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## Recasting Oneself, Rejecting the Other: Pan-Turkism and Iranian Nationalism

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Twentieth-century historiography on nation– state correlation and nationalism has to a large extent been shaped by a eurocentric ethnolinguistic discourse, where ‘ethnicity and language’ become the central, increasingly the decisive or even the only, criteria of potential nationhood, (1) or as Karl Renner asserts:

*once a certain degree of European development has been reached, the linguistic and cultural communities of people, having silently matured throughout the centuries, emerge from the world of passive existence as people (Passiver Volkheit). They become conscious of themselves as a force with historical destiny. They demand control over the state, as the highest available instrument of power, and strive for their political self-determination. The birthday of the political idea of the nation and the birth-year of this new consciousness, is 1789, the year of the French Revolution.(2)*

However, what this perception of the nation-state largely neglects is the fact that the construction of a bounded territorial entity (or what is generally referred to as nation-state-building) has often entailed components other than ethnic or linguistic bonds. Collective imagination, political allegiances, reconstructing and reinterpreting history, the invention of necessary historical traditions to justify and give coherence to the emerging modern state: all these are often major factors in bringing groups of people together and strengthening or even forming their common sense of identity and political solidarity.

In some cases the mere application of ancient, historically resonant names and traditions is enough to evoke a consensus of political legitimacy. Consequently, the social connotations of certain key socio-political phrases, as well as geographic terms, become an important element in reshaping the geographic boundaries of emerging sovereign states.

As far as Iran is concerned, it is widely argued that Iranian nationalism was born as a state ideology in the Reza Shah era, based on philological nationalism and as a result of his innovative success in creating a modern nation-state in Iran. However, what is often neglected is that Iranian nationalism has its roots in the political upheavals of the nineteenth century and the disintegration immediately following the Constitutional revolution of 1905–9. It was during this period that Iranism gradually took shape as a defensive discourse for constructing a bounded territorial entity – the ‘pure Iran’ standing against all others. Consequently, over time there emerged among the country’s intelligentsia a political xenophobia which contributed to the formation of Iranian defensive nationalism. It is noteworthy that, contrary to what one might expect, many of the leading agents of the construction of an Iranian bounded territorial entity came from non-Persian-speaking ethnic minorities, and the foremost were the Azerbaijanis, rather than the nation’s titular ethnic group, the Persians. The intention of this essay is to throw further light on the complex origins of Iranian nationalism. While examining the various loyalties of the Iranian non-Persian intelligentsia, I shall sketch the measures adopted by such groups when defending their real or imagined identities against the early-twentieth-century irredentist ideology of neighbouring states.

## **The Outbreak of World War I**

For many Iranians the thirteen months of ‘lesser despotism’ of June 1908– July 1909 which followed Muhammad ‘Ali Shah’s coup was the most crucial period of their country’s constitutional history: the entire country, except for Azerbaijan, was subjugated to the new regime. By sending in the army and imposing economic restrictions, the central government strove to bring the Azerbaijanis, too, to their knees. However, while famine spread across the province, the Azerbaijani constitutionalists set up barricades in Tabriz and prepared to offer

armed resistance. When the government in Tehran was eventually overthrown, the constitutionalists found themselves in a nearly unique position with the attention of the entire nation fixed on them. Gradually the belief arose among Iranians that, although the Constitutional Revolution had been born in Tehran, it had been baptized in Tabriz and the Constitution had no chance of surviving without Azerbaijan. Moreover, Azerbaijan was seen as the most important centre where any future progressive political changes would originate. This appraisal of the cardinal role played by the Azerbaijanis in restoring

constitutionalism in Iran left Azerbaijani constitutionalists with a strong consciousness of being the protectors of the country's territorial integrity, a consciousness which still persists.

When World War I erupted, political chaos and confusion swept across Iran. Successive governments proved incapable of solving the country's escalating problems and implementing fundamental reforms. Indeed, not only did the outbreak of the war fail to stop political disintegration in Iran, but increased foreign pressure caused the longstanding rift in Iranian politics to widen. As early as October 1910, Britain had delivered an ultimatum to Iran concerning the security of southern Iran. In so doing, Britain set an example for the Russians to follow. Russian troops had already occupied the northern provinces. In November 1911 the tsarist government presented its own ultimatum to Iran, which amounted to nothing less than an attempt to reduce the north of the country to the status of a semi-dependent colony. (3) However, while the Iranian parliament, which enjoyed the support of the crowds in the street, resisted the Russian ultimatum, the fragile Iranian government decided to accept it and dissolve the parliament. This seemed the only effective measure available to the deputies in the face of the crisis that had arisen. (4) Meanwhile, the occupation of the north and south of Iran by Russian and British troops was to provoke the Ottoman forces to invade western and north-western Iran early in the war. If we add to this list of disasters the activities of German agents, especially among the southern tribes, we begin to get an idea of how impotent the Iranian government was during this period.

