

Assimilation Policies Applied to Iranian Turks

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Abstract

The factors underlying the policies implemented by the Iranian administration against the Turks in the region are investigated in this study. Iranian governments state that the reason for their repression policies is based on the idea of national unity, unity and solidarity. The Turks living in Iran, who rely on their demographic superiority in the country, demand equal rights with the Persians. The Iranian government regarded such demands of Turks as alarming and repressed them with brute force. Iran has not only applied this policy to the Turks, but other ethnic groups have also been affected by this policy. However, the ethnic group most affected by the Persianization policy is the Turks. Since the Turks, who are very crowded in population, have always been perceived as a threat by the Iranians. The purpose of the article is to reveal political and sociological dimensions of assimilation policies applied to Iranian Turks.

Keywords: Turks, Iran, Assimilation, Pressure, Persianization

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İran Türklerine Uygulanan Asimilasyon Politikası

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Öz

Çalışmada incelenen konu, İran yönetiminin bölgedeki Türklere karşı uyguladığı politikaların temelinde yatan unsurun ne olduğu ile alakalıdır. İran yönetimleri, uyguladığı baskı politikalarının gerekçesini ulusal bütünlük, birlik ve beraberlik düşüncesi ile yaptığını ifade etmektedir. İran'da yaşayan Türkler ise ülkedeki demografik olarak üstünlüklerine güvenerek Farslarla eşit haklara sahip olmayı talep etmektedir. İran hükümeti, Türklerin bu tarz taleplerini endişe verici olarak değerlendirmiş ve sert güç kullanarak bastırmıştır. İran, bu politikasını yalnızca Türklere uygulamamış, bu politikadan diğer etnik gruplar da etkilenmiştir. Ancak Farşlaştırma politikasından en çok etkilenen etnik grup Türklerdir. Çünkü nüfus olarak oldukça kalabalık olan Türkler, İranlılar tarafından her zaman tehdit olarak algılanmıştır. Makalenin amacı İran Türklerine uygulanan asimilasyon politikalarının siyasi ve sosyolojik boyutlarını ortaya koyabilmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkler, İran, Asimilasyon, Baskı, Farşlaştırma

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Политика ассимиляции применительно к иранским туркам

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Резюме

Предмет, изучаемый в исследовании, связан с основополагающим фактором политики, проводимой иранской администрацией против турок в регионе. Иранские администрации заявляют, что они оправдывают свою репрессивную политику идеями национального единства и солидарности. С другой стороны, турки, проживающие в Иране, полагаются на свое демографическое превосходство в стране и требуют равных прав с персами. Правительство Ирана посчитало такие требования турок тревожными и подавило их, применив жесткую силу. Иран применял эту политику не только к туркам, на эту политику повлияли и другие этнические группы. Однако этническая группа, наиболее затронутая политикой персианизации, - это турки. Потому что турки, которые как население очень многочисленно, всегда воспринимались иранцами как угроза. Цель статьи; Цель состоит в том, чтобы выявить политические и социологические аспекты политики ассимиляции, применяемой к иранским туркам. В ходе исследования я попытался укрепить свои тезисы, используя множество отечественных и зарубежных источников.

Ключевые слова: Турки, Иран, ассимиляция, репрессии, персианизация

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Introduction

As of today, there is a sharp separation in Iranian society. According to the surveys, 73.6% of the Iranian Turks care about the ethnicity of the people they will marry. The ratio of those who prefer their spouses to be of Persian origin is 0.5%. While the valid rate of those who use Farsi as the language of communication among family members in the family environment is 3.2%, the valid rate of those who never use Persian is 75.6%.¹

In the population distribution of Iran, the second group after the Persians is the Iranian Turks. The Turks in this geography had various names such as Tatar, Onus, Turkmen, Azerbaijani, Acme, Kizilbash, Turk, and Azeri, as well as many tribal names. Persian Turks such as Kashkayi, Inalli, Sahahseven, Afsar, Kacar ruled Iran until 1925, and because the Europeans knew this region as Persia, the states established by the Iranian Turks were called Persians. For the same reasons, the Ottomans called these states Acem.² There are three regions where Iranian Turks live intensively in Iran. North-West Region or Ethnic Azerbaijan, North-East Region or North of Horasan Ostan, South and Central Iran. The Turks living in Iran started to experience great problems with Rıza Pehlevi's termination of the Kacar dynasty although the Turks living in Iran are a large majority in the region. With the establishment of the Pahlavi dictatorship, Iran became the official colony of Britain after this development, while it was the unofficial colony of England before.

