

**THE VOICE OF A PERIPHERY LOST IN THE COLD WAR;
FIRQE-YI DEMOKRAT AND ITS OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER “AZERBAIJAN”**

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of History

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Art

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Budapest, Hungary
2017

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Abstract

The rise and fall of the *Firqey-i Demokrat* (The Democrat Party) and the establishment of the Azerbaijan People's Government in the winter of 1945 has been a matter of scholarly interest for decades. The Azerbaijan People's Government (APG) was a self-declared autonomous Government in northwest Iran, Iranian Azerbaijan, headed by Seyyed Jafar Pishavari in December of 1945, which lasted only for a year. The life of the short-lived government and of its leader, Pishavari, is contested among scholars with different ideological orientations. While many see the APG as nothing but a Soviet designed plan, others describe it as a mass mobilization against the injustices of the central government in Tehran. The result of the near half-century battle was the production of reductionist histories in Farsi, Azerbaijani Turkish, and English, the primary concern of which was to prove or disprove Soviet support for the APG and thus discredit or legitimize it. Whether a Soviet plan or a spontaneous mass movement, the story of the Azerbaijan People's Government has many other understudied aspects.

Considering the necessity of going beyond this narrow focus, this thesis will consider the regional dynamics and narrate a history through the official newspaper of the *Firqey-i Demokrat* as the voice of a periphery stuck amid a great war. To do so, first, this research will define the Iranian Azerbaijan as a peripheralized center that was gradually losing its impact within Iranian society. After an overview of the historiography in the introduction, the first chapter will discuss the process of peripheralization in which Azerbaijan gradually lost its importance as a center during the early decades of the twentieth century by focusing on a few cultural, legal and economic examples. The second chapter is devoted to the legacy of *Azerbaijan* newspaper and its origins. The

final chapter, will use the official newspaper of the Azerbaijan People's Government to exclusively investigate problems and concerns of a periphery within Iranian society which were among the claims of legitimation for the APG officials.

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1 Introduction

Iranian Azerbaijan occupies an important position in the contemporary history of Iran. Due to its geographical location, multilingual population and strong economic ties with neighboring countries, Iranian Azerbaijan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the gateway for Russian, Ottoman and European ideas of progress and development that soon spread all over the country. Not only ideas but also new technologies were transmitted through Azerbaijan to the other parts of Iran. Tabriz, the capital city of Azerbaijan, is known to be the city of firsts,¹ since most of its state institutions are older than those in Tehran; the first municipality, cinema, modern schools and printing houses. Located near the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, with close economic ties to Baku, Tbilisi and Istanbul, Azerbaijan was also the first region in Iran to stand against Qajar absolutism and demand constitutionalism simultaneously with the Russian

¹ Samad Sardarini in his book on the role of Tabriz in the formation of modern Iran, elaborates more on the issue and with numerous examples introduces Tabriz as the pioneer city in the formation of civil society in Iran. For more information, please see: Sardarini, Samad. *Azerbaijan Pishgam-e-Jame-ye-Madani [Azerbaijan, the Frontrunner of the Civil Society in Iran]*. Tabriz: Hadi, 1998.

Revolution of 1905-1907 and the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Iranian Azerbaijan a perfect example of Mary Louise Pratt's theory of "contact zones," which she describes as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other."²

The contemporary history of Azerbaijan has been eventful. Starting from the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, where Tabriz was under siege by government forces for almost a year, Azerbaijan has been in the center of several uprisings that fundamentally changed Iranian society. The devastation caused by the long and violent years of the Constitutional Movement were followed by the atrocities of the First World War. Iranian Azerbaijan had been also a strategic interest for the Ottomans, the Russians and the European powers during the First World War since it was repeatedly occupied by the Ottoman and Russian Armies and witnessed atrocities where cities and towns were plundered by the irregulars. Furthermore, a number of uprisings also broke out and led to emerging new political entities. Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani declared the autonomy of *Azadistan*³ in 1920, and the Lahuti Revolt in 1922⁴ disrupted the political life in Iran for a few weeks. With the emergence of the Pahlavi Dynasty, founded by Reza Shah, Azerbaijan became a relatively stable region, but paid the price for this stability in tight security measures and the suppression of political opposition until 1941. After the occupation of Iran by the Allies in 1941, another eventful period in the history of Azerbaijan began.

² Mary Louise Pratt, "Criticism in the Contact Zone," in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

³ A major insurgency after the First World War in Iranian Azerbaijan that resulted in a short-lived autonomous government called *Azadistan*. Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani as the leader of the movement has been an inspiration for the later generation of Azerbaijanis including many high and mid rank officials of the Azerbaijan People's Government.

⁴ An eleven-day uprising led by Major Abulqasim Lahuti. For more details, see: Cronin, Stephanie. "The Provincial Cities in Revolt (ii): Major Abulqasim Lahuti and the Tabriz Insurrection of 1922." In *Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran*, 101–27. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010.