The Iranian government's reaction to the outbreak of the war was to declare Iran's strict neutrality in the *farman* of 1 November 1914. On the other hand, what sense was there in the government's announcing its neutrality when a sizeable part of Iran's territory was occupied by the Entente forces? When Mostowfi ol-Mamalik, the prime minister, approached the Russian authorities and asked that they withdraw their troops from Azerbaijan because their presence gave the Turks a pretext for invading Iran, 'the Russian minister appreciated the Iranian viewpoint but inquired what guarantees could be given that after the withdrawal of Russian forces, the Turks would not bring in theirs.' (5) Consequently, Azerbaijan became one of the major battlefields of the war. As part of their military strategy, the Russians, British and Ottomans all pursued policies which aimed at stirring up or aggravating the existing animosities between the different ethnic and religious groupings in the province. Promises were made with regard to setting up a sovereign state for Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians and Azerbaijani Muslims. Such demagogic manipulations led to the most bloody and barbaric confrontations among these ethnic and religious groups.

Soon after the outbreak of World War I, the Ottoman Empire, with

the encouragement of Enver Pasha, the Ottoman minister of war, sided with Germany. Enver Pasha, judged that doing so gave the Ottomans a good chance of surviving and perhaps even of making some gains from Russia. He also declared a jihad, inciting Muslims to rise up against British and Russian rule in India, Iran, the Caucasus and Central Asia. To him, the Russians were not only kafir (infidels), but also invaders who had occupied areas south of the Caucasus which were considered part of the Islamic– Turkic homeland. Enver Pasha played a leading part in negotiating a secret German– Ottoman treaty, signed on 2 August 1914; in October the Ottoman fleet entered the Black Sea, bombarded Odessa and the Crimean ports, and sank Russian ships. In addition, Ottoman forces were deployed along the Caucasus frontier with Russia, where severe fighting began in the harsh mountain terrain. The ultimate strategic objective for the Ottomans was to capture the Baku oilfields and northern Iran in order to penetrate Central Asia and Afghanistan, not only as a threat to British India, but also to extend the Ottoman Empire to what were referred as its natural boundaries:

*We should not forget that the reason for our entrance into the world war is not only to save our country from the danger threatening it. No, we pursue an even more immediate goal – the realization of our ideal, which demands that, having shattered our Muscovite enemy, we lead our empire to its natural boundaries, which would encompass and unite all our related people. (6)*

In December 1914, a Russian advance towards Erzurum was countered by the Ottomans, but, in battles at Sarikamish, in January 1915 the Ottomans, ill-clad and ill-supplied for the Caucasian winter, suffered their greatest defeat of the war.

In the south, other Ottoman forces, which had invaded the city of Maraghan in late November 1914, moved to Tabriz on 14 January. Since the Russian army was still stationed in Tabriz, confrontation between two armies seemed inevitable. Although the Russian troops avoided a military confrontation and evacuated Tabriz, the Ottomans were unable to maintain their hold on the city and were expelled by a Russian counter-invasion in March 1915.(7) The defeat at Sarikamish, was indeed a turning-point in the Ottomans' policy of expanding east. Throughout the remaining years of the war they adopted a low profile in the region. It was only at the end of the World War I, and following the Russian Revolution, that the Ottomans were able to return to Iran.

## **Pan-Turkism and Iran's Response to It**

Although it took some years for the Ottomans to realize their dream of installing themselves in the region north as well as south of the Araxes river, the pan-Turkist uproar reached Baku as early as 1908, when the Young Turk Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) launched their coup, which brought an end to the despotic era of Abdulhamid. When Abdulhamid abdicated, pan-Islamism, which he had supported, was flavoured throughout the heartland of the empire by Turkic national sentiment. Like the people who initiated pan-Turkism, the pioneers of propagating pan-Turkism among the Turkic peoples came from the Russian Empire, having been influenced by the model of nineteenth-century pan-Slavism.

As early as 1904, Yusuf Akc, uroglu (later known as Yusuf Akchura), a Tatar from the Russian Empire, published a pamphlet called *Uch, Tarz-i Siyaset* (Three Kinds of Policies), which soon came to be known as the manifesto of the pan-Turkists. In this famous declaration, which was originally printed in Cairo by Turks in exile, Akc, ura discussed the inherent historical obstacles blocking the advance of pan-Ottomanism and pan-Islamism and advocated *Ittihad-i Etrak* (Unity of Turks), or as he later called it, *Turkculuk* (Turkism), (8) as the sole concept capable of sustaining the *Turk milleti* (Turkish nation).

He admitted that he ‘does not know if the idea still had adherents outside the Ottoman Empire’, especially in *Qafqaziya ve shimali Iran* (the Caucasus and northern Iran), but he hoped that in the near future his views on Turkish identity would attract the support of many Turks wherever they lived. (9)

*Ittihad-i Etrak* was soon adopted as a policy by political parties and ‘cultural organizations’ in the Ottoman Empire. In 1908, *Turk Dernegi* (the Turkish Society) was founded in Istanbul to study the ‘past and present activities and circumstances of all the people called *Turk*.(10) In its declaration issued on 25 December 1908, the society pledged to ‘encourage the use of Ottoman-Turkish among foreign peoples. At first, Turks in the Balkan states, Austria, Russia, Iran, Africa, Central Asia and China will be familiarized with Ottoman-Turkish’. Furthermore, ‘languages in Azerbaijan, Kashgar, Bukhara, Khiva, etc., will be reformed to be like Ottoman-Turkish for the benefit of Ottoman trade’.(11) *Turk Dernegi* was followed by another society called *Turk Ocagi* (Turkish Hearth). In its manifesto, written in 1912, this society proclaimed as its chief aim ‘to advance the national education and raise the scientific, social and economic level of the Turks who are the foremost of the peoples of Islam, and to strive for the betterment of the Turkish race and language’.(12)

