

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

IRANIAN TURKS IN NATION-BUILDING PROCESS: FIRST PAHLAVI ERA

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HEIDARI, Mojtaba (2023). Iranian Turks In Nation-Building Process: First Pahlavi Era. *Aurum Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 8(1), 75-97.**Abstract**

The study explores the emergence of Turkic identity because of identity politics committed in the aftermath of the nation-state building in Iran after 1925. It is believed that the primordial nationalism on the base of the Aryan race impacted the country's diverse population and ethnic categories and the imposition of highly restrictive measures and social policies in cementing Iranian nationalism built upon the Persian culture and myth, paved the way for the politicization of identity. To obtain a thorough analysis, a set of theories are applied. Pierre Bourdieu's class formation and symbolic concept of power and language in a semi-patrimonial society and the social identity theory and having an eclectic grasp of the literature on assimilation and violence have contributed to the theoretical base of the study. First-hand materials, journals, and archives are used to enrich the research content. The establishment of the modern state in the 20th century and the biased ethnic-lingual policies precipitated centrifugal forces among ethnic realities, so the alchemy of stereotyping and discrimination, and social comparison giving birth to group identification contributed to the politicization of ethnic identity among Azerbaijani Turks and their ethnic awareness.

Keywords: Nation-Building, Racism, Identity, Iranian Turks, Ethnic Awareness.

ULUS İNŞA SÜRECİNDE İRAN TÜRKLERİ: BİRİNCİ PEHLEVİ DÖNEMİ

Öz

Bu çalışma, İran'da 1925'ten sonra ulus-devlet inşasının ardından izlenen kimlik siyasetinin sonucu olarak Türk kimliğinin ortaya çıkışını araştırmaktadır. Aryan ırkına dayanan primordial milliyetçiliğin ülkenin çeşitli nüfus ve etnik kategorilerini etkilediği, Pers kültürü ve miti üzerine inşa edilmiş olan İran milliyetçiliğine bağlı son derece kısıtlayıcı önlemler ve sosyal politikaların, kimliğin politikleşmesine yol açtığı düşünülmektedir. Kapsamlı bir çözümleme yapabilmek adına bir dizi teoriden yararlanılma yoluna gidilmiştir. Pierre Bourdieu'nun yarı-patrimonial toplumda sınıf oluşumu ve sembolik güç ve dil kavramı, sosyal kimlik kuramı ve asimilasyon ve şiddet literatüründe eklettik bir anlayışa sahip olma çalışmanın teorik temeline katkıda bulunmaktadır. Araştırma içeriğini zenginleştirmek için birinci el materyaller, süreli yayınlar ve arşiv kaynakları kullanılmıştır. Farklı etnik grupları barındıran İran'da 20. yüzyılda modern devletin kurulması ve önyargılı etnik ve dilsel politikalar, etnik gerçeklikler arasında merkezkaç kuvvetlerini hızlandırmış, böylece önyargılar ve ayrımcılıkla ilgili süreçler ve grup kimliğinin doğmasına yol açan sosyal karşılaştırma, Azerbaycan Türkleri arasında etnik kimliğin siyasallaşmasına katkıda bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ulus İnşası, Irkçılık, Kimlik, İran Türkleri, Etnik Farkındalık.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is a powerful source of mobilization and quite a penetrating sociopolitical factor, yet it is not an old phenomenon, and as a political ideology its birth doesn't outlive the modern era. There is a general agreement that in regions with distinctive identity markers, nationalism at best would cause friction and in worse scenarios, it may breed conflicts. The geography known as Iran has encompassed people with different languages, cultures, and traditions almost all with distinctive geographic and cultural borders with their distinct source of identity, religion, and region where they had lived, played a crucially important role and cast a shadow on ethnic and identity issues. However, the lack of communication facilities and absence of lucrative trade routes, and the well-established economic system in between the regions had a part to play until modernization along with nationalism were felt as necessary ingredients for the unity of the country in turmoil in the verge of fragmentation at the onset of the 20th century.

In the aftermath of industrial breakthroughs in the West, the spread of nationalism seemed unavoidable, and the countries following suit were destined to tread on a rough and tempestuous path. Greenfeld & Chirot (1994) argue that Europeans defining themselves as nation-states provided enough trace for others to follow suit. The most probable cause derived from the fact that the rest were lagging in industry, and they thought the model to be the right and the only pick to catch up with the West. Backing their country, they opted to pursue the obtained perception of nationalism as their state ideology (Atabaki, 1993) so the notion of identity started to take a new form and later ethnicity grew to become a political issue with deep security implications.

Iran is a country that encompasses diverse ethnocultural groups, including Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Baluchies, and Lurids, who have established a significant presence in both territorial and demographic terms. Historically, various Turkic dynasties and empires have ruled over Iran, without imposing their ethnic values on their subjects. However, the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty marked a notable departure from this trend, as its founder Reza Shah initiated stringent measures designed to create and promote a systematic identity and Iranian nationalism. The conflation of Iranian nationalism with the Aryan race¹ and the state's discriminatory policies in favor of a particular group resulted in the politicization of identity and ethnicity. The emergence of identity politics in Iran's first nation-state under the Pahlavi dynasty led to the solidification of ethnic identity, particularly among Turks in the country.

To properly analyze the development of nationalism and the Turkic identity, theoretical frameworks must be applied. Simply relying on firsthand materials and archival sources risk producing a chronological narrative. One theory alone may not suffice to scrutinize complex social events, and philosophical grounding should not be prioritized. Therefore, this study employs a variety of theories, including Pierre Bourdieu's class formation and symbolic power, Henri Tajfel's social identity, and Johan Galtung's views on assimilation and violence. These theories, combined with firsthand materials, aim to enrich arguments, and simplify the comprehension of the emergence of Turkic identity as a backlash against the Pahlavi state's reactionary identity politics.