Only a few months after Seyyed Jafar Pishavari, an experienced journalist and politician, published the manifesto of the *Firqe-yi-Demokrat* with the help of his comrades on September 12, 1945, they declared the establishment of the Azerbaijan People's Government, *Azərbaycan Milli Hökuməti*. Azerbaijan People's Government (APG) was a self-declared autonomous Government in northwest Iran, the Iranian Azerbaijan, headed by Seyyed Jafar Pishavari which lasted only for a year. In mid-December 1946, even before the first troops of the central government forces entered Tabriz, local bandits took to the streets, attacked members of the *Firqe-yi-Demokrat* and paved the way for the Iranian army to put an end to the one-year life of the Azerbaijan People's Government. December 12, 1946 (*21 Azar 1325*) is a disputed symbolic day representing either the day that Azerbaijan was “rescued” from the enemy or the day it was “occupied” by the Iranian Army.

The rise and fall of the Azerbaijan People's Government in the winter of 1945 has been a matter of scholarly interest for decades and is contested among scholars with different ideological orientations. While many see the APG as nothing but a Soviet designed plan, others try to disprove this. The result of the battle for almost half a century was the production of reductionist histories in Farsi, Azerbaijani Turkish, and English whose priority and primary concern was to prove or disprove Soviet support for the APG and thus discredit or legitimize it. Whether a Soviet plan or a spontaneous mass movement, the story of the APG has many other aspects to be properly studied.

Due to the consideration of how other possible approaches could better explain the rise of the Azerbaijan People's Government, along with extensive research on similar uprisings in the region prior to the APG, what particularly became increasingly interesting was the frequency and duration of movements in the region which, in one way or another, confronted Tehran. The Constitutional Movements in the early twentieth century, the short-lived autonomous *Azadistan* of Khiabani in 1920, and finally the rise of *Firqe-yi Demokrat* in 1945 were major events in Iranian history where

Tabriz revolted against the center. Such turmoil and many similar events raise a number of questions: why do similar movements keep happening in Azerbaijan? What facilitates the frequent breakout of revolts and uprisings? What could be a useful source to study such movements? And more importantly, how did the founders of the APG use their newspaper, “*Azerbaijan*,” to elucidate their positions to multiple audiences and grow their movement?

With these questions and concerns in mind, and considering the necessity of going beyond the “Soviet” element in order to know more about other aspects of the Azerbaijan People’s Government, this thesis will argue that the rise of APG and frequently happening similar stories prior and after, can be identified as the reaction of a periphery on a gradual exclusion from the nation-building process in Iran, a periphery that until the early years of the twentieth century was itself at the center of Iranian politics. Furthermore, this thesis will argue that the rise of the APG was the result of a rapid peripheralization process in which Azerbaijan gradually lost its political, economic and social impact within the Iranian context. To this end, this thesis will narrate a micro history in which the official newspaper of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat*, “*Azerbaijan*,” symbolizes the voice of a periphery on the verge of a break away from the center, Tehran. Analyzing the *Azerbaijan* newspaper as the reflection of criticisms, concerns and hopes of a contested periphery, will shed light to the claims of Pishavari and his comrades for taking over power in Tabriz and will further explain what strategies of legitimization they used to justify their newly declared autonomous government.

1.1 The rise and fall of the Azerbaijan People’s Government: a never ending dispute

The historiography of the Azerbaijan People's Government is dominated by either nationalist narrative that claim or disown the APG or macro histories that analyze the APG in the context of the Cold War. The common ground for the majority of these works is to focus on the Soviet Union, diving into the archives of Moscow, Baku, Tehran or the Allies with the hope of finding documents and either confirm that the APG was a Soviet plan or had nothing to do with the Soviet Union. The result is a never ending dispute on the origins of the APG. Consequently, limited consideration is left to the internal dynamics of Iranian society and what Tabriz had to say amid a big power confrontation. The extensive emphasis on the Soviet Union in the literature is a reflexive reaction of scholars to underline the role of "the crisis in Azerbaijan" in the formation and escalation of what soon became known as the Cold War. Of course, this is no surprise since the crisis in Azerbaijan according to many actually is one of the key strategic locations that started the Cold War. For instance, Robert Rossow, the United States council in Tabriz in 1945-46, argues that the Cold War began when the Soviet forces began to pour into the northwestern Iranian province of Azerbaijan and deploy along the Turkish and Iraqi frontiers and towards central Iran on March 4, 1946.⁵

Referring to Rossow, Jamil Hasanli, a prominent Azerbaijani historian, in his book *at the Dawn of the Cold War* also extensively focuses on the importance of the crises in Azerbaijan and the rise of the *Firge-yi Demokrat* and shows how the situation in Azerbaijan during the postwar period further escalated the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Hasanli devotes one full chapter of his book to situating the crisis in the context of great power politics to argue that the Iranian Azerbaijan was the actual point where the Cold War began.⁶ Whether the

⁵ Rossow, Robert. "The Battle of Azerbaijan, 1946." *Middle East Journal* 10, no. 1 (1956): 17.

⁶ Hasanli, Jamil. *At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. Lanham, Littlefield Publishers, 2006, 225-254.

beginning of the Cold War, or a critical point in its formation, the rise and fall of the APG has been a matter of controversial historical debates and polarization and fragmentation in the historiography of the APG.