The pioneers of pan-Turkism in Caucasian Azerbaijan, however, were those of the Azerbaijani elite living in Istanbul who were disillusioned by the stagnation of the Iranian constitutional movement, the failure of the Russian revolution of 1905, and the crisis in the European social democratic movement. Some, who were sympathetic to the Iranian reformist movement, turned their gaze from Tabriz and Tehran to Istanbul. The Istanbul of the Young Turks, with its call for unity among the Turkic peoples, was a new haven for such elites from tsarist Russia. With a growing sense of their isolation, they turned to studying ethnic culture and history and its accompanying political importance. The outlook of Ali Husaynzade, Ahmad Aghayev and, later, Muhammad Amin Rasulzade was immediately welcomed by the CUP, and some of them were even given government positions in the new Ottoman regime. When *Turk Yurdu* (Turkish Homeland), the main journal propagating pan-Turkism in the Ottoman Empire was launched in Istanbul, they were among the most prominent contributors to it. In one of his editorials Ahmad Aghayev even reproached the Ottomans for calling the Iranian Azerbaijanis, Iranians, rather than Turks. (13) Muhammad Amin Rasulzade in a series of articles entitled '*Iran Turkleri*' (the Iranian Turks), contributed a descriptive analysis of the Iranian Turkic minorities and their distinctive national identities. (14)

During the war, pan-Turkist activities in Baku, which was still under tsarist rule, were mainly confined to the publication of certain periodicals. While maintaining their absolute loyalty in the tsarist cause in the war, periodicals such as *Yeni Fuyuzat* (New Abundance) and *Salale* (Cascade), adopted as their chief mission the purification of the Azerbaijani language, Arabic and Persian vocabulary was to be purged, and words of pure Turkic origin were to be substituted, as was being done in nationalist circles in the Ottoman Empire. Whereas news about the activities of pan-Turkist organizations in the empire was often covered in editorials by 'Isa Bey Azurbeyli, the editor of *Salale*, the question of Iranian Azerbaijan remained neglected by such periodicals, and it seemed that in their hidden agenda the forging of firmer ties with the Ottomans had priority over unification with the Iranian Azerbaijanis. (15)

However, the attitude toward Turkism in the Caucasus was somewhat altered when in 1913 an amnesty was declared in Baku on the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of the Romanov dynasty. Political activists such as the committed social democrat Rasulzade, who some years earlier had launched the leading newspaper *Iran-e Now* in Tehran, were then able to return to live within tsarist territory.

On his return to Baku, Rasulzade began to publish his own newspaper. The first issue of *Achiq Soz* (Candid Speech) appeared in October 1915 and publication continued until March 1918. Under the tsars the newspaper called itself 'a Turkish political, social and literary paper' and adopted a standpoint close to that of the tsarist empire, endorsing the latter's war policy. At the same time, it paid a certain amount of attention to Iran and Iranian Azerbaijan. When it had occasion to cover Iranian news, it voiced its sympathy for the Iranian Democrats. 16 After the Russian Revolution, however, it changed its attitude, and abruptly adopted an openly pro-Ottoman policy, calling for *turklame*, *islamlame* va mu'asirllame' (*Turkicization, Islamicization and modernization*).

On 18 October 1917, a branch of *Turk Ocagi* was founded in Baku. Among the aspirations of the new society, which claimed that its activities were confined exclusively to the cultural domain, was the desire to '*acquaint the younger generation with their historical Turkic heritage and to consolidate their Turkic consciousness through setting up schools, organizing conferences and publishing books*'.(17) *Achiq Soz* not only welcomed the new society but reported extensively on its activities, covered its frequent gatherings in Baku, and published lectures delivered at its conferences. Most of these lengthy articles were on different aspects of the history and culture of the Muslim peoples of the southern Caucasus. It seems that at this stage no one in Baku was interested in applying the term 'Azerbaijan' to the territory south of the Caucasus. '*Tu`rk milleti*' and '*Qafqaziya mu`salman Xalqi*' (the Muslim people of the Caucasus) were often employed to designate the inhabitants of the region. The first Constituent Assembly, which was established in Baku on 29 April 1917, was even called the General Assembly of the Caucasian Muslims.