Bourdieu's analysis of social class, identity, and education corresponds well with the existing questions of the current research. Socially studying the formation of class, unlike the dominant discourse of proletariat class and means of production, what Bourdieu prefers to focus on is more associated with social relations, power, and capital, which all are finalized in social inequality. So, according to Wilterdink (2017), it should not be scaled back into an economic issue, this class is corresponding well to a group whose power is based on dominating violence apparatus and bureaucracy over ethnic groups or minorities as well. Although Bourdieu hasn't ostensibly postulated nationalism, Miller (2003) holds that he was fully aware of the nation-states' role in vocalizing the variance and significance of the socio-culture phenomenon, so nation-states with a dominant ruling class, with their mechanisms, tools, and their institutions could have an immense impact on cultural hybridity. The sensitivity of the taken steps bulges out when the existing political system of the semi-patrimonial Qajar dynasty and the advent of the first modern state is discerned.

The second pillar of the theoretical framework, for the emergence of Turkic identity and finally its de facto recognition lies in the concept of social identification where people tend to identify themselves

1 Arya is the cornerstone of nationalism discourse in Iran. Branding people living in Iran with Aryanness meant highlighting their biological ties and roots to Europeans and it was a thesis used to emphasize their distinction from Arabs, it literally tried to show Iranians descended from a pure race and at its core, Aryan discourse and Aryanism is a racial look at identity enshrining its superiority compared to rival identities notably Arabs and religion of Islam. The formulation of this racial discourse in Iran was particularly pointed at Arabs and later Turks. In a sense, it was the hypothesis of Iranians and non-Iranians. (See Zia-Ebrahimi, R. (2016). *The emergence of Iranian nationalism: race and the politics of dislocation*. Cambridge University Press.)

within groups and it derives from the fact that they never feel comfortable with uncertainty. Subjective uncertainty that they feel threatened by immediately should be reduced. The action in turn gives way to increasing confidence and self-esteem. This categorization (as Bourdieu calls it “strata”), would create a social field that is both organized and contextually relevant, and meaningful. As can be seen in the social identity approach, stratification and self-categorizations lead to increased motivation and certainty over who one is and who is not, formulating their perception, behaviors, understanding, and their attitudes.

There is a consensus among most scholars that ethnicity is regarded as the outcome of an interactive social process in which the ethnic category is the trophy made by intergroup’s interaction. Consequently, because of reciprocity the socio-cultural variances would be much more visible and recognizable by the subject. Therefore, the time when these variances and distinctions become socially pertinent, in the words of Eriksen (1993), what is known as an ethnic identity comes to light and surfaces. As so, people in different groups perpetually try to know who they are and what they are not, so they would be able to distinguish themselves from others with different identity markers and sets of values in which the ‘relational self’ is reflected. (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012).

The state’s educational policies either via persuasion or structural violence aimed at making citizens into adopting Persian identity and its cultural values. Nevertheless, the state’s comprehensive assimilation efforts did not attain their objectives as ethnic categories, particularly Turks, later formed resistance and alternatively identified themselves with their own cultural markers, despite influential Turkic-ethnic elites like Kasravi, Taghizadeh, or Kazemzadeh Iranshar aligning with the government. The study tries to elucidate the intricate issues surrounding the identity of Iranian Turks. It poses several fundamental questions, the foremost being why the nation-building practice in the first Pahlavi regime failed to culminate in the emergence of a homogenous and integrated nation. The study intends to examine how the theoretical framework and empirical findings are correlated to clarify the impact of structural pressures on the formation or deformation of social identity. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate what underlying causes triggered the realization of ethnic consciousness among Iranian Turks.

2. STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. A Primordial Identity on A Modern Bedrock

Dealing with figures like Johann Herder and introducing a romantic reading of nations and ethnicity, thus nationalism is founded upon language, history, and culture so it was regarded as an objective phenomenon. Common ancestors, language, and history are inseparable parts of this approach. Nationalism is a phenomenon that has had a critically important role in forming modern world reality, and even after this much surge to go beyond it, it still has a significant psychological and conceptual dominance.

The case of collective identity and forging a unified identity coat for different ethnic categories in Iran, as a prescription of modernity, was not a novel phenomenon in its type and it had had precedence in the

political field in this wide world. Similar projects were applied elsewhere and later bore similar results. A right vindication is Gellner (1983) points to the existing bond of nationalism and modernism that ask for the state to form modern mobile, literate, culturally standardized, interchangeable population. Hence taking into consideration of multi-ethnic setting of Iran and taking them synonymous with Persian identity should make the current work focus more on where different identities are coming from and how they are constructed.

In academia, it is widely believed that identity is socially constructed, hence it is becoming increasingly difficult to deny or avoid the conceptualization and constructiveness of identity. So, the term nation is perceived as a novel phenomenon that molded political groups and provided communal consciousness. However, it is not to deny the existence of ethnic and regional identities dating back to premodern times. Since these group identities as Armstrong (2011) calls them "ethnic" permeates the historical record.

2.2. Violence: a Symbolic and Structural Form

Nation-building is embedded with blood and violence and most practices have incorporated social upheavals in which new groups and classes were delivered. However, not always it has been the case and as Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) noted, there is a less violent face of class formation and social change as "symbolic violence" which was developed to illustrate how dominant classes with social and cultural control share cultural practices. He defines this sort of violence as an exercise of force on an agent by their own will and complicity, where no explicit use of force is on the table, but by tacit pushing and other means administered by the institutions, the subordinated groups are persuaded to or made align with the demanded policies.

Delving into how class and power are met in Bourdieu's analysis of dominant and subordinate groups, Webb, et.al (2000) note that the power relations are constructed and applied in such a manner to reflect the interests and concerns of the dominant group, whereas the subordinates are to concede it as a norm. Therefore, it paves the way for the legitimate practice of power and cultural values of the dominant group. That is by institutionalized sources any given value is generalized and the subordinate groups inevitably accept it and consider it reasonable, where a mixture of obligation and cooperation is included (Jenkins, 2002).