Louise Fawcett in the introduction of her book *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan crisis of 1946*, provides a summary of the fragmentation in the existing literature on the APG. Fawcett identifies four major tendencies in the literature. First, she describes pro-Shah narratives that depict the whole crisis as merely a Soviet plan. The second group are those that, along with the Soviet factor, acknowledge the popular support in Azerbaijan for the short-lived government. The third group are the left-wing narratives that depict the APG as a movement seeking large-scale changes in Iran, and finally there is a fourth group which favored the Soviet interpretation of the APG as a national self-determination movement.⁷ Fawcett believes that despite some shortcomings, “a version of truth seems to lie between the second and third categories.”⁸

Amir Hassanpour, in his analysis of the crisis in Azerbaijan, also underscores the fragmentation in the historiography and brings more insight to the problems of the available literature. According to Hassanpour, most of what has been written on the short-lived government “is dominated by the conceptual and theoretical perspectives of Cold War, Western, positivist social sciences and Iranian monarchist historiographies.”⁹ Consequently, the APG is presented to the reader as a “puppet” state and its officials were introduced as “traitors” of the country in favor of foreign invaders. Both Fawcett and Hassanpour explain well how the fragmentation in the historiography of the APG is not only due to great power politics and their strategic interest, but also to national

⁷ Fawcett, Louise. *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 5.

⁸ Ibid, 5

⁹ Amir Hassanpour, "The Nationalist Movements in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, 1941–46," in *A Century of Revolution: Social Movements in Iran*, ed. Foran John. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, 79.

histories in which Pishavari and his comrades are despised or praised according to their affiliation with the Soviet Union.

While the majority of the available secondary literature on the APG in English has dealt with the relationship between the short-lived government and great power politics, most of the literature produced in Farsi and Azerbaijani Turkish is dominated by a battle ground of two “grand debates,” the *Iranist* tradition and the *Azerbaijanist* tradition. With Persian ethnocentrism as its core, the *Iranist* camp tends to explain the rise and fall of the APG as a separatist movement that was planned, organized and operated by the Soviet Union. However, the *Azerbaijanist* camp tends to question Soviet support of the APG, describing it as a mass mobilization that originated from the discriminatory policies of the central government. Both the *Iranist* and *Azerbaijanist* grand debates include voices from the far right to the far left, and have proposed claims that can be supported by the works of other researchers.

Outnumbering the *Azerbaijanist* tradition, the *Iranist* tradition is dominated by national histories primarily concerned with the territorial, and sometimes racial, unity of Iran and thus extensively researched the links between the APG and the Soviet administration. Touraj Atabaki’s book *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran* is an example of this tradition, heavily emphasizing the links of the APG to the Soviet administration.¹⁰ In addition to his book, Atabaki has taken an active part in talks, podcasts and seminars and introduced the notion that the short-lived government in Tabriz was merely a Soviet fantasy and Pishavari was a Soviet agent. In a series of podcasts produced by Radio Farda, the Farsi division of Radio Free Europe, Atabaki narrates how a Red Army officer shouts at Pishavari that “whoever brought him, now tells him to

¹⁰ Atabaki, Touraj. *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000.

leave!”¹¹ A number of other authors agree with Atabaki in his argumentation and are even more critical of the APG. Hamid Ahmadi and Kaveh Bayat, two prominent scholars who wrote numerous articles and books on the APG also contend that Pishavari and his government were the result of Stalin’s order.¹²

On the opposite side of the spectrum in the historiography of the Azerbaijan People’s Government is the *Azerbaijanist* tradition. The *Azerbaijanist* tradition traces back the origins of Pishavari’s government as a major uprising only created by Azerbaijanis. According to this tradition, the idea of creating one nation under one language instigated such an atmosphere. Furthermore, large-scale reforms and systematic discrimination in state policies and economic deprivation are shown as the causes of a “national movement” that aimed to liberate Azerbaijanis from Tehran. The main argument of the *Azerbaijanist* is the progress Azerbaijan made under the APG: the first free elections in Iranian history, universal suffrage and improvement of security, etc. The suppression of the APG thus devastated people of the region and marked a dark period under an authoritarian leadership. Mohammad Hossein Yahyayi, an economic historian, argues that the violent suppression of the APG was a failure of democracy in Iran and solidified the monarchy of Mohammad Reza Shah. Furthermore, this failure paved the way for the suppression of other democratic movements and instigated the 1953 coup¹³ against Mohammad Mosaddegh and his democratic government.¹⁴

¹¹ «آخرين پيام شوروى به پيشه‌ورى: «سنى گنيرن، سنه دبير گت» ر.ا.ديو فردا/». Accessed April 28, 2017.

<http://www.radiofarda.com/a/fk-fergheh-e28/27463954.html>.

¹² Kaveh Bayat, Hamid Ahmadi, “Khashtgah-e- Vaghei-ye- Firqe-yi Demokrat-e- Azerbaijan [*The real origins of the Firqe-yi Demokrat of Azerbaijan*],” *Goftogu Magazine*, December 2005, 178-199.

¹³ The 1953 military coup overthrow Mosaddegh’s democratic government and granted the monarchy for Mohammad Reza Pahlavi until 1979.

¹⁴ Yahyayi, Mohammad Hossein. “Firqe-ye-demokrat Va Hukumat-e-yeksale-ye-an [the Democrat Party and a Year of Its Government].” BBC Persian. March 1, 2016. Accessed April 17, 2016.

http://www.bbc.com/persian/tvandradio/2016/03/160304_pargar_artical_azerbaijan_hyahyayi.