One result of the political upheavals in Moscow, which eventually ended with the Bolshevik takeover in October 1917, was the creation of a power vacuum in the Caucasus. A month later, the Transcaucasian Commissariat was established in Tblisi, and it proclaimed 'the right of Caucasian nations to self-determination'. By then it was obvious that the Armenian Dashnakists and Georgian Mensheviks were poised to establish their power over a large part of the region. The Baku Musavatists, who enjoyed an absolute majority in the Baku Constituent Assembly, realized that the time had come for swift political action. With the old tsarist empire gone, the Musavatists were counting on the Ottomans, who were now viewed as the uncontested dominant power in the region. The goal of the Musavatists in their contest with the Armenians and the Georgians was to win control over as much territory as possible. They claimed '*besides the Baku and Ganja province, the Muslim population of Daghestan, the*

*northern Caucasus, the Georgian-speaking Muslim Inghilios of Zakataly, the Turkish inhabitants of the province of Erivan and Kars, and even the Georgian-speaking Muslim Ajars of the southern shore of the Black Sea’.*(18) Furthermore, since the majority of Azerbaijani speaking people lived in a large region within northern Iran, their ultimate hope was to persuade the Azerbaijani leaders in Iran to support their proposed project for unity. Consequently, in October 1917 an emissary arrived in Tabriz, approached the local politicians and advocated that they separate from Iran and join with Baku in a great federation. However, their proposal was rejected by the Azerbaijani Democrats. (19)

Following this failure, in an editorial published in *Achiq Soz*, in January 1918 the Musavatists for the first time tackled the question of Iranian Azerbaijan. In a rather haughty style, the author defined the historical boundaries of Azerbaijan as stretching to the Caucasian mountains in the north and to Kirmanshah in the south, with Tbilisi forming the western frontier and the Caspian Sea the eastern. The Russian expansionists and the Iranian ruling class were blamed for having adopted policies that resulted in the dismemberment of the nation of Azerbaijan. Furthermore, according to the author, it was the ‘*natural right of the south Caucasian Muslims to call their territory Azerbaijan*’ and to hope that ‘*one day their brothers in the south could join them*’.(20)

Interestingly enough, the first reaction to this irredentist propaganda came from a group of Iranian Democrats residing in Baku. Since the beginning of the century, the flourishing economy of the Caucasus had attracted many Iranians, most of whom were Azerbaijanis or Azerbaijani-speakers from the north of Iran. But although they spoke the same language, they did not readily assimilate. Throughout the Caucasus region they were known as ‘*hamshahri*’ (fellow countrymen) and they maintained a sense of separate identity which marked them out as different from the local population. (21)

Of the various organizations that existed among the Iranian community in Baku, the local branch of the Iranian Democrat Party was the most eminent and active. The party’s Baku Committee was founded in 1914 and its members were recruited from the Iranian community in Baku and the adjacent regions. In their perception the view expounded in the *Achiq Soz* editorial was nothing less than a pan-Turkist plot which menaced Iran’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Disturbed by such attempts to undermine Iranian unity, they soon inaugurated their own political campaign in the region. On 10 February 1918, the Democrats launched the publication of a bilingual



newspaper, *Azarbayjan, Joz'-e la-yanfakk-e Iran* (Azerbaijan, an Inseparable Part of Iran). (22) 'Azarbayjan' was printed in big letters on the masthead with 'Joz'-e la-yanfakk-e Iran' printed in much smaller letters inside the 'n' of Azarbayjan'. Later on Salamullah Javid, a political activist in Baku, acknowledged that 'the decision to publish the newspaper was taken by the Democrats at the local level and was a direct response to irredentist propaganda initiated by *Achiq Soz*'.(23)

In addition to promoting political change and reform in Iran, the newspaper declared as its task '*displaying the country's glorious past and its historical continuity*',(24) as well as '*hindering any attempt to diminish the national consciousness of Iranians*'.(25) While glorifying the name of Azerbaijan and its '*key position in Iranian history*', the publication frequently referred to '*the many centuries during which Azerbaijan governed all of Iran*'. Similarly, it stressed that Azerbaijan had a shared history with the rest of Iran, and strove to foster selfconfidence and the feeling of belonging to territorial Iran. Pointing to the geographical front-line position of the province, the newspaper '*declared it to be the duty of Azerbaijanis*' to confront the hostile outsiders, and to safeguard the country's '*national pride*' and '*territorial integrity*'. Though the newspaper never named these outsiders, or '*intruders*', as they were called, it considered that 'their intention has always been to undermine Iran's territorial integrity and political sovereignty'. Moreover, by representing Azerbaijanis as the main champions of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, it attempted to portray them as the sole guardians of Iran as a bounded territorial entity.

In a multi-ethnic society like Iran, where Persians form the titular ethnic group, a minority of Azerbaijanis living outside Iran, but within their linguistic territory, promoted a sense of Iranian state patriotism and territorial nationalism rather than their own ethno-nationalism. Their political loyalty and attachment to a constructed political reliability therefore took precedence over their other loyalties, in particular their ethnic loyalty. Likewise, they apparently believed in the nineteenth-century notion of a '*historical nation*' in which the Staatsvolk (state-people) was associated with the state. In their view, the Iranians, just as the dispersed members of a Greater Russia or a Greater Germany did, made up a community associated with a territorial state. Consequently they attempted to uphold their territorial/Iranian identity in the face of pan-Turkist propaganda by '*shaping a significant and unbroken link with a seminal past that could fill the gap between the nation's origin and its actuality*'.(26) For them, as Nipperdey has correctly pointed out, romantic nationalism provided the driving force for political action: '*cultural identity with its claims for what ought to be, demanded political consequences: a common*

