbaijani. In September 1919, this goal was realized. After the Soviet takeover of the republic, Russian was imposed as the primary language at the university.

The Red Army of the newly established Soviet state attempted to reconquer the territories of the former Russian empire that had declared independence. On April 27, 1920, Soviet forces, with the assistance of Azerbaijani communist supporters, conquered the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, bringing its independent statehood to an end after only twenty-three months and incorporating it in the territory of the Soviet Union.⁷⁹

Identity in Iran

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Iranian Azerbaijanis spearheaded the Iranian Constitutional movement, and most of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia identified as Iranians. Two main trends of identity emerged among the Azerbaijani activists in Iran at this time: Some supported the Persianization of the Azerbaijanis and other minorities in Iran, to increase unity and ease the development of a modern state. Others advocated the establishment in Iran of a reformed constitutionally-based and supra-ethnic regime that would allow for cultural autonomy. Some members of this group supported autonomy for the Azerbaijanis and the other ethnic groups in Iran as a means to form liberal political structures in Iran, at least on a local scale.

Generally, activists who had been educated in the Caucasus and had extended contacts with their co-ethnics in the north, including the leftists,

79. Swietochowski cites a Soviet source that claims that in April 1920 there were approximately 4,000 members of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan. In Swietochowski's opinion, the local communists were a less critical factor leading to the fall of the ADR than public fear of the overwhelming Soviet military might and infighting among the Azerbaijani nationalist groups. See Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, p. 91.

tended to support the preservation of Azerbaijani cultural and linguistic rights within Iran. In contrast, those who had not had extended contact with their co-ethnics in the north, and were most often educated in Tehran, usually supported the Persianization of the Azerbaijanis in Iran.

Tabriz, the major Azerbaijani-populated city, was the center of revolutionary activity in Iran in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The demonstrations that triggered the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906 began in Tabriz. The majority of the Azerbaijani activists in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution wished to pursue goals that would affect the regime in all of Iran. However, in their efforts to preserve the constitutional regime, Azerbaijanis, on a number of occasions, threatened to separate from Iran in their confrontation with the Shah's regime.⁸⁰ This indicates at least an awareness of their distinctive identity within the Iranian framework, and a perception of its potential political power.

A few writers in Iran were working to strengthen particularistic Azerbaijani identity in this period. Among them was the Azerbaijani educator Mirza Hasan Roshdiye, who in 1905 published a textbook, *Vatan Dili*, in Tabriz. Written in Azerbaijani, it was based on Azerbaijani literature and folklore.⁸¹ Some writers contributed to the bilingual Azerbaijani-Persian newspaper, *Azerbayjan*, which began to appear in 1907. It published varying views on the question of national identity, and emulated the satirical journal, *Molla Nasreddin*.⁸²

After the 1906 Constitutional Revolution in Iran, local councils, or *anjumans*, were established to supervise local parliamentary elections. The Tabriz Anjuman extended its authority far beyond this role and even remained in permanent session after the elections, a move that illustrates Azerbaijani desire for local rule.⁸³

In 1908, the Qajar Shah, Mohammad 'Ali, attempted to reverse the successes of the Constitutional Revolution and reimpose autocratic rule in Iran. Under the leadership of Sattar Khan, an Azerbaijani, the residents of Tabriz were the first to stand up against the Shah. Sattar Khan's troops captured Tabriz in the name of the Tabriz Anjuman, and replaced the Ira-

80. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 91.

81. Mirza Hasan Roshdiye (1850–1943), *Vatan Dili* (Tabriz, 1905).

82. *Azərbaycan* often published caricatures in which the lines spoken by the sympathetic peasant are in Azerbaijani, while the lines spoken by the landowner, the tax collector, etc., are in Persian, reflecting an intertwining of ethnic and social grievances.

83. Janet Afary, "Peasant Rebellion of the Caspian Region during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906–1909," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 23 (May 1991), p. 142.

nian flag with the flag of the Tabriz Anjuman. Sattar Khan declared that the “nation of Azerbaijan” refused to recognize the sovereignty of Mohammad ‘Ali Shah, and declared Tabriz the temporary capital of Iran.