Whether by the practice of symbolic violence or even direct violence, groups' rights no are denied. There exists another form of violence that Johan Galtung (1969) introduces as "structural violence", where violence and inequality are built into the structure and manifest themselves as inequality of power, resources, and life opportunities. It can be inferred from this attribution that social disparity, ethnic exclusion, and subordination are just some samples that account for the practice of direct violence that forms the structure, and consequently will happen as unequal life chances where advantages are flown disproportionately toward the dominant group.

Following up on structural violence, in revisiting Johan Galtung's Concept of Structural Violence, Dilts, et.al (2012) view culture as an inseparable part of society that sits at the center of violence where symbols are applied to legitimize and justify structural violence by mystifying or sanitizing it. So cultural violence in its closest attribution to what Galtung (1990) narrates, is defined as any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form. Symbolic violence built into a culture doesn't tend to incapacitate direct violence or the violence built into the structure, however, it is used to legitimize either or both. Ethnic identity has turned into one of the major concepts in social science and has gained quite a unique place in the matter of social and collective identity. Collective or social identity is addressing the bond between individuals and the region or environment they are in, and they are in contraction and correlation.

2.3. Concordance of a Social Identity: Collective and Individual

For having a thorough grasp of the developments, along with the symbolic violence of Bourdieu and Galtung's structural-cultural violence narrations, an intermediate exposition of social identity theory is required. This theory was developed by Hogg and Tajfel in the 1970s to battle against the negative psychological consequences derived from marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion. It deals with the psychological experiences people suffer as minorities or excluded categories, so they try to categorize themselves accordingly. The collective social identity involves two major processes of self-categorization and social comparison which could lead to different consequences. As Hogg and Abrams (1988) clarify, these categories in which individuals affiliate themselves, are parts of a structured society and exist only with rival categories and identities. Considering the ontologically continuous trend of ethnicity and the circumstance of its subjective perception, we are to witness that self-identification and social comparison have led ethnicities to emerge and deepen in societies like Iran where the ethnic categories due to modernization project and ethnically biased state policies had been forced to abandon their *de facto* social identities.

Categorizing people into groups with assigned features and stereotypes is likely to breed at best social dissatisfaction and discord and even it could turn into territorial disintegration. Depending on the way a group defines its social identity, and the way interprets the threat, a defensive response is likely. Scholars like Matthew J. Hornsey and Michael & Hogg (2000), hold that the existence of threats in intergroup relations is one major ingredient for tension and exacerbation of relations and unity. From this stand, it won't be hard to guess why nation-building projects in ethnic-rich settings, if not applied properly, the ideal society will hardly get actualized.

Any threat targeting the social identity of any given group might breed from a variety of reasons. The most important ones can be listed as exclusion and inclusion. Exposing to structural violence brings up the issue of assimilation that purposefully is administered to humiliate and then facilitate the process of inclusion. In this regard, Bourdieu's stand on the emergence of social class, and cultural capital which breeds symbolic violence, is closely linked to structural violence and cultural assimilation. It is a behavioral process the dominant cultural capital is integrated, and ethnic categories will either

conform or further get marginalized. Nonetheless, social identity theory explicates how individuals and groups by comparison and counting psychological pressures imposed on them into account, would tend to converge and appreciate their in-group identity. However, facing such a threat to a group's social identity may serve as a precursor to intergroup conflict which elicits protective behaviors aimed at safeguarding social identity and it becomes susceptible to vulnerability when there is a possibility of losing status or limited prospects for prosperity.

Uncertainty surrounding intergroup boundaries, as well as a poorly defined ingroup prototype can also contribute to social identity threat. Michael & Hogg (2000) have argued that perceived threats intensify subgroup solidarity, sharpen intergroup boundaries, and accentuate ethnocentric attitudes and behavior. This can inhibit identification with a superordinate group and lead to a more focused and polarized ingroup prototype, with a more hierarchical leadership and power structure. Consequently, if not handled carefully, perceived threats to social identity can exacerbate intergroup conflicts.

3. CENTRALITY AND DISPARITY: UNEVEN SHARE OF POWER, A RECIPE FOR ETHNIC DISSATISFACTION

Undoubtedly 20th-century events and socio-political developments in Iran have had a durable impact on the process of identity. The establishment of a strong centralized state was the necessary action so that no ethnicity, language, or culture would weaken this authority. The state staunchly demanded the unification of the country under the banner of Iranism, the Persian language, and the Aryan race to construct a bounded territorial entity, so no surprise that cultural homogenization was among the top projects.

However, the formula applied proved to be less functional, and in short, it put the country's territorial integrity in jeopardy. Forcefully encouraging people with clear different ethnic identities to embrace the state's desired identity while calling the same people intruders, rough or uncultivated invaders² would not work out. With the growing pressure, discrimination, and assimilation via the education system and administrative policies, ethnocultural differences grew to be a psychological reality for ethnic categories.

The majority, constituting less than half of the population, employed strategies to foster a sense of unity and shared identity among diverse groups. However, by upholding the superiority of a particular group and promoting racial superiority, this "we image" and unity would remain elusive. A group of intellectuals, primarily from the Berlin Circle³, inspired by Germans and their narrative of the Aryan race,

2 Iranshahr magazine was among the most prominent press feeding up nationalistic sentiment being published for five years (1922-1927). In its numerous series Turks and Arabs were vilified and labeled as intruders. (See Iranshahr Magazine, (1923), second year, no ۲. & Iranshahr Magazine, (1925), Third year, no 5.)