*state, the only context in which they [the people] could develop, the only force that could protect them and the only real possibility for integrating individuals into a nation'.(27)*

With a persuasive political agenda, *Azarbayjan, Joz'-e la-yanfakk-e Iran* pursued what in its first issue it had proclaimed to be its duty, and continued to publish even after the takeover of Baku by the Bolsheviks known as the Baku Commune. However, it was forced to close down in May 1918 when the Musavatists regained power and formed their national government. In their turn the Musavatists, who had been obliged to stop publishing *Achiq Soz* during the previous five months, in September 1918 launched their new gazette *Azerbaijan*. By adopting the same name for their publication that the Iranian Democrats in Baku had used four months earlier, the Musavatists demonstrated their firm attachment to the name they intended to give their future independent state.

## **The Return of the Ottomans**

After World War I, the political arena in Anatolia as well as the Caucasus was significantly altered. The tsarist empire had been swept away by the winds of revolution and the Ottomans were striving to put together the jigsaw pieces of their empire. If during their first short-lived invasion the Ottomans had not had time to disseminate their pan-Turkist propaganda among the Iranian Azerbaijanis, as a result of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the fall of their old foe, the CUP were now able to initiate a new pan-Turkist campaign in northern Iran. As noted by a member of the British diplomatic service: *Turkey are hand in glove with the Tatars of Transcaucasia (Baku) and these have put in claims to Azerbaijan on their own account. . . . Northern Persia is essential to Turkey as a link with the Turanians of Central Asia.* (28)

In the middle of April 1918, the Ottoman army invaded Azerbaijan for the second time. Yusuf Zia, (29) a local coordinator of the activities of the *Teskilat-i Mahsusa* (Special Organization) (30) in the region, was appointed political adviser to the Ottoman contingent in Iran. Soon, the *Teskilat-i Mahsusa* introduced a small pan-Turkist party in Tabriz(31), together with the publication of an Azerbaijani-language newspaper called *Azarabadegan*, which was the Ottomans' main instrument for propagating pan-Turkism throughout the province. The editorship of the newspaper was offered to Taqi Rafcat, a local Azerbaijani who later became known for his vanguard role in effecting innovations in Persian literature.

Contrary to their expectations, however, the Ottomans did not

achieve impressive success in Azerbaijan. Although the province remained under quasi-occupation by Ottoman troops for months, attempting to win endorsement for pan-Turkism ended in failure.

The Ottomans had never enjoyed the support of local political parties, ever since their arrival in Tabriz, and their relations with the local Democrats had been particularly strained. With the passage of time relations with the Democrats deteriorated to the point, where the Ottomans went as far as to arrest the Democrats' popular radical leader, Muhammad Khiyabani, together with his two comrades Nowbari and Badamchi, and sent them to Kars in exile. (32) Khiyabani being accused of '*collaborating with the Armenians against the forces of Islam*', (33) the immediate result of their intervention was to whip up serious anti-Ottoman sentiment among the Democrats, who were preparing to take control of the province.

The summer of 1918 appeared to be a honeymoon period for the Ottomans after stationing their troops on Iranian soil. Occupying the area north of the Araxes was the next logical step on their agenda. With the seizure of Baku in September 1918, it seemed that their Turanian dream was gradually being realized: the region both north and south of the Araxes was now under their control. However, with the end of the war approaching, and an escalating political problem at home, not to mention the food crisis, the CUP leadership was obliged to give priority to the centre of its envisaged empire rather than to the periphery. A direct consequence of the large-scale export of cattle and grain from the newly occupied territories to the Ottoman interior was a mounting resentment among the local population. On 23 September 1918, an Ottoman– German protocol was signed, confirming the territorial integrity of Iran, but the Ottomans suffered a setback on their western front when Bulgaria was forced to surrender on 30 September. It was then obvious that pursuing the war any further was impossible for the Ottomans. On 9 October, the CUP government fell and the new government of Izzet Pasha signed an armistice with the Allies. Returning to Tabriz from exile on 24 June 1920, Khiyabani announced the formation of a local government. The announcement took place with pomp and ceremony in the '*Ali Qapi*', the central government's provincial headquarters. In a country where the political culture was dominated by xenophobia, one of the key issues for Khiyabani and his fellow Democrats was how to dissociate themselves as completely as possible from the foreign powers. Their relations with the Ottomans, in view of the latter's actions against Khiyabani, remained cold and distant. But what concerned them even more urgently was how to defend their position in face of the political upheavals sweeping through the Caucasus.