While the Azerbaijani activists in the Constitutional Revolution in Iran had mostly advocated the Persianization of the Azerbaijanis and the centralization of government in Iran, literature appeared during the period of Sattar Khan’s revolt that glorified Azerbaijan’s role in Iranian history, called Azerbaijan the homeland, and extolled the virtues of the Azerbaijanis. In addition, the publication of an Azerbaijani-language newspaper in Tabriz, *Ana Dili* (Mother Tongue), began at this time; it stressed indigenous Azerbaijani language and culture and often published literary works from north Azerbaijan.⁸⁴ Sattar Khan had close ties with the left-wing *Firqeh-i Ijtima’iyyun ‘Ammiyyun* party, which was based in the Caucasus.⁸⁵

The end of the Qajar monarchy was preceded by three revolts in north Iran: in Gilan, Khorasan, and Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani activists from both the north and south, as well as other groups from the Caucasus, were active in the uprisings. These revolts were led by reform-minded individuals who believed that the establishment of democratic reforms in their own regions would lead to the basis for liberalization of the rest of Iran.⁸⁶ Of the three revolts, the revolt led by Kheyabani in Azerbaijan was the most threatening to the Iranian regime. Kheyabani, a well-educated cleric, had embraced radical ideas while studying in the Caucasus.⁸⁷ He was exiled by the Turkish forces that had occupied Iranian Azerbaijan in 1915, because he rejected the Pan-Islamist ideology that the Turks were trying to promote at the time and had warned against what he viewed as their attempts to annex the province.⁸⁸ Early in the revolt he convened a conference of representatives from most of the towns in Iranian Azerbaijan. After the conference, a bilingual Azerbaijani-Persian newspaper, *Tajaddod*, was established and the name of the Azerbaijani branch of the Democratic Party was changed to the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, emphasizing its separateness. The Tabriz Democrats established a chap-

84. Ghods, *A Comparative Historical Study*, pp. 135–136; and Berengian, *Azeri and Persian Literary Works in Twentieth-Century Iranian Azerbaijan*, pp. 47–48.

85. Afary, “Peasant Rebellion of the Caspian Region during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906–1909,” p. 151.

86. Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and Autonomy in Twentieth-Century Iran*, p. 3.

87. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 112.

88. Ghods, *A Comparative Historical Study*, p. 171.

ter in Baku, which in 1918 began to publish its own newspaper, *Azerbaijan*.⁸⁹ Among the demands the conference in Azerbaijan sent to Iran's central government were the appointment of a governor of Azerbaijan who would be trusted by the people of the province; the immediate reconvening of the National Assembly in Tehran; and the reconvening of the *anjumans*, as provided by the constitution.⁹⁰ In his closing speech at the conference, Khiyabani charged that Azerbaijan, despite the sacrifices that it had made in the Constitutional Revolution, received neither fair parliamentary representation nor equitable budgetary allocations from the central government.⁹¹ When the Shah rejected their demands, Khiyabani proceeded to take over and govern the whole province of Azerbaijan, establishing the autonomous government of *Azadistan* (Land of Freedom) in April 1920.

Khiyabani decreed the right to use the Azerbaijani language in the province. His insistence on protecting journalists who wrote in Azerbaijani led to an open split with Ahmad Kasravi, who was deported from Iranian Azerbaijan because he criticized the use of the Azerbaijani language in the province.⁹² Like many of his northern Azerbaijani counterparts, Khiyabani differentiated between identifying culturally as Turks and forging political links to Turkey; he supported the right of the residents of the province to use their native Turkic language, and also struggled against the Ottoman presence and its influence in Azerbaijan. Khiyabani also promoted a local literary revival under the direction of Mirza Taqi Khan.

Khiyabani's demands reflected both Azerbaijani and Iranian identity. Khiyabani did not aspire to separate the Azerbaijan provinces from Iran, but advocated a change between center and periphery relations and the retention of language rights for Azerbaijanis. He strove, as well, for the formation of a reformed democratic Iran that would allow for cultural pluralism. Khiyabani used the term *vatan* to refer to both Iran and Azerbaijan.⁹³ As part of the reforms he instituted during the short-lived autonomy, Khiyabani worked to establish Azerbaijani-language schools

89. Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, p. 65.

90. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 112.