Azerbaijanist national histories, in which the APG is a symbol of national liberation, are mostly dominant in Azerbaijani Turkish both in Iranian Azerbaijan and also the Republic of Azerbaijan. Ekrem Rehimli, for example, has written a book on Pishavari in which he argues that the Soviet element has become a reason to demonize the APG and its leader.¹⁵ Aliriza Miyanalı, another *Azerbaijanist* researcher, in his two volume book, *Sihahla Ölçülen Topraq*,¹⁶ extensively deals with the rise of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* and includes many articles in which the main aim is to illustrate the reforms, progress and plans of the APG officials. Introducing Pishavari as a national, *Milli*, and leader, Miyanalı presents the APG as “the zenith of a democratic national movement that quickly gathered and organized people and received unprecedented support.”¹⁷

Following this brief overview of the general trend in the historiography of the Azerbaijan People’s Government, the following can be concluded: the rise and fall of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* and the APG is an extremely polarized and controversial topic; furthermore, the focus on the Cold War and great power politics leaves limited space for internal dynamics and even that limited space is mostly dominated by national histories that barely refer to what actually happened in Azerbaijan. This thesis will neither confirm or deny the accuracy and authenticity of the claims of these different historiographical traditions. Rather, this thesis aims to bring a local perspective that does not necessarily contradict any of the abovementioned historiographical traditions, but can coexist with them.

Since national histories have been dominant for quite a time in other countries of the Middle East, scholars in different areas have been challenging the dominance of national historiographies. One particular work in Turkish studies that has been an inspiration for this thesis is an article written

¹⁵ Rehimli, Ekrəm. *Seyid cəfər pişəvəri*. Baku: Nurlar, 2009, 10-12.

¹⁶ The land taken by the gun.

¹⁷ Miyanalı, Aliriza. *Sihahla Ölçülen Topraq* [The land measured by the gun]. Vancouver, Unknown, 2005, 23.

by Gavin Brockett with the title of “Provincial Newspapers as a Historical Source: *Büyük Cihad* and the Great Struggle for the Muslim Turkish Nation.” As indicated by the title, Brockett has done a creative study on a controversial Islamist provincial newspaper, *Büyük Cihad*, published in the city of Samsun during the Cold War.

Because the newspaper was labeled as a “Black Press” that propagated intolerance and extremism by what he calls an “elite, centrist perspective derived from the secular nationalist historical narratives,” it has also been neglected as a historical source. Brockett is also critical of reading Turkish history through the cultural production of political centers while many peripheral publications and newspapers are simply dismissed due to the dichotomy of a progressive “center” versus a backward “periphery.” Consequently, as the author puts it: “newspapers produced in provincial centers for a local readership have received very little attention from scholars not only of Turkey but also other countries in the Modern Middle East.”¹⁸ Brockett’s criticism is also valid within the field of Iranian studies, in which the heavy presence of secular, centrist and nationalist narratives have dominated the historiography of contemporary Iran. The story of the official newspaper of the APG is similar. The majority of the works and trends mentioned in previous pages heavily relied on sources that have been published outside of the Iranian Azerbaijan, in Moscow, Baku or Tehran. Thus, using *Azerbaijan* as a peripheral newspaper will be a breakthrough in studying Iranian Society and questioning the dominance of centrist national histories.

1.2 Thesis Outline

¹⁸ Brockett, Gavin D. “Provincial Newspapers as a Historical Source: *Büyük Cihad* and the Great Struggle for the Muslim Turkish Nation (1951-53).” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 3 (2009): 439.

In order to overcome the abovementioned problems and go beyond the fragmentation in the historiography of the Azerbaijan People's Government, this thesis will approach the life of the APG through a wide range of written and visual primary sources that have been neglected by the available literature. The main primary reference of this research will be the official newspaper of the Government called *Azerbaijan*. Since the newspaper was the official bulletin of the APG, it includes a wide range of discussions that reflect the political atmosphere of the period, the APG policies, and the proposed doctrine for the Iranian Azerbaijan. The newspaper provides a clear reflection of the historical and political plans envisioned by the government officials in Tabriz. Other sources will be visual materials, speeches of APG officials, especially Pishavari himself. In addition, this thesis will include those voices who opposed the APG. The main resource for harsh opposition to the APG will be the *Parcham* periodical published in Tehran by Ahmad Kasravi, a local of Tabriz and one of the pioneers of Iranian nationalism. In addition, this research will occasionally use the memoirs of the founder of the short-lived government to contextualize the discussions.

As mentioned, this research will define Iranian Azerbaijan as a peripheralized center that was gradually losing its cultural, political and economic weight within Iranian society. After an overview of the historiography in the introduction, the first chapter will discuss the process of peripheralization in which Azerbaijan gradually lost its importance during the early decades of the twentieth century by focusing on a few cultural, political and economic examples. The second chapter is devoted to the legacy and origins of *Azerbaijan* as a newspaper. The final chapter, will use the official newspaper of the APG to exclusively investigate problems and concerns of a periphery within Iranian society which were among the claims of legitimation for the APG officials.

1.3 The Sources

The main primary source for this thesis is the official newspaper of the APG *Azerbaijan*. The newspaper was initially published twice a week, and became a daily paper after a month and was distributed all over the region. Pishavri, as the head of the government, authored numerous articles in the newspaper addressing citizens and the central government. The first issue was published on Sept 5, 1945. The publication continued for more than a year and the last issue was published on Dec 11, 1946. *Azerbaijan* was a bilingual periodical both in Farsi and Azerbaijani Turkish with Arabic script, and consisted of four pages. The newspaper claimed its legacy from a series of newspapers with the same name published in 1907 and 1941 in Tabriz.