3 The Berlin Circle was a label a group of Iranian students in Berlin was famous for. Inspired by German nationalism and its racial implications, the group formed the backbone of Reza Shah's intellectual toolkit and nationalism ideologists. The Aryan discourse was indeed the production of this group. Scholars and activists like Ali Dashti, Abdolhossein Teymourash, Seyed Hasan Taqizadeh Taghi Arani, Kazemzadeh Iranshahr, and some other intellectuals were members too.

ultimately arrived at a perilous conclusion about biologically based racial differences. As Motadel (2014) notes, concepts like the Aryan race and blood gained popularity among these intellectuals and ultra-nationalists. They were tasked with plans for the homogenization project. It could be easier for cultural groups with affinity to Persians, but for the Turkic population with their distinct conditions, proved to be a challenging and arduous undertaking.

To make ends meet, no one could be better than a Turkic-ethnic intellectual like Kasravi (1936), who testified against his background. He sought to prove that non-Iranian cultural and linguistic identities were merely the products of proximity to Turks and Arabs' colonial presence in the country (e.g., the Arab invasion of Iran in 633-654 AD and Mongol invasions in 1219)⁴. Similar claims were made by Iraj Afshar (1927) asserting the amalgamation of Turkic and Arabic races into the pure Aryan race. So, by making the case quite racial and casting doubt on people's identity, the state aimed to introduce Aryan teachings and reshape the mindset of non-Persians by indoctrinating them with what was thought as the country's glorious past (Atabaki, 1993). Basically, this racial and chauvinistic classification and disregard for people's identity was very much like Nazi Germans with whom the Pahlavi state enjoyed a cordial relationship.

3.1. Centralized State and Economy Against Periphery

Up until Pahlavi's establishment, the Azerbaijan region in general used to be the beating heart of the economy in Iran. The social system was a type of hierarchal order and patronage in which elites, landlords, businessmen, and religious figures all enjoyed a certain degree of power and influence. Tabriz was the main route of trade with Europe and the Soviet and the state and people's relation was mainly defined by taxes the government was collecting. After 1920 the order crumbled, and a very strong centralized state was introduced. With a windfall tax on merchants, land confiscation, and changing trade routes, Tabriz's role in the economy and business drastically degraded. In the word of Berberian (1996), the economic factor was among the prominent stimulus for [wide range] ethnic consciousness after Reza Shah's rule in Azerbaijan province.

The center-oriented structure demanded everything transferred to the capital. The beginning of Reza Shah's reign with the slogan "One Ruler, One Nation, and One Language" created many troubles for the people Shiri Azar (2008), states that during his reign, in addition to cultural discrimination, economic discrimination also spread in Azerbaijan to the extent that of 22 factories established by the government between 1931 and 1941 in four provinces of Mazandaran, Isfahan, West Azerbaijan, and East Azerbaijan, only two factories were allocated to Azerbaijan. Indeed, the Law of Monopoly on Foreign Trade was one of the laws that had a significant impact on the Azerbaijan region's economy and society. Under this law, the state was in the charge of import and export of all-natural and industrial products.

4 Ahmad Kasravi (1936), In his book "Azari or the Ancient Language of Azerbaijan" claimed that the language of the Azerbaijani people, contrary to popular belief, was an Iranian language and belonged to the Pahlavi language branch. In his view, the people of the region after years of living with invaders, changed the way they had used to speak, and their language was Turkified.

In the dire economic situation, the government was also unjustly collecting taxes from rural landowners. Based on the reports certified in National Archive documents, the stagnation of the grain market and the failure to sell products added to the poverty of farmers. Tax officials were collecting taxes while the product had not yet been sold. In some regions in Azerbaijan, the situation was even more drastic, and people ended up begging due to extreme poverty and they were forced to beg for their livelihood. Therefore, the agricultural and economic policies of Reza Shah were assumingly pointed against the people of Azerbaijan. So that large sway of people according to Katouzian (2018), because of the unfair situation and blatant discrimination, many had to leave their region to be settled in the capital.

3.2. Weaponized Ignominy and Humiliation

Despite being verbally regarded as Iranians, ethnic categories, and non-Persians, particularly Turks and Arabs were subject to severe pressure and frequent humiliation by the state agents. For example, Abdullah Mostofi-the governor of Azerbaijan during 1940-1941, in response to a very peaceful protest of people about the quality of bread and flour in Tabriz, said, "Azerbaijanis are Turkic. They made the constitutional revolution a [huge] success only by eating grass. Now they are also going to eat hay and make Iran prosperous."(Jami, 1984: 271). Mostofi's repulsive racial remarks didn't end⁵ and similar humiliations of ethnic categories were persistent factors in the process of nation-building in Iran.

The state imposed a language at the expense of ethnics' cultural belongings and values, and deliberately tried to eliminate their very language and replace it with the Persian language- a practice Novic, (2016) calls cultural genocide rhetoric- enabled the state to a lesser degree, Persian speakers to wield a variety of tools to ignore, devalue, and mock other groups, presumably to assimilate dissimilar populations through any possible means.

The epic poem of Shahnameh (written between 977-1010 A.C.), served as a powerful symbol of Aryan and Persian nationalism. This literary work is replete with expressions of grief and disparagement targeting Turks and Arabs. Nationalism was on a primordial approach with Shahnameh occupying a preeminent position in this discourse. Educational curricula during the reign of Reza Shah were heavily imbued with poetry laden with hate, racism, and sarcasm towards non-Persians while venerating Persia's rich past. The oppressive measures, including the banning of ethnic languages, were humiliating factors that contributed to a widening subsequent gap after the fall of Reza Shah and presented a unique opportunity to celebrate the literature, poetry, and cultural achievements of the Turkic people.

5 In the case of the 1940 census in Tabriz, Jami (1984) cited from Setareh Newspaper (1940) the governor kept insulting the city residents as donkeys and had stated that they (Turks) don't need a census, there should be donkey-counting in this city.