91. Similar claims were made sixty years later by Azerbaijani activists, referring to their sacrifices in the Islamic Revolution.

92. Ervand Abrahamian, "Communism and Communalism in Iran: The Tudah and the Firqah-i Dimokrat," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1970), p. 294.

93. Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, p. 99.

in Iranian Azerbaijan, often employing teachers from north Azerbaijan or Turkey.⁹⁴

Khiyabani's reforms and cultural programs were cut short after his rebellion was quelled in September 1920 by Reza Khan's forces, which dispersed the Democrats and later executed Khiyabani. Reza Khan's success in subduing the autonomy movements was an important rallying point in his rise to power as Shah of Iran.

TIES AND MUTUAL INFLUENCES ACROSS THE ARAZ

Despite the division of the Azerbaijanis under separate and very different empires, they continued to interact as one intellectual and cultural sphere, and the commercial and family ties between the two populations remained vibrant. For most of the period, there was constant migration between the two sides, and each side was a refuge when turmoil occurred on the opposite side. The Azerbaijanis continued to play an important role as a conduit of ideas and as activists in Russia, Iran, and Turkey.

Azerbaijanis from Iran who had significant contact with co-ethnics from the north tended to be more attached to their Azerbaijani identity than those who did not have this contact. They usually strove to promote this ethnic culture even within the framework of other ideological movements, such as communism or Iranian nationalism. Many of the major liberal Azerbaijani political activists in Iran had spent time in the Caucasus, and had connections with and received aid from Azerbaijanis there. For instance, a group of Tabriz intellectuals who had spent time in Baku founded a literary circle in 1895 that later served as a basis for liberal oriented political and education activity and for secret and semi-secret activity devoted to constitutionalism.

Zeynal 'Abdin Taghiyev's philanthropical activities illustrate the social and cultural cohesion of Azerbaijanis from both sides of the Araz in the nineteenth century, and how identity with co-ethnics often extended beyond the border. Taghiyev's activities touched Azerbaijanis beyond his home in the north. In Tabriz, he underwrote the first *Jadidist* high school which served as a model throughout Iran and a modern library, and he funded the distribution of liberal newspapers to clerical students in Najaf.⁹⁵

Free from the threats and limitations of the ulama, an educated and secular Azerbaijani intelligentsia emerged in the Russian Empire before anything similar in most places in the Muslim world. Many members of

94. Ibid., p. 97.

95. Ibid., *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, p. 23.

this group were exposed to and adopted liberal political thinking. These ideas were easily transmitted to their co-ethnics in Iran. Through their frequent contacts with each other and common language, Azerbaijanis channeled ideas and influence to both sides of the Araz. In addition, many publications from Baku were distributed among Azerbaijanis in Iran and had significant impact there. The most prominent are the works of Miza Alekber Sabir Tahirzade, published mostly in the Azerbaijani journal *Molla Nasreddin*.⁹⁶ Sabir's works influenced not only the Azerbaijanis of Iran, but also intellectuals throughout the country. Many Iranian political movements, such as most of the Iranian socialist parties, were organized and run from Baku. The Azerbaijani migrant workers who formed the bulk of the membership worked in Azerbaijan for only part of the year, and brought back with them radical ideas and forms of protest when they returned to Iran.⁹⁷ Another illustration of Azerbaijanis' role as conveyors of activity was that volunteers from the Caucasus, many of Azerbaijani origin, joined in the struggle to retain the constitutional regime in Iran. For example, fighters from the Caucasus were among the forces that set out from Gilan and overthrew Muhammad 'Ali in Tehran on July 16, 1909, and arms were sent from Baku to the fighters in Tabriz.

On both sides of the border, many Azerbaijani intellectuals active during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were often affected by the same revolutionary events. The intellectuals' careers also illustrate how both Azerbaijan functioned as one intellectual and political sphere with much movement between the two regions. The career of Mehmet Emin Rasolzade best reflects this mobility and the interconnections of events in north and Iranian Azerbaijan. One of the founders of the *Himmet* socialist party in Baku, Rasolzade also had been active during the Constitutional Revolution in Iran, and worked as the editor of the Persian newspaper, *Iran-i Nou*. When Iran returned to despotic rule, Rasolzade spent a period in Istanbul, and then became one of the leading activists of the Azerbaijani nationalist Musavat Party in Baku. There, he edited the Azerbaijani journal *Achiq Soz* from 1913. In his contributions to this paper, he referred to the Azerbaijanis by the term *Turk*. In 1918, Rasolzade was elected to serve as the first head of the National Council of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

96. Miza Alekber Sabir Tahirzade was born in 1862 in Shamakhi.

97. Afary, "Peasant Rebellion of the Caspian Region during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906–1909," p. 141.