There are a very limited number of secondary sources in English, Farsi, and Azerbaijani Turkish that make use of the official newspaper of the APG as a source of a historical research. In this regard, this thesis will be the first attempt to mainly focus on the newspaper. However, considering the chaos in Iran during the Second World War, which overlapped with the beginning of Muhammad Reza Shah's monarchy, the major difficulty of this research is to clearly understand the political polarization in Iranian society. Furthermore, the instability in the political center provided a good opportunity for a wide range of publications during the period to express and advocate their respective ideologies. Newspapers and periodicals defending the monarchy, religious fanaticism, fascism, and communism all existed not only in Azerbaijan but also in other parts of Iran. Thus, to overcome this obstacle, this thesis will try to include multiple voices from the secondary literature as well as the primary sources, to remind the reader that there are fundamental disagreements among the scholars that worked on the Azerbaijan People's Government.

2 Peripheralization of a center; Azerbaijan from Qajar collapse to the abdication of Reza Shah, 1921-1941

The long and exhausting years of large-scale uprisings, riots and violence that followed the Constitution Revolution of 1906 makes the contemporary history of Iranian Azerbaijan a complex case study. From 1905 to 1922, then the *Iyalet*, the province of Azerbaijan, was occupied twice by the Russians, once by the Ottomans, and was sieged and suppressed many times by the central government forces. During the same period, Azerbaijan witnessed two major self-declared, autonomous political entities. The State Council of Azerbaijan administrated the *Iyalet* of Azerbaijan for some years during the Constitutional Revolution, and Khiabani declared the autonomy of Azerbaijan in 1920 for a short six months. The frequency of such sociopolitical clashes exhausted the resources of the state and left it in chaos very similar to that of the rest of the country. Yet another eventful period started for Azerbaijan when Reza Khan came to power in 1921.

During the consolidation of his power, Reza Khan declared himself as the king of the newly forming Iranian nation-state in 1925 and brought the short and violent years of constitutionalism to a dramatic end. During the reign of Reza Shah from 1925 to 1941, accompanied by the rapid centralization of Iranian politics and economy in Tehran, the *Iyalet* of Azerbaijan gradually lost its central political, cultural and economic position within Iranian society and was degraded to a peripheral status. This chapter, aims to discuss the reign of Reza Shah, and then the process of Peripheralization in Azerbaijan by focusing on a few political, cultural and economic examples.

2.1 Reza Shah, the “Man of Order”

Born in 1878 in a small village in Mazandaran province in Iran, Reza Pahlavi was known before his enthronement by his titles “Reza Mirpanch” and “Sardar Sepah.”¹⁹ Poverty and unstable political circumstances forced the young Reza to join the Cossack Brigade.²⁰ Within a few years young Reza gained remarkable success and reputation and became a mid-ranking officer in the army. Not long after he became the face of the British-led coup of 1921²¹ and occupied important offices in the government. After the coup, Reza Khan became a key military figure and was appointed as the Minister of War. In 1923, Reza Khan became the Prime Minister of the last Qajar King, Ahmad Shah. As the Prime Minister, Reza Khan was able to strengthen his authority quickly over the state apparatus and, with the collaboration of the parliament, he abolished the Qajar dynasty, founded the Pahlavi Dynasty and declares himself the new king of Iran in 1925. His reign

¹⁹ Mirpanch was an mid-rank army insignia in the Qajar army which can be translated as the “commander of five.” Sardar Sepah was invented by Reza Shah himself and it can translated as “the commander of the army.”

²⁰ Cossack Brigades were created by Nasir-al-din Shah Qajar as an imitation of Russian army in 1879.

²¹ Known as the Persian coup of 1921.

For more details see : <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/coup-detat-of-1299-1921>

continued for sixteen years. Reza Shah's collaboration with the Nazis during the Second World War, however, soon brought his reign to an end when the British and Soviet troops occupied Iran in 1941. During the occupation of Iran by the Anglo-Soviet forces, Reza Shah was abdicated and was replaced by his son, Mohammad Reza. Reza Shah was sent to exile in South Africa and died in Johannesburg in 1945.

The secular centrist national historiography of Iran, however, defines Reza Shah's reign as a period of the nation-building processes and rapid reformation that strengthened the national unity under an authoritarian leadership. Zürcher and Atabaki, for example, use the concept of "authoritarian modernism" to describe a strict monopoly of political power by charismatic leaders and argue that the newly established nation-states in the context of the Middle East, e.g. Iran, had no option other than empowering leaders to prevent political chaos and disintegration:

*"The threat of imminent disintegration after the war, all of these left the middle classes and the intelligentsia in these countries with no other option than to look for a man of order, who, as agent of the nation, would install a centralized, powerful (though not necessarily despotic) government that would be capable of solving the country's growing problems of underdevelopment, while at the same time safeguarding its unity and sovereignty."*²²

An authoritarian modernism also struggled to unite the masses under one flag and one language. This approach to modernism required a centralized structure with a national language to build a more linguistically homogenous Iran. Thus, Reza Shah, very much like his Turkish role model Atatürk, heavily invested in establishing a linguistic unity and took oppressive measures to assimilate linguistic groups. Reza Shah and his administration also established the *Farhangestan*-