1-Ethno-Political Movements in Iran and the Attitude of State

In the Pahlavi period, the state pursued centralization policies. The aspirations of the occupying forces in Iran have led to a nationalist fluctuation in Iran through Shiism and Persianness. Nation consciousness, which is the principal condition for forming a nation-state, started to develop in Iran in particular. One of the redesign policies of society was to unite all autonomous structures in one center. The centralization policies included the linking of semi-autonomous structures to the center, the removal of local civil servants, the appointment of

¹Hossein Ahmadian Dishkedouki, "İran'da Güney Azerbaycan Türklerine Uygulanan Asimilasyon Sürecinin Gündelik Yaşamda Görünümleri: Tebriz Örneği", Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara 2009, p. 221.

²Rafael Blaga, *İran Halklarının El Kitabı*, Yeni Zamanlar Yayınları, İstanbul 1997, p. 273.

civil servants appointed from the center, the establishment of nomadic communities and compulsory military service. As a result of these centralization policies, systematic discrimination was applied particularly against nomadic peoples and other minorities.³

In particular, minorities reacted strongly to the centralization policies in Iran and demanded the reinstatement of their rights during the Kacar period. Various independence movements have started to form against the government that started to become destabilized. In the 1920s, a series of rebellions based in Tabriz took place and the central government suppressed these rebellions with the strong force.⁴ Rıza Pehlevi, who tried to establish the system he imagined in the first years of his power, was able to suppress the rebellions between 1921 and 1925 and the Turkmen uprisings that started in 1925 only in the beginning of 1927 the late 1920s, the Arabs in Kuzistan, the Kurds in the Burucerd region, and the Baluchs in Sistan joined the rebellion. After 1927-1928, the center of the rebellion shifted to the southern and central regions.⁵

2-Differentiation in National Identity after Iranian Islamic Revolution

When Iranian national identity was evaluated within the framework of Islamism after the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Iranian identity emerged as a religious identity. Before the revolution, the Pahlavi dictatorship was based on Iranian identity rather than on Persia. In the Pahlavi period, the upper identity was designed on Iranianism and the lower identity was designed on Islam, or in other words, religion. Religious arguments were mostly used to keep people's morale and motivation high. In particular, Iranian identity was seen as a blending understanding of different religious and ethnic elements.⁶ The Persian identity of the pre-revolutionary Iran and the regional identity of Western Nationalism are similar. With the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the Iranian identity was replaced by the Islamic identity. The Islamic Revolution of Iran served as a kind of laboratory for those seeking the Islamic Revolution.

The basic philosophy of the Islamic state understanding is that all the systems on the earth are human, the individuals in the society are incapable of solving social issues, and

³ Gün Taş, *İran'ın Ulusal Bütünlüğü ve Güney Azerbaycan Sorunu*, A Kitap, Ankara 2016, p. 106-107.

⁴ Gülara Yenisey, *İran'da Etno-Politik Hareketler (1922-2004)*, Ötüken Yayınları, İstanbul 2008, p. 112.

⁵ G. Yenisey, *Ibid*, p 113.

⁶ For more information, see Arif Keskin, "İran'da Fars Milliyetçiliğinin Üç Dalgası: İranlılığa Giden Yol-İran Türkleri (Güney Azerbaycan)", *Türksam*, S. 9, 2001.

therefore there is the necessity of a divine state structure and the idea that the nation- states are contrary to Islam are advocated.⁷ Although the Iranian Islamic Revolution claims to defend an Islamic ideology, Persian nationalism continues in Iran.