Conclusions

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, it is difficult to speak of a separate “Azerbaijani” identity among the residents of this area; but rather, there was a separate Turkic, or Muslim, and regional identity. Even in the Safavid period, when the Azerbaijanis formed the ruling elite of Iran, and strongly identified with the Iranian state and the Shi‘i people of Iran, a distinct Turkic identity existed and Turco-Persian tensions remained high. Later, balancing between those groups became a mark of the Qajar regime. Thus, even in this period, there were distinctions of identity between Turks and Persians in the area. Nevertheless, during the Safavid and Qajar periods, Azerbaijanis could identify with Iran in supra-ethnic terms, especially since the political leadership of these regimes shared a common ethnic and linguistic background with them, and in this period ethnic identity was less pronounced in general. There was no inherent conflict between identifying with the Iranian state and Turkic culture. In later years, the Safavids came to symbolize for many Azerbaijanis their own sovereignty and leadership over Iran. Today, when some Azerbaijanis say that they identify themselves as Iranians, they are not necessarily implying that they identify with Persian culture and leadership, but rather with an Iran that accommodates both Turkic and Persian culture and language, along the lines of the Safavid model.

The imposition of Shi‘a on the population of Iran led to important developments in terms of collective identity. Adherence to Shi‘a expanded the ties between Azerbaijanis and Persians and linked them together in the Shi‘i state of Iran. Yet, as the only major Turkic-speaking Shi‘i group, Azerbaijanis in Iran forged a separate Azerbaijani identity that cemented the ties between the Turkic speakers on both sides of the Araz River. Thus, the Shi‘i factor that unites the Azerbaijanis with Iran also links them with Azerbaijanis beyond the borders of Iran.

In later periods the cultural orientation chosen by certain Azerbaijanis was not always directly translated into a political orientation. For instance, interest in and identification with Turkic culture did not always lead to a desire for political alliance with or orientation toward Turkey.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, forces from different ends of the political spectrum promoted Azerbaijani cultural rights in the Russian Empire, especially the use of their language. In Baku, many groups, including Marxist ones such as the *Himmet* and the *Firqeh*, as well as individuals such as Nariman Narimanov and Mehmet Emin Rasolzade, supported Azerbaijani cultural rights. Even more orthodox Marxist groups were often willing to use rhetoric in support of

Azerbaijani cultural and language rights, which illustrates their assessment that these goals were popular among many Azerbaijanis and that such a stance would help mobilize support. In contrast, many prominent Azerbaijanis in Iran advocated assimilation into Persian language and culture. One of the reasons for the difference may be that in the Russian Empire, Muslims could not assimilate into the majority group. In Iran, in contrast, Azerbaijanis and members of other minority groups could choose to identify themselves as Iranians. Furthermore, Russian discrimination against Azerbaijanis and other minorities and Azerbaijani contact with non-Muslims in the Russian Empire seem to have reinforced the minorities' distinctive identities. In contrast to their co-ethnics in the north, during the nineteenth century, Azerbaijanis in Iran had much less frequent contact with non-Azerbaijanis in Iran. In this period in Iran, provincial power was predominant, and the Qajar Shahs had limited control and influence outside of the capital.⁹⁸ Moreover, official cultural discrimination emerged later in Iran, as part of Reza Shah's centralization policies; as will be shown in the next chapter, this had a significant impact on the collective identity of the Azerbaijanis in Iran.

98. See Nikki R. Keddie, "The Iranian Power Structure and Social Change 1800–1969: An Overview," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 2 (1971), p. 3; and Shaul Bakhash, "Center-Periphery Relations in Nineteenth-Century Iran," *Iranian Studies* Vol. 14 (Winter–Spring 1981), p. 35.