²² Atabaki, T, Zürcher, E. *Men of Order Authoritarian Modernization under Atatürk and Reza Shah*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004, 5-6.

e Zabane Farsi (Farsi language Academy) in 1935.²³ Furthermore, Reza Shah's administration implemented policies in favor of Persian ethnocentrism. Persian (Farsi) became the new unifying element in a territory where more than half of its population were non-Farsi speakers. In addition, previous dynasties and empires were accused of betraying the "great Iran" and the Aryan People were shown as the true inhabitants of the Iran plateau. Consequently, many non-official languages were banned in the public sphere and publication of non-Persian books and press was strictly forbidden.²⁴

Top-down religious reforms also were strictly imposed by the Reza Shah administration. The clergy faced restrictions in their clothing and rituals. Muharram Mourning,²⁵ for example: Hijab was banned in Iran by Reza Shah in 1936 because it was in contrast with the modernity Reza Shah and his administration had in mind.²⁶ Policies of Reza Shah in the social sphere also tended in the same direction as Atatürk especially in terms of dress code and mandatory unveiling. In Iran, however, these restrictions were more restrictive: by the order of a new dress code in 1936, women were forcefully unveiled in public and were not allowed to appear in public with their Hijab.

Even though Reza Shah was brought down by a British led coup of 1921, he later became inclined towards Nazi Germany. Reza Shah's tendency towards the Germans became one of the primary concerns of the Allies and soon became one of their main reasons to occupy Iran sixteen years later, in the summer of 1941. Recently declassified reports²⁷ by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on the role of the United States in the coup of 1953 against the Mossadeq Government also

²³ *Men of Order*, 239.

²⁴ For more details, see: Jami, Group of authors. *Gozashte Cheraghe rahe Ayande ast* [gun The past is the light of future]. Tehran: Niloufar, 2001, Chapter 1.

²⁵ Shi'a Muslims mourning ritual in the anniversary of the Martyrdom of Imam Hussain in Karbala 680 AD.

²⁶ See: Black, Cyril Edwin. *The Modernization of Inner Asia*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1991, 265-271.

²⁷ The latest release was in 2014 and the full document is available here:
<https://archive.org/details/TheBattleForIran>

include very important notes on Iran during the Second World War. The report notes that within less than ten years, from 1932 to 1941, trade between Iran and Germany had increased from 8% to 45.5 % of the total trade of the country, and close to 2000 German “advisers, technicians and businessmen” were active in Iran. The day-by-day increasing influence of Nazi Germany, according to the reports of the CIA, become a major concern for the United States:

*“The nature and extent of this German penetration into Iran became very significant when German armed forces invaded Russia in 1941 and rapidly moved deeply into the Soviet Union. Iran was the shortest and most feasible route for badly needed war materials to be sent to Russia by its new allies in the West. Further, the possibility of a German takeover in Iran was a risk the Russians could not allow. On 19 July and 16 August 1941, the British and Soviet diplomatic missions in Tehran presented notes demanding the expulsion of the Germans in Iran, but Iran insisted it was neutral and that no danger existed. On 25 August, the final Allied demands were presented and the invasion began.”*²⁸

Reza Shah’s empathy towards Nazi Germany was not merely due to an economic or political relationship. Cultural ties between the two had been on the rise as Reza Shah and his administration found many of the Nazi ideologies more appealing than other competing fronts.

Jennifer Jenkins in her article “Iran in the Nazi New Order, 1933-1941,” traces the German influence in Iran prior to the rise of the Nazi Party and explains in details the importance of Iran for the Nazis. According to Jenkins, the party had a branch in Tehran and some Nazi ideologues including Alfred Rosenberg and Josef Goebbels are known to be quite supportive of the “Aryan brotherhood.”²⁹ The Aryan race theory was also among the commodities that was imported from

²⁸ Byrne, Malcolm. 2014. *The Battle for Iran, 1953: Re-Release of CIA Internal History Spotlights New Details about anti-Mosaddeq Coup*. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB476/>.

²⁹ Jenkins, Jennifer. “Iran in the Nazi New Order, 1933–1941.” *Iranian Studies* 49, no. 5 (September 2, 2016): 727.

Nazi Germany during this exchange. Racially pure Iran, the land of the Aryans, thus was openly propagated by the Reza Shah administration as the true Iran.

The most widespread idea that also was directly supported by Reza Shah's government and gradually dominated the Pahlavi historiography was the idea of "Pan Iranism." An elite, ultra-nationalist movement, the basic principles of Pan-Iranism were to define a greater Iran that included Caucasus, Eastern Anatolia and most part of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. It glorified the ancient cultural history of Iran and demanded the revival of ancient Iran and the Iranian people. The Pan Iranists later on established a political party and were in close contact with Reza Shah and his advisors. Reza Shah and his government also found it very useful to erect pre-Islamic history as the source of legitimization for the newly established Pahlavi Dynasty. In addition, this enabled the Pahlavis to introduce themselves as the revivers of ancient Iran since Reza Shah and his son and those who brought them to power could not attach themselves either to Islam, because of a strict secular interpretation of modernity, nor to the Turkic lineage that had been present in Iran for a millennium. Pan Iranism not only was an ideology but was an established political party in latter years which had a considerable political weight in Iranian politics during Mohammad Reza Shah.