3.3. Homogenization as an Attempted Cultural Genocide Act⁶

For intellectuals siding with the state national unity was the indispensable element for territorial integrity and a remedy for eliminating ethnic conflicts. Materializing this aim meant the erasure of existing fractions in lifestyle, clothing, costumes and traditions, language, etc. which could constitute an attempt at cultural genocide. In this regard, based on the recommendation of some very prominent intellectuals associated with Berlin Circle notably Mahmud Afshar-the chief editor of *Ayande* newspaper (1927), to completely proliferate the Persian language, the state banned education in local languages in Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Arabistan [Ahvaz] which was in an indisputable contrast to the existing social reality. Officials changed local names and replaced them with Persian ones. As a crude image of a genocide attempt, it started the ruthless dislocation and resettlement of tribes in different zones, and as brought up earlier, a thorough assimilation project to Persianize a large swath of non-Persians, at the cost of side-lining or even depriving them of their mother tongue, so that the very symbol of a culture brought into a deliberate and systematic destruction verge.

To make homogeneity a reality, the Persian language was introduced as the standing pillar of culturally bound to create and protect political unity. There, the education system via schools and public administration via offices were serving this aim. Persian was the only academic and official communication tool. School teachers and public administration posts in the Azerbaijan region were occupied by Persian speakers and non-natives and seemingly they were given *carte blanche* in applying force in schools to spread and promote the Persian language.

Jami (1984) notes that everybody had to speak in Persians and transgressors were [severely] punished, so they wouldn't recourse back to their mother tongue. Hence by de facto criminalizing ethnic and local languages, all public services were offered only in the official language. The comprehension of hostility directed toward Azerbaijani Turkic language is more attainable when the country's oldest theatre in Tabriz which used to perform art in Turkic, based on its perceived deviation from Persian norms and standards, was closed. (Heyat, 2001). Following the presented facts, oppressive measures and deculturization through restricting using a language in educational settings and wider social space by ultimately targeting cultural and linguistic heritage serving the cause of cultural genocide.

6 It should be noted to what extent 'forced assimilation' has a 'cultural genocide' connotation. This categorization requires the interpretation of sophisticated and complex legal frameworks, international court rulings, and the UN Genocide Convention. Yet in terms attributed to Raphaël Lemkin, Genocide is a coin of 2 sides "One, the face of it is the destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group and the other, is placing the national pattern of the ruler. In this regard, assaulting a culture though is an act of genocide. Based on what culture is defined by sociologists and anthropologists; deliberate cultural destruction by any force is narrowly linked to the destruction of nations, in Lemkin's thought. (See Irvin-Erickson, D. (2019). Raphaël Lemkin: Culture and cultural genocide. In *Cultural Genocide* (1st ed., pp. 21-44). Routledge.)

4. A PRELUDE TO TURKIC IDENTITY FLOW IN IRAN

It is a common belief that the onset of organized ethnically Turk identity campaigns and social activism started with the fall of Reza Shah, though their actions were supported by the Soviet's military presence and there are documents proving it was orchestrated by the Soviets⁷. The surge for identity in Iranian Azerbaijan is a complex phenomenon that is fed from a plethora of subtle motives. While external factors like foreign powers' intervention might play a role in instigating the movement, it is not accurate to view it as solely a result of foreign influence. Yet, the burgeoning of [Turkic] nationalism and identity awareness among the Turkic population of Iran dates to the 1910s when Ottoman forces due to Armenian insurgency in the eastern part of the country, had a military presence in Iran during the first world war. Although the country was far away from the battlefields, however, due to its geopolitical position, it became the conflict scene of the Ottoman and Russian empires. According to Malekzadeh (2017) Iranian Azerbaijanis because of cultural and linguistic affinity sided with the Ottomans.

In the aftermath of the Russian 1917 Revolution, despite all odds, according to Atabaki (2007), [Turkic] nationalism especially among migrants who had moved [Northern] Azerbaijan from Iranian Azerbaijan, was gradually on the rise. In 1918 the Musavat [Equality] Party, which came to power in Azerbaijan's northern region of Aras with the "Turkic unity" motto addressed the issue of the identity of the Azerbaijanis in Iran. Rasolzadeh the leader of the party and later the President of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920), raised his concern for Azerbaijan in the "Açık Söz" newspaper on January 20, 1918. In this article, he emphasized the Turkic identity of the Azerbaijanis and opposed the Iranian newspapers' claim that Azerbaijanis had a Persian origin. Rasolzade (1919) in his book- "The Formation and Current State of the Azerbaijan Republic", highlighted the Turkic identity of people living in Iranian Azerbaijan and sympathized with them stressing how Persian literature negatively affected Turks living in Iran, nonetheless later in his book, he would dichotomize the political route Azerbaijani Turks (both Turks living in Iran and others who lie in South Caucasus under Tzars) take.

Meanwhile, when the conditions were ripe, during the Ottoman forces' presence in Tabriz, Turkic unity advocates sphere of activities expanded in Iranian Azerbaijan through the Young Turks' Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and the Musavat Party of Rasolzade. Taqi Rafat, a nationalist and staunch supporter of Turkic unity, launched the "Azarabadegan" newspaper in Azerbaijani Turkic to support the cultural rights of the people of Azerbaijan. He was the right hand of Khyybani and his democrat party in Tabriz. As it can be inferred from Ayande newspaper (1925), Kasravi who was a prominent Iranian nationalist theorist left the Democratic party and Tabriz because of Rafat's growing effects and his Ottoman-friendly posture, and his approach and efforts in publishing [Azerbaijani] Turkic newspaper. So, his role in the Turkic identity movement in Iranian Azerbaijan is symbolically important. He enjoyed cordial ties with the Committee of Union and Progress members of the Ottoman Empire. Rafat in his Tajaddod newspaper (1918), in an open letter, praised and advocated Rasolzade's remark on the unity,

7 Soviets had an undeniable role in the establishment and support of the Azerbaijan People's Government. They provided military and logistics support; however, their support was short-lived, and Pishavari's local government finally collapsed after a year in the aftermath of the Soviets' departure. (See Ramin Ahmadoghlu, "Azerbaijani National Identity in Iran, 1921-1946: Roots, Development, and Limits," Iranian Studies 51, no. 5 (2019): 253-278.)

origin, and identity of both people of Azerbaijan on either side of the Aras (Araxes) river, however, he didn't shy away of criticizing Rasulzade's comments on Persianizing Turkic Azerbaijanis living in Iran in his *Açık Söz* (1918) media.