On 27 May 1918, when the new Republic of Azerbaijan was founded on the territory north of the Araxes River and south-east of Transcaucasia, the adoption of the name 'Azerbaijan' caused consternation in Iran, especially among Azerbaijani intellectuals. Khiyabani and his fellow Democrats, in order to dissociate themselves from the Transcaucasians, decided to change the name of Iranian Azerbaijan to Azadistan (Land of Freedom). (34) By way of justifying this decision, they referred to the important 'heroic role' Azerbaijan had played in the struggle to establish the Constitution in Iran which, in their view, warranted adopting the name Azadistan. (35)

## From Territorial to Titular Nationalism

The fall of the Musavatists in 1920s, which was a result of close collaboration between the Bolsheviks and the CUP leadership, caused considerable disillusion among the Azerbaijani pro-Ottoman intelligentsia. However profitable this cooperation was for the Bolsheviks, the old guard of the Ottoman Unionists in the region, by adopting different measures, were still striving to realize their old dream. As an intelligence British office remarked:

*It will be remembered that the unfortunate 'Musavat' government of Baku was successfully overturned by the Communists mainly as a result of the assistance given by the numerous Turkish Unionists. The infiltration of Unionists in the Turkish Communist Party in Baku still continues; they thus seek to establish complete control in course of time, and to gain control of Georgia and Azerbaijan in order to connect them up with their schemes in Central Asia. . . . The Unionists' plan therefore is to continue the alliance with Russia so long as it enables them to advance their own plans, which are being energetically pursued. (36)*

The final consolidation of Soviet power in the Caucasus, which was eventually realized by the subjugating of Georgia on March 1921, paved the way for a shift in diplomatic maneuvering by the newly born Soviet administration. In February the Soviet–Iranian Treaty was concluded, and it was followed by the signing of a peace treaty with Turkey in March 1921. Having extended its southern border to the Araxes river, the Soviet regime adopted a restrained policy towards Iran, officially forbidding any nationalist claims on Iranian territory.

The tragic outcome of Khiyabani's revolt, which was followed by the suppression of the uprisings in Khorasan and Gilan, left the Democrats in Iran in total disarray. A group of them, mainly from non-Azerbaijani background, were enthralled by pan-Islamism, as propagated by the late Ottomans as a means of winning over a non-Turkic

people in the region. Another tendency within the Democrats found it difficult to subscribe to the regional movement launched by their party comrades. Subsequently, a new group of reform-minded intellectuals gradually emerged on the Iranian political scene. Their mode of understanding society was based on socio-political ideas of West European origin. Despite the diversity of their political views, what singled out them from the home-grown variety of educated or learned individuals was the model of society that they took for granted. The West European model presupposed a coherent, class-layered society, which by definition was organized around the distinctive concepts of *nation* and *state*. They were convinced that only a strong centralized government based in the capital would be capable of implementing reform throughout Iran, while preserving the nation's territorial integrity. Likewise they believed that modernization and modern state-building in Iran would require low cultural diversity and a high degree of ethnic homogeneity. Only when Iran fulfilled the preconditions for a nation-state as defined by them, when '*empirically almost all the residents of a state identify with the one subjective idea of the nation, and that nation is virtually contiguous*',(37) could they realistically cherish hopes of safeguarding Iranian territorial integrity.

In the recently born state of Turkey, the *Turk Ocagi* activists strove to find a new home under the self-restrained Kemalist regime. In 1923, the Turkish magazine *Yeni Mecmu'a* (the New Journal) reported on a conference about Azerbaijan, held by *Turk Ocagi* in Istanbul. During the conference, Roshani Barkin, an ex-member of *Teshkilat-i Mahsusa* and an eminent pan-Turkist, condemned the Iranian government for its oppressive and tyrannical policies towards the Azerbaijanis living in Iran. He called on all Azerbaijanis in Iran to unite with the new-born Republic of Turkey. (38)

In reply *Iranshahr* (Land of Iran), a journal published in Berlin, and the Tehran-based journal *Ayandeh* (The Future) ran a series of articles denouncing pan-Turkism and became the pioneers of the newly launched titular nationalism in Iran. While *Iranshahr* attempted to provide historical underpinning, *Ayandeh* took on the task of propounding the necessary conditions for the '*unification*' and '*Persianization*' of all Iranians as one nation. (39) Advocating the elimination of regional differences in '*language, clothing, customs and suchlike*', *Ayandeh* demanded '*national unity*' based on the standardized, homogeneous and centrally sustained high culture of the titular ethnic group:

*Kurds, Lors, Qashwa'is, Arabs, Turks, Turkmens, etc., shall not differ from one another by wearing different clothes or speaking a*

*different language. In my opinion, until national unity is achieved in Iran, with regard to customs, clothing, and so forth, the possibility of our political independence and geographical integrity being endangered will always remain.*(40)

Their insistence on raising the status of Persian above that of a *lingua franca* and cleansing its vocabulary of loan words, especially those from Turkish and Arabic, provided the newly constructed sentiment with a form of philological nationalism. Later, philologists were to be inspired to create grotesque and far-fetched neologisms such as '*kas nadanad-sikhaki*', to replace '*mahramana-mostagim*' (direct-confidential). Moreover, their campaign of purification naturally went beyond the linguistic field and pervaded the realm of Iranian history as well. By rewriting history, a 'pure Iran' with a long historical identity was created, an Iran purged of all 'foreign' and 'uncivilized elements' within its borders. Such an identity ultimately depended on negative stereotypes of non-Iranians. The Turks and later the Arabs, who were referred in nationalist discourse as the '*yellow and green hazards*',(41) served as the indispensable '*others*' in the construction of the new Iranian identity. With the passage of time, the proponents of this form of revivalist nationalism became the founders of a trend in Iranian historiography known above all for its emphasis on continuity in Iranian culture and its concern to uphold the country's pre-Islamic values.