Figure 1: Pan Iranis Party poster: *March Ahead!* ³⁰

Mahmoud Afshar, a prominent historian of Iran, was the first intellectual to discuss Pan Iranism and its implications in details. In October 1927 in *Ayandeh*³¹ periodical, before the Aryan Race Theory came into the picture, Dr Afshar wrote an article on "the question of nationality and the national unity of Iran" discussing the obstacles of the new Iranian nation-state under Reza Shah.

Dr. Afshar proposed a rather controversial definition of being Iranian:

*"In Iran our national unity is based on the unity of race (nejad), common religion, social life, and united history for thousands of years... Today when we talk about the Iranian nationality, we mean all people from the Iranian race that live in Iran or abroad. This of course excludes Armenians and Jews and foreigners residing in Iran."*³²

³⁰ The original source of the poster is unknown due to very limited information one can find about the topic. However, this particular image and some others can be found here :

<http://www.iranpoliticsclub.net/history/nazis1/index.htm>

³¹ The equivalent in English would be "the future". Mahmoud Afshar was the director of the periodical.

³² *Ayandeh*, "Masale-ye mellayat ve vahdate Melliye Iran (the question of nationality and the national unity of Iran)." Oct, 1927. From Dr Afshar foundation. m-afshar.net/future/g2/2.doc (accessed Nov. 10, 2016). 560

Azerbaijan and its Turkic population and historical significance after the Mongol Invasion seemed to be a matter of concern for Mahmoud Afshar in imagining a pure Iranian race. Especially when his definition of an Iranian race considers it “a superior race to those yellow Turks and Arabs (Semitic people) because of a distinct Aryan race and thousands of years of glorious history.”³³ At the end of the article, Dr. Afshar offers eight solutions to strengthen the Iranian nation and purify it from the Arab, Turk, and Mongol invaders. He suggests to build railroads, expand and invest in Farsi education in Azerbaijan, redraw provincial boundaries and change the Turkic names of towns and villages and possibly even change the name of Azerbaijan and other historical regions such as Khuzestan and Khorasan.³⁴

2.2 Peripheralization of Azerbaijan during the reign of Reza Shah

Rapid political, cultural and economic reforms during the reign of Reza Shah were also accompanied by centralizing policies imposed by the state. The centralization in Tehran fundamentally changed the position of Azerbaijan and Tabriz within Iranian society, where large-scale structural changes disrupted the *Ancien Régime*. A process of rapid peripheralization within a few decades degraded Azerbaijan from a political, cultural and economic center to a forgotten periphery. The city that during the late 19th century was the frontrunner of social changes in Iran and frequently described as the “most important city of the Qajar Empire,” “considerably larger

³³ Ibid, 561.

³⁴ Ibid, 566-569. The complete English translation of this section of this article will be in the appendix.

than Tehran” and “more superior to Isfahan in terms of size,”³⁵ by the 1940’s was to be known for waiting eight years for Tehran authorities to repair the city bridges after a massive flood.³⁶

The characteristics of the changes in Azerbaijan, can be better explained by the concept of “Peripheralization.” As a term mostly used by scholars in urban and regional studies, Peripheralization process is defined as “a multidimensional process which includes economic (deindustrialization, restructuring), social (impoverishment, discrimination, stigmatization) and political (exclusion from decision-making, dependence) phenomena and leads to the emergence of peripheries characterized by dependence, disconnection, poverty and outmigration.”³⁷ Peripheralization, while closely connected to centralization, is not only the structural opposite of the processes of centralization, but periphery and center mutually influence each another.³⁸

Processes dimensions	Centralization	Peripheralization
Economic	<i>Innovation dynamics</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high-qualified work • growth of employment (business services) 	<i>Lack of innovation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low-qualified work • decline of employment (deindustrialization)
Social	<i>Wealth</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-migration • Hegemony 	<i>Poverty</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out-migration • Stigmatization
Political	<i>Power</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-making and control (autonomy) • Inclusion in networks 	<i>Powerlessness</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependency (in decision-making and control) • Exclusion from networks

Figure 2: Centralization vs Peripheralization³⁹

³⁵ Clark, James D. *Provincial Concerns: A Political History of the Iranian Province of Azerbaijan, 1848-1906*. Mazda, 2006, 135.

³⁶ Jami, Group of authors. *Gozashte cheragh-e-rah-e-ayande-ast [the past is the light of future]*, Tehran: Niloufar.1984,270.

³⁷ Berndt, Matthias, and Laura Colini. *Exclusion, marginalization and peripheralization*. Working Paper, Leibniz-Institut für Regionalentwicklung und Strukturplanung, 2013,3.

³⁸ Kühn, Manfred. “Peripheralization: Theoretical Concepts Explaining Socio-Spatial Inequalities.” *European Planning Studies* 23, no. 2 (February 1, 2015): 376.

³⁹ Ibid, 375.