4.1. Discourse Shift: Folklore and Literature Revival

From a functional perspective, language is primarily seen as a means of communication that facilitates social interactions. According to Beats et al. (1991), functionalism in language emphasizes the relationship between language and social meaning. Semantic, cognitive, and communicative functions are considered tools to facilitate social interaction among people in society. However, language is more than just a communicative tool. It serves as means of power holding significant symbolic and cultural value in society. The symbolic value of language adds to its users' identity and becomes even more noteworthy when it is the language of power in a society and in Foucault's (1972) term, it is discursively constituted through social practices suffused by relations of power and ideology.

Once a language is introduced as the language of power (official language), it morphs into a political weapon with a profound symbolic value, benefiting the ruling class and genuinely its native speakers. "Languages are no less potent a force in constructing identities concurrent with and often resistant to the national" (Joseph, 2004: 162). Therefore, discrimination against other cultures and groups becomes unavoidable. Considering the relationship between (dominant) language, culture, and power highlights the dynamics of subordination, assimilation, and marginalization, hence potentially politicizing ethnicity, and identity. This process may cause distinct groups with different identity markers to evolve into movements with far-reaching political implications.

Putting the utmost value on the mother tongue and its national literature and folklore can be assessed in this regard. Herman (2010) suggests that academics often prioritize the safeguarding of endangered languages and oral storytelling traditions threatened by modernity. In some cases, scholars aim to amplify the voices of marginalized or neglected narrators with a populist aesthetic mindset. The Azerbaijan Newspaper (1945) served as a vehicle for Pishevari's ideologies even before local governance and shortly after Reza Shah's downfall, advocating for the protection of their native language and promoting it as a symbol of national education and civil leadership. Intriguingly, the Azerbaijan Democratic Party seldom identified themselves as "Turkish" or "Turkic," but rather opted for Azerbaijani attribution to define themselves. Nevertheless, they continuously emphasized the distinctions between people living in Azerbaijan province and the Persians. However, these people regardless of political discourse consistently have identified themselves as Turk and their language is (Azeri) Turkic.

Awakening to the post-Reza Shah period, writers, and poets in Azerbaijan free from the systematic and institutional shackles popular with Reza Shah's regime found a unique opportunity to publish their works written in their mother tongue. Huseyn Dadparvar (1942) a columnist in the Azerbaijan newspaper lamented the period for building a barrier in the path of growth and development of non-

Persian cultures. The state's apartheid-like regime was quite strict on allowing local cultures growth, let alone the language and culture which reminded them of the agony of past invasion of their dear Aryan land. So, the Turkic language being labeled as the heritage of Mongol invaders had to be side-lined in favor of Persian. This type of labeling either for marginalizing or assimilating people into the dominant culture, later transformed into social consciousness and resistance movement.

Social identity theory elaborates well on how growing pressure, discrimination, and assimilation trigger a psychological response. Appreciating their collective identity, language, and culture reinforced the ethnic identification of Turks in Iran, countering policies and practices that had marginalized and tried to assimilate them. Consequently, concepts like "we Turks," "motherland," and "mother language" were frequently used in Tabriz and other cities in the press following the political turmoil after Reza Shah's collapse, also "people" or "nation" terms which were predominantly were used in a religious context, started to be employed with a more secular connotation and define people based on their ethnolinguistic affiliations.

Frequent application of "national liberty," and "mother language," by the press in Azerbaijan grew to be a disturbance for political activists and nationalists in Tehran. Pishevari, the head of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party, received threatening letters of condemnation from these individuals who feared that the implementation of these terms would lead to the disintegration of the country's territorial integrity. In Pishevari's words, Tehran had never been able to provide liberty without subjugating the Azerbaijani nation. In an editorial in the party's official newspaper, Azerbaijan, the party demonstrated an awareness of Tehran's failure to provide freedom and restore the inalienable rights of the Azerbaijani nation. The article contended that being forcefully subject to foreigners (Persians) could not be called freedom, and denying the identity of a nation would not help the state exploit Azerbaijanis.

The use of language as a constant symbol of identity was not only a surprising manifestation of power against the ruling authority but also a means of challenging the dominant discourse which had marginalized and exoticized ethnic differences. Nagengast and Kearney (1990) suggest that similar movements are likely to occur in other parts of the world, which would illustrate that power does not always flow from the state downwards. In fact, the effective exercise of power relies on Azerbaijan's range of social knowledge that permeates the public discourse.

In line with that exercise of power and public sources of support, in a letter sent to the newspaper's office as a compliment and thanksgiving letter from the rank-and-file youth, they had reflected their love and gratitude for reviving Azerbaijan's mother language after the dark days of Reza Shah in which even speaking of the language in school was criminalized. Reminding the hard days of Reza Shah's reign and oppression of their very language and folklore by the state, deprivation of school kids from learning in their own language, and excessive hardships of learning in Persian for students as well as grown-ups, they couldn't hide the happiness they felt for the steps taken in the honor of their mother tongue and language.

In retrospect, it is apparent that significant social and political changes have had a notable impact on literature, which has thrived as a result. Examples of this can be seen in historical events such as the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of October 1917, and other transformative political movements around the world. It could be argued that literature has been fostered and developed due to the influence of such political phenomena. The transformative nature of these revolutions has led to a metamorphosis in literature, with the emergence of great poets, novelists, and playwrights, such as Lamartine, Hugo, and Balzac, reflecting the changes and flourishing of literature. A similar transformation could have taken place in the Iranian part of Azerbaijan in the aftermath of the unprecedented Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1909.