3-The Persianization Process of Turks in Iran

The establishment of the nation-state in Iran had a negative impact on the Turks. According to Parson: *“From 1925 to the present, Turkish culture as a separate entity within the scope of the modern nation-state (Islamic) understanding of the Pahlavis and the Islamic regime has been based on Persian cultural elements through state intervention in Iran and has lost its institutional integrity within the bureaucratic organization of achieving the collective aim. The mechanisms of differentiation, adaptive ability, coverage and value generalization processes, which are four basic aspects of modernization, have facilitated and inevitably made use of Persian cultural elements among Turks within the scope of assimilationist practices.”*⁸

According to Dishkedouki: *“When the Pahlavis in Iran became the head of the authority in 1925, they adopted the Persian culture as the only valid culture in the process of transforming the multi-ethnic structure into one language, one nation and one state structure in order to realize the modern nation-state project in their own understanding. Subsequently, the implementation of political practices based on the perception of the superiority of Persian identity clearly constituted the initial stage of the assimilationist approach to the present as a state policy. In this context, within the scope of comprehensive practices, the Persianization process initiated for other cultures and ethnicities other than Persian culture and ethnicity has been tried to be carried out with categorical identification projects known as the Nation of Iran and sometimes the Shiite / Muslim Ummah. As of today, there is a sharp separation in Iranian society. According to the surveys, 73.6% of the Iranian Turks care about the ethnicity of the people they will marry. The ratio of those who prefer their spouses to be of Persian origin is 0.5%. While the valid rate of those who use Farsi as the language of communication*

⁷ Ahmed Eşref, *İran'da Ulusal ve Etnik Kimlik Krizi*, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul 2009, p. 118.

⁸ Talcott Parsons, *The System of Modern Societies Englewood Cliffs*, Prentice-Hall, NJ, New York 1971, p. 11. Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, Free Press, New York 1967, p. 519.

*among family members in the family environment is 3.2%, the valid rate of those who never use Persian is 75.6%”.*⁹

Since 1925, the Iranian state has deliberately and planned subjected other cultures outside of Persian culture to a culturalization project with racist political practices based on Persian nationalism within a single currency, finances, national language, legal system, army, police, and education system, using all power and management powers, based on the principle of internal sovereignty within its Monastery and integrity.¹⁰ In Iran, the Persian identity dominated the state itself. Those who oppose this system suppressed and isolated the system itself. As a normal consequence of this situation the national festivals, and ceremonies of the Iranian Turks, such as the annual Babek Castle Festivals and national heroes commemoration were banned. At the same time, within the scope of assimilation policies implemented by the state, it continues to erase the collective memory, history and identity consciousness of the Turks by means of education, economic institutions and mass media and fill the elements that form the basis of Persian / Iranian identity.¹¹ Arif Konak's master's study titled “Education Requestsof Iranian Turks in Mother Tongue”, explains historically how the Iranian state pursues a policy in education in mother tongue:

*“When the Islamic Republic of Iran was established on 12 February 1979, it was stated that despite the assimilated policies of the Shah period, minorities would be granted some administrative and cultural rights. In this regard, the meeting was held at the University of Tehran in 1979 with the participation of Iran's prominent lawyers. Prof. Dr. Cevat Heyet, Dr. H Katibi and Prof. Dr. Hamit Nutki attended this important meeting of Iranian Turks. These people, known for their valuable work on the national identity of Iranian Turks, had important demands on the rights of Turks in the meeting.”*¹²

The Iranian government has managed to conceal this problem from the world public despite the justified demands of the Turks. Although Turks gained independence in the region twice, they could not maintain their sovereignty.

⁹ H.A. Dishkedouki, *Ibid*, p. 220-221.

¹⁰ Gianfranco Poggi, *Modern Devletin Gelişimi*, 4. Baskı, (çev. Şule Kut ve Binnaz Toprak), Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul 2007, p. 25.

¹¹H. A. Dishkedouki, *Ibid*, p. 97.

¹² Arif Konak, ‘*İran Türklerinin Anadilde Eğitim Talepleri*’, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul 2018, p. 48-49.