Furthermore, by adopting the Western European model of modern nation-state-building under an absolutist ruler, the Iranian nationalists in their manifesto advocated bureaucratic efficiency, clear territorial demarcation, and a homogenized and territorially fixed population, who were to be taxed, conscripted into the army and administered in such a way as to be transformed into modern '*citizens*'. When Reza Shah ascended the throne, he wholeheartedly endorsed all the demands voiced by these nationalists. Indeed, the blueprint for his 'one country, one nation' project was already on his desk.

## Conclusion

The most important political development affecting the Middle East at the beginning of the twentieth century was the collapse of the Ottoman and the Russian empires. The idea of a greater homeland for all Turks was propagated by pan-Turkism, which was adopted almost at once as a main ideological pillar by the Committee of Union and Progress and somewhat later by other political caucuses in what remained of the Ottoman Empire. On the eve of World War I, pan-Turkist propaganda focused chiefly on the Turkic-speaking peoples of

the southern Caucasus, in Iranian Azerbaijan and Turkistan in Central Asia, with the ultimate purpose of persuading them all to secede from the larger political entities to which they belonged and to join the new pan-Turkic homeland. Interestingly, it was this latter appeal to Iranian Azerbaijanis which, contrary to pan-Turkist intentions, caused a small group of Azerbaijani intellectuals to become the most vociferous advocates of Iran's territorial integrity and sovereignty. If in Europe '*romantic nationalism responded to the damage likely to be caused by modernism by providing a new and larger sense of belonging, an all-encompassing totality, which brought about new social ties, identity and meaning, and a new sense of history from one's origin on to an illustrious future*',(42) in Iran after the Constitutional movement romantic nationalism was adopted by the Azerbaijani Democrats as a reaction to the irredentist policies threatening the country's territorial integrity. In their view, assuring territorial integrity was a necessary first step on the road to establishing the rule of law in society and a competent modern state which would safeguard collective as well as individual rights. It was within this context that their political loyalty outweighed their other ethnic or regional affinities. The failure of the Democrats in the arena of Iranian politics after the Constitutional movement and the start of modern state-building paved the way for the emergence of the titular ethnic group's cultural nationalism. Whereas the adoption of integrationist policies preserved Iran's geographic integrity and provided the majority of Iranians with a secure and firm *national* identity, the blatant ignoring of other demands of the Constitutional movement, such as the call for formation of society based on law and order, left the country still searching for a *political* identity.

## Notes

- 1 E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 102.
- 2 K. Renner, *Staat und Nation*, p. 89, quoted by Hobsbawm, *ibid.*, p. 101.
- 3 For the details of the ultimatum, see A. Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Hijdah Saleh-e Azarbayjan*, 9th edn (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 235–40.
- 4 R. Ramazine, *The Foreign Policy of Iran* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1966), pp. 103–8.
- 5 Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran*, p. 115.
- 6 S. A. Zenkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 127–8.
- 7 R. Orbay, 'Hatıralar', *Yakinn Tarihimiz*, cilt I (Istanbul: Türkipetrol, 1963), pp. 16–29.
- 8 Y. Akçuroglu, ed., *Türk Yılı, 1928* (Istanbul: Yeni Metba'a, 1928), p. 396.
- 9 Y. Akçuroglu, *Üç Tarz-i Siyâset* (Cairo: Metba'a-i Qadr, 1909), pp. 11–12.
- 10 B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 343.
- 11 M. Arai, *Turkish Nationalism in the Young Turk Era* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 20.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 344.
- 13 Türk 'Âlemi *Türk Yurdu Birici Cilt 1327–1328* (Istanbul: Tanin Matba'ası, 1328/1912), p. 16.
- 14 'Iran Türkleri', *Türk Yurdu Birici Cilt 1327–1328* (Istanbul: Tanin Matba'ası, 1328/1912), pp. 106–11, 428–32, 551–6, 648–56, 670–72, 755–60.
- 15 See, for example, *Şâlâlê*, 17 January 1914.
- 16 See, for example, *Achiq Söz*, 20 August 1917.
- 17 *Achiq Söz*, 18 October 1917. Among the founders of Türk Ocağı was Abdullah Şa'îq, the younger brother of Yusuf Zia. For Yusuf Zia, see note 29.
- 18 Zenkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia*, p. 262.
- 19 FO 371/4358, 1918.
- 20 *Achiq Söz*, 17 January 1918.