The process of peripheralization in Azerbaijan during the reign of Reza Shah in Iran was a multidimensional process. Azerbaijan was not only left out from the decision-making bodies and social and economic development, but was also depicted as a centuries-long image of periphery within the Iranian society. Yadullah Shahibzadeh in his recently published book, *The Iranian Political Language*, discusses how local historiographies were also silenced by centrist national historiographies. Furthermore, Shahibzadeh argues that “the historical accounts of the state centralization process in Iran are the ideological positions that justify the peripheralization of the peripheral regions.”⁴⁰

The national historiography during the Pahlavi dynasty was dominated by secular nationalist narratives defending the newly built Iranian nation-state as an ancient entity. An archaic and primordial understanding of the Iranian nation thus was in a constant struggle to unite all the inhabitants of the Iranian plateau based on racial and linguistic unity. The history of Iran was, and still is, more discussed in a pre-Islamic space and the ancient civilizations that emerged in the Iranian plateau. The most notable example of these civilizations that quickly found a central location in the Pahlavi historiography after merging with the Aryan Race Theory, started with the mass migration of Aryan people from the steppes to the Iranian plateau whom later on establish the Achaemenids dynasty (550-330 BC).

The Pahlavi history writing, however, discharged three crucial elements that fundamentally shaped Iranian history and took a hostile position towards them as “invader” cultures. First was the expansion of Islam into these lands; the second was the mass migration of Turkic tribes starting from the tenth century onwards; and the third is the coming of the Mongols into the Iranian Plateau

⁴⁰ Shahibzadeh, Yadullah. *The Iranian Political Language: From the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 91.

during the thirteenth century. With such narration, Azerbaijan was defined as a peripheral part of the Iranian history since most of its significance comes after the Islamic conquest and the migration of the Turkic peoples and the Mongol invasion.

During the reign of Reza Shah, apart from Farsi which was declared as the official language of the country, all the major languages spoken in Iran were widely suppressed and publication in these languages was forbidden.⁴¹ In Azerbaijan, where the majority of the population spoke (Azerbaijani) Turkish, such strict regulations had devastating consequences. The majority of the locals from lower and middle classes faced difficulties in learning the new national language due to the lack of educational infrastructure in cities and especially in rural areas. Before the state enforcement of Farsi as the national language, Azerbaijan had a long tradition of being one of the major centers for the development of Farsi literature. However, that did not mean that everyone knew Farsi—the use of Farsi was mostly limited to bureaucrats, ruling dynasties and poets. The everyday language of people in the region remained Azerbaijani Turkish or *Turki* as people in Tabriz, Arabil and the rest of Azerbaijan would call it even today.

Defining a racially homogenous nation was a big challenge for Reza Shah and his administration due to the linguistic diversity of Iran. Many Iranians spoke languages that did not have much to do with the official language. Arabic and Turkic languages, along with many others, were widely spoken in Iran. Turkic languages were, and the majority of them still are, spoken among the Qashqai people in Sothern Iran, Khalaji among the locals of central Iran, and Turkmen in the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijanis also for centuries have used (Azerbaijani)Turkish as the language of communication, arts and literature. However, since the Turkic people were seen as the invaders, it had to be replaced with an Iranian language. Reza Shah's administration

⁴¹ Atabaki, Touraj. *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000, 23-25.

followed a policy of denying the existence of Turkic people in Iran and sought for alternative narratives to implement its discriminatory policies. The process of Peripheralization in Azerbaijan, as it has been mentioned, was a multidimensional process that by itself could be the topic of extensive research. Considering the limitation of this thesis and its focus, the following pages will explain the process through three cultural, political and economic examples.

2.3 The Azeri language thesis: the language of culturally peripheral Azerbaijan

The most important theory that quickly became the core policy of Reza Shah and his administration in dealing with Azerbaijan was the Azeri Language Thesis proposed by Ahmad Kasravi. Kasravi in his controversial book *Azeri or the Ancient Language of Azerbaijan* argues that the “true” language of Azerbaijan is not a branch of Turkic languages and Azerbaijanis are originally non-Turkic people who were forcefully turkified after the Turkic migration, the Mongol invasion and the rise of the Safavids. Furthermore, he claimed that before these events, the original language of Azerbaijan that descended from the old Iranian language called “the Azeri Language” and had nothing to do with the Turkic language.⁴² While the authenticity of Kasravi’s Azeri Language Theory can be fundamentally challenged, the conclusion of his thesis is even more controversial: since the language of Azerbaijan was Azeri before the coming of the Turks and the Mongols, it should be brought back and replace the current language of Azerbaijanis. Albeit, he expected Azerbaijanis to become pioneers of this change:

“We say for the good of the masses of Iran that the language should be one. This is the benevolence of the Azerbaijanis that, for the felicity of the country and the people, restrained themselves and put these bigotry beliefs (the language rights) aside and said: we should

⁴² Kasravi, Ahmad. *Azari ya Zaban-e-bastaniye Azerbaian [Azeri or Ancient Language of Azerbaijan]*. Tehran: unknown, 1925. available only in Farsi at: www.kasravi.info/ketabs/azari-zabane-bastan.pdf

abnegate Turki and help to expand Farsi among the Azerbaijanis as much as possible. This is an idea that Azerbaijanis themselves have founded it with their purity and wisdom."⁴³

Indeed, many Azerbaijani Intellectuals⁴⁴ like Ahmad Kasravi himself were among the pioneers of creating a strong centralized nation-state and defending Reza Shah's linguistic policies. His offer is pretty straightforward and clear: Azerbaijanis should abandon their language and switch to Farsi. This is the agenda that a secular nationalist government in Tehran happily incorporated into its mechanism. Reza Shah and his government found Kasravi's definition of Azerbaijan well-suited, above all, to their understanding of the concept of a nation: a racially and linguistically homogenous body with an authoritarian ruler