The Iranian state is oppressing non-governmental organizations that oppose the government as a derivative of Persianization policies. The state does not allow the Azerbaijani Civilization Center, which conducts semi-secret studies on the Turkish language and history. Dishkedouki mentions this situation:

“In the parliamentary elections held in 1996, the candidate status of Dr. Mahmut Ali Çehregani, who obtained the permission to participate in elections as an independent deputy candidate from Tabriz and won the highest vote, was canceled by the state for advocating for the cultural rights of Turks during the election campaigns. Then he and several Azerbaijani Turkish intellectuals, writers, and activists were arrested and were imposed to heaviest penalties.”¹³

The assimilation policies of the Iranian Turks were also determined by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and a report was prepared by the Special Representative of the UN Human Rights Commission on Iran, Prof. Maurice Copithorne. According to the report, there was a systematic Persianization activity in Iran.¹⁴ The voter base of the People's Muslim Party was diverse. In addition to the clergy, there were representatives from the secular sector. The People's Muslim Party was led by Ayatollah Kazem Sharia Medari. Sharia Medari considered Velayet-i Fakih¹⁵ differently from Khomeini. According to him, clergy should not rule the state, and clergy should only be controlling the structure of the state. Under the leadership of Shariah Medari, Iranian Turks supported the revolution. Sharia Medari had national demands for Iranian Turks during the rebellion. According to him, Iranian Turks should have been autonomous in South Azerbaijan. Khomeini and 'Hizb-i Cumhuriye İslami' were disturbed by these developments. Khomeini started making worse comments for Sharia Medari in his articles. The People's Muslim Party cited as a conspiracy for the state in a statement issued by Khomeini. In southern Azerbaijan, there were riots based in Tabriz. The state blamed the People's Muslim Party. Revolutionary Guards besieged Tabriz. All Iranian parties participated in the suppression of the People's Muslim Party uprising. Although the people's Fadais defended the

¹³ H.A. Dishkedouki, *Ibid*, p. 99.

¹⁴ Sema Barutcu Özönder, “Iran and the Turks,” *Kök Journal of Social and Strategic Research*. C. 4, N. 2, Ankara 2002, p. 107-108.

¹⁵ That the jurist, which means religious law scholar, will mean the concept of tutelage and administration.

rights of minorities, they participated in the suppression of the rebellion. Ultimately, the rightful defense of Iranian Turks was suppressed.¹⁶

¹⁶ Merih Özşahin, ‘‘Güney Azerbaycan’da Bağımsızlık Hareketleri ve Güney Azerbaycan’ın Türk Dünyası İçin Önemi’’, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul 2007, p. 104-105.

Conclusion

The results of these surveys show how successful Iran's assimilation policies are. Iranian Turks, who could not use their mother tongue as a language of education for many years, managed to maintain their national identity despite everything. Iran acts with suspicion towards the actuality of Turkey in South Azerbaijan and it considers the problem of Turks in the region as its internal issue. Thus, from past to present, Turkey has been unable to sufficiently penetrate the region. The fact that Iran has a closed regime makes it impossible to solve the problem. Looking at Iran's modern history, one cannot speak of a single nationalism. We see that Iranian nationalism and Iranian identities emerged during the Pahlavi era. Shiite nationalism emerged alongside Iranian nationalism after the Iranian Islamic Revolution. What is important here is that Iran's nationalism is based on different opinions against other ethnic groups. Looking at Iranian history from this context, we can say that Iran's identity ideologies are aggressive and expansionist towards other ethnic groups. The attitudes of the Kacar Dynasty and Pahlavi regimes towards the ethnic communities differed. That is due to the demands of ethnic communities between periods, the impact of awareness, and differences in development. Considering the ethnopolitical movements in Iran, we see an improvement in the level of political awareness of the Persians and other ethnic groups. We can say that Turks are more effective in expressing their desire for autonomy or federation by developing their identity strategies in Iran. However, it is usually the Turkish intellectuals who are outside Iran since Iran suppresses such demands in itself. We can say that Iran's policy of oppression and intimidation against ethnic groups due to its multi-ethnic structure is a wrong strategy when we look at the conjuncture of the 21st century. Iran's democratic solution methods will not only solve this problem but also ensure the national integrity and survival of the country. However, the central government, which thinks that the problem can be solved by anti-democratic methods, increases the unsolvability of the problem as it applies brute force. In order to make an inferential future for Iran, its brute power policy may lead to the division of Iran.

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