- 21 On the process of self-identification, see Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), pp. 9–10.
- 22 Mohammad Khan Tarbiyat was the founder of the Democrat Party's Baku committee, and the director of Iranian Etehhad school in Baku. Other members: Mirza Mahmud Khan Parvaresh, Mirza 'Abdollah 'Abdolahzadeh, Shaykh Baqir Shirazi, Azhdar 'Alizadeh, Hosayn Khayyat, Hosayn Mahmuzadeh, Mir Hosayn Motazavi, Mirza 'Aliqoli (from Ashqabad, who later became the editor of the newspaper *Azarbayjan, Joz'-e layanfakk-e Iran*), Mir Jafar Javadzadeh Pishavari, Haji Mo'atlem Ja'farzadeh Kalkhali, Mirza Aqa Valizadeh, Sayfollah Ibrahimzadeh, 'Ali Akbar Osku'i (founder of Iranian gilde, labours executive committee). Because of his political activities Parvarish had to leave Baku in 1916; he went illegally to Iran. After the Russian Revolution of February 1917, the Democrat Party began to operate legally. See S. Javid, *Iran Sosal Demokrat (Adalat) Firqasi Haqqinda Khataralarim* (Tehran: Lithography, 1980), pp. 9–10. The other Iranian societies and organizations in Baku included the 'Iran Independent party', pro-Iranian government, Javid p. 11. 'Sanduq-e Ta'avon-e Madrisa-e Etehad-e Iraniyan-e Baku', Javid, p. 13. 'Jam'iyat-e Ma'arif-e-I Iran' (an Adalat party front), Javid p. 17. 'Ijtima'iyun-Inqilabiyun (Sosal-Revolutioner). 'Ali Bayramov, was killed by Musavatists during their reign, Javid, p. 19. Furthermore, the Iranians had two schools: Etehad in the city centre and Tamadon (in the Sabunchi district). In March 1918, following the conflict between Musavatists and the Baku Commune, almost all Iranian societies were liquidated. Javid, pp. 14–15.
- 23 Ibid, p. 10.
- 24 On the origin of reconstructing Iran's pre-Islamic history in the nationalist discourse, see M. Tavaqoli-Targhi, 'Contested Memories: Narrative Structure and Allegorical Meaning of Iran's pre-Islamic History', *Iranian Studies*, vol. 29, nos. 1–2 (1996), pp. 149–175.
- 25 *Azarbayjan Joz'-e layanfakk-e Iran*, nos. 2 and 3, 2 and 6 February 1918.
- 26 I. Gershoni, 'Imagining and Reimagining the Past: The Use of History by Egyptian Nationalist Writers, 1919–1952', *History & Memory*, vol. 4, no. 2 (fall-winter 1992), p. 7.
- 27 T. Nipperdey, 'In Search of Identity: Romantic Nationalism, its Intellectual, Political and Social Background', in J. C. Eade, ed., *Romantic Nationalism in Europe* (Australian National University, 1983), p. 11.
- 28 FO 371/4358, 1918.
- 29 Yusuf Zia Talibzada was born in Burchali in Georgia in 1877. His father was a high-ranking mulla in the Caucasus region. When Yusuf was a child his mother took him, together with his brother 'Abdullah, later 'Abdullah Sa'iq to Mashhad to study. His teacher there was a dissident

Anatolian Turk called Zia, whose name Yusuf adopted. After finishing elementary school in Mashhad, he went to Kerbela and became a mulla. Returning to Baku in 1899, he started his career in the service of Haj Zaynolabidin Taqiov, at whose order he translated *Hashf al-Haqaiq* into Azerbaijani. Three copies of the book was presented to the Shah of Iran, the Amir of Afghanistan and the Ottoman Sultan. Yusuf Zia was asked to take the Sultan's copy to Istanbul. In 1907 he went to Istanbul and joined the CUP. He served with the Ottoman forces in the 1912 Balkan war and received the title of Pasha. He spent periods as an Ottoman secret agent in Iranian Azerbaijan. Following the Bolshevik takeover he temporarily joined the Bolsheviks and spent some time in Nakhjivan. Later he joined Enver Pasha in Turkistan and became his deputy. Following the death of Enver, while attempting to escape to Afghanistan he was drowned in the Panj river.

- 30 For a detailed study of *Teşkilât-i Mahsusa's* activities in Iran, the Caucasus and Central Asia', in Tabaki, ed., *The Great War in Iran* (St Antony's Publications, forthcoming).
- 31 FO 371/4358, 1918.
- 32 Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Hejdah Saleh-e Azarbayjan*, vol. 2.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Hejdah Saleh-e Azarbayjan*, vol. 2, p. 872.
- 35 Azar, A. op. cit., p. 299.
- 36 FO 371/6342, 1921.
- 37 J. J. Linz and A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation, Southern Europe, South America, and post-Communist Europe* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 25.
- 38 'Türk Ocağında Konfirans', *Yeni Mecmu'a*, no. 81, 2 August 1923, pp. 317-8.
- 39 See, for example, *Ayandeh*, nos. 1 (1925), 8 (1926); *Iranshahr*, no. 2 (1923). The magazine *Iranshahr* was first published in Berlin, in June 1922. The editor, Hosayn Kazemzadeh, maintained close contact with intellectuals in Europe who were involved with Iranian studies, and his magazine was soon exercising a powerful influence in political and intellectual circles in Iran. During the five years of *Iranshahr's* existence, forty-eight issues appeared and special attention was often paid to Azerbaijan. Indeed, there were nine long articles devoted to the subject.
- 40 Afshar, M., 'Aghaz-nameh', *Ayandeh*, no. 1 1925.
- 41 Afshar, M., 'Khatar-i zard', *Ayandeh*, no. 24 (1927).
- 42 Nipperdey, 'In Search of Identity', p. 15.