It's noteworthy that following the revolution, the reformists, in alliance with the Democratic Party, aimed to establish a modern bureaucracy and a federal-level educational system. However, it was met with resistance from conservative landowner elites and World War I, and subsequent uprisings in Gilan, Khorasan, and Azerbaijan, rendering it literally impractical. Yet, after the 1940-41 events, and being forcefully exposed to a racial narrative myth and folklore for almost 20 years, Azerbaijani Turkic literature experienced considerable growth. Poets and writers had the opportunity to revive their language, publish their works, and express their thoughts and concerns and the short gap and interval before the full settlement of the second period of Pahlavi's reign were enough to default back with fully dynamic and passion to revive and claim old Turkic myth and folklore.

In this regard, 'Dede Kurkut Tales' for the first time after years of oppression was published in 1945. Stressing the importance of language as a communication tool and the mother tongue as an existential link to survival of one's identity and history, reflected in *Azerbaijan newspaper* (1945), local authorities concluded that a nation deprived of practicing and learning their mother tongue is a failed policy. So, the protection of language as a group's historical identity and the evidence of their existence in times of chaos and crisis should be every individual's duty and commitment. The role of this asset is like a soul in the body and group psychology is very much affected by this asset, so that even though may not be regarded as the only reason for a nation's existence, a nation's ethnic values, traditions, and collective psychology is mainly transferred to forthcoming generations by the language asset and literature.

Like people across the globe, Azerbaijani Turks enjoyed rich and creative folklore that represented its people's historic stories, myths, and lyrics that transferred from generation to generation. This folklore as a collective product reflects all that an ethnic reality as a community has felt, the dreams they have made, the lifestyle, and the set of beliefs they have developed in the course of history. In this regard, between 1941-1946 when *Azerbaijan Newspaper* was being published, officials used to place a permanent column for folklore and asked people in different regions to share their oral literature and folklore so it would be recorded and published. Old scholars and poets like Fuzuli, Saip, Nizami, Hagani, Nesimi, and even elegy writers like Muciz Şebisteri didn't escape the attention and all were commemorated, and their works started to reach people by local newspapers.

According to the daily reports of *Azerbaijan Newspaper* (1945), Turkic scholars set their sights on collecting this long and rich oral literature and folklore in the form of books to restore them for the next generations. That's how `Dede Kurkut` and `Kuçak Nebi` happened to be ever-present characters in public reintroduced in an organized manner and spread. The first conference and gathering of poets and scholars working on Turkic literature in southern Azerbaijan were held in Tabriz in 1942. Indeed, the reopening of Tabriz Theater Hall was an indication of how self-identification in parallel with local culture and art was on the hike. Consequently, local music and theatre found a chance to grow and improve in line with public demand and culture.

4.2. Education, School Training, and the Development of Identity

A huge part of our first interaction with the world either in academic or non-academic ways is formed via language, so children need to be educated in their mother tongue because it is the only language that children understand the educational materials the best. Yet the emphasis on the mother tongue is critically important and to some extent becomes problematic from the angle where both the dominant and subordinate cultures consider it. The mother tongue's crucial role is indisputable in the academic well-being of children, the flourishing of their culture, and the establishment of a sustainable social order.

Considering the dire state in which very young learners start their academic life in a language that they have no clue about is painstakingly hard. Learning a new language and concomitantly learning science and school materials (in Persian) would certainly cause irreversible damage to students' academic confidence and self-perception. This sheer amount of inequality in education would spill over to other aspects and students in comparison to their Persian peers would grow up less confident and more likely to suffer academic incompetence. They would hardly be able to express their thoughts and ideas in the second language during the adaptation period and competing with their Persian peers would be a tall order.

The government's discriminatory policies have resulted in a situation where Turkic-ethnic students were denied access to the cultural capital that could have positively impacted their social and educational experiences. This unjust inequality, which is perpetuated by cultural and educational factors, is in line with Bourdieu's theory of social stratification. According to Riley (2017), the systemic and institutionalized nature of these disparities, which are reinforced by racialized stereotypes, illustrates how structures based on race, social class, and education interact to reproduce and expand existing inequalities (Wallace, 2017). Following the downfall of Reza Shah authorities in Azerbaijan appreciated the crucial importance of the mother tongue in education. They underscored the efficacy of educating students, particularly in their early years, in their native language, highlighting that the region's progress and prosperity depended on providing young learners with the appropriate education. (*Azerbaijan Newspaper*, 1945).

In a report cited in *Azad Millet* newspaper (1946), the local government in Tabriz implemented the establishment of numerous educational institutions in Azerbaijan. Based on this report the first university

in Azerbaijan (Tabriz University) was established and it was about to recruit students from 2 faculties. The education was in Azerbaijani Turkic. This action was prompted by the party's acknowledgment of the regressive and prejudiced educational policies of the preceding administration, which contributed to Azerbaijan's stagnation and numerous challenges (*Azerbaijan Newspaper*, 1946). The local government's Ministry of Education was instructed to launch recruiting university instructors and the necessary means for teaching. It recognized education and instruction in the mother tongue, as a potential solution to the divisive consequences of Reza Shah's tenure.

Before the establishment of Pahlavi, traditional schools (Mektep) in Turkic-speaking regions provided education in both Turkic and Persian. Due to a semi-patrimonial state system, language sensitivity was not a primary concern, and individuals did not experience identity issues. However, the Azerbaijan Democratic Party and subsequently the National Government of Azerbaijan placed great emphasis on the importance of Turkic language and literature. They publicly advocated for the teaching and revitalization of Turkic in educational institutions, culminating in a decree on December 26, 1946, declaring Azerbaijani Turkic as the official language of the local government in Azerbaijan. This decree mandated the use of Azerbaijani Turkic in all public and private institutions in the region. According to a December 1945 report in an Azerbaijani newspaper, the first decree of the education and culture minister of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party required all schools and educational institutions to teach materials in Azerbaijani Turkic.

The rationale behind promoting education in one's mother tongue lies in the fact that the ability to read and write in one's native language eliminates the need for an intermediary language (official language) to comprehend educational materials. This would facilitate thinking and problem-solving in the language one is most familiar with, enabling a more efficient learning process. In contrast, studying in a foreign language can impede intellectual development and hinder academic progress as students struggle to grasp concepts and ideas presented in a language that is not their own. Thus, emphasizing the importance of mother tongue education could greatly enhance cognitive abilities and would prevent students from falling behind their peers.

Throughout history, the preservation of cultural heritage has enabled human groups to survive challenges and changes. Language is a vital pillar of this cultural heritage, recording and preserving a society's culture and values for future generations. Languages that are not used as languages of education are likely to weaken, become fragile, and ultimately decline. Therefore, to preserve this valuable heritage for future generations, speaking alone is insufficient.

The scope of education-related concerns extends beyond instructional quality and includes issues related to recognition and self-identification, particularly for students at the beginning of their educational journey. Warin (2016) argues that establishing a sense of identity is a crucial aspect of young children's introduction to formal education, and this process of identity formation persists throughout their compulsory schooling. The party officials made a noteworthy effort to emphasize the importance

of native language education and to address the linguistic proficiency requirements of young learners while preserving the cultural aspects of identity and language.

Calling the language not local, but national in documents and newspapers like Azerbaijan, demonstrates a change in discourse and understanding of self and others. The self-identification under the banner of Aryan discourse failed. Even in the lack of strong public support for such identification, many elites who were mostly from the working class and underprivileged segment of society turned out to be its advocates. Admittedly, being loyal or uncommitted to the teachings and ideas of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party divergence and a fault line were discrimination evident in what had been perceived as an assimilated Persianized population.

5. CONCLUSION

Despite being the epicenter of transformative political developments and movements in Iran, evidently, Turkic-ethnic pioneers and elites had failed to nurture their own ethnic identity. This was mainly because ethnic identity hadn't been the primary agenda in the Iran until the first quarter of the 20th century when Rasulzade founded the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918 where he appreciated the Turkic identity of both groups living on either side of the Aras River. Immediately and the onset of the 1920 Khyabani movement Taqi Rafat's started to highlight the identity issue of the Turkic population living in Iran. Yet, Rafat's efforts and his ties to Jön Türks didn't necessarily lead to the development of the Turkic identity. The setback of the ambitious Constitutional Revolution sparked significant concern among intellectuals who foresaw the potential disintegration of the country. So, Reza Shah's ascent to power and subsequent dissolution of the Qajar dynasty in 1925 delivered significant transformations characterized by the introduction of some basic industries, progress in education, and socio-political changes, culminating in the establishment of a nation-state based on the Aryan race and Persian nationalism with a primordial reading.

This view was facilitated by cultural capital authorities in the Pahlavi state invested in it. So, through the guise of modernization, measures like compulsory education, a particular interpretation of history, uneven urbanization, and severe repression of ethnic categories to form an integrated and homogeneous nation was strictly followed. These measures were intended to construct a cohesive national identity by emphasizing the superiority of a particular cultural and historical narrative while simultaneously erasing alternative perspectives. Such efforts reflect the power dynamics and political interests involved in the construction of national identity and shaping collective memory and national consciousness.

In the context of Iran's nation-building process, the theories of symbolic violence and structural-cultural violence, and social identity are believed to shed light on the elucidation of how Turkic identity was exposed. Its note-worthy that the state's efforts to assimilate non-Persian ethnic categories in general and Turks as the subject of this study, due to the groups' dynamics and social psychology tried to categorize themselves with their affiliated social groups. So marginalized groups facing threats to their identity, engaged in coping strategies that led to intra-group solidarity while sharpening intergroup boundaries.

The abundance of overt and covert violent acts ultimately proved futile in resolving differences and instead fostered a sense of self-awareness and an identity movement that culminated in the decoupling of Turkic ethnicity from state-backed Aryan discourse and Persian nationalism. Accordingly, the activities starting from the 1941 collapse of Pahlavi's first monarch and his regime culminated in the emergence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party led by Pisheveri who enjoyed the assistance and endorsement of the Soviets and demanded the recognition of Iranian Turks' discrete identity, emphasizing their unique language, rich history, and cultural markers. Undoubtedly, Pisheveri's movement was not authentically national as it had clear and documented support from foreign powers. Nevertheless, the exclusionary tactics and marginalization of ethnically Turkic groups would inevitably have negative consequences as they had little resemblance to the state's ideology, indoctrinations, and most attributes given to them, therefore their digestion into what the Pahlavi state had planned was already a stern task. Nonetheless, the movement played a crucial role in promoting the growth of the Turkic identity in Azerbaijan province and had a profound influence on the political situation of the region.

The present study provides a preliminary exploration of identity formation. However, it is acknowledged that limitations exist, and further research is needed to fully understand the complexities of this process. Future research should consider a range of factors, such as the historical and cultural context, to explore the development of Turkic identity in Azerbaijan province. Additionally, investigating the coping mechanisms used by marginalized groups and their impact on inter-ethnic relations, as well as analyzing the relationship between discursive structures and inter-group conflict, could provide valuable insights into identity formation. Furthermore, understanding how ethnic identity intersects with other identities, such as class and religion, is important in comprehending the complex dynamics of power and politics in the region. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be conducted to deepen our understanding of the interplay between identity and its relationship to power and politics and to inform strategies for promoting greater understanding, cooperation, and social justice in Azerbaijan.

DECLARATIONS

Declaration of Compliance with the Ethical Principles

In line with the *"COPE-Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors"* the following statements are included: The authors of this study declared that they did not use any data that would require the Ethics Committee approval.

Etik İlkelere Uygunluk Beyanı

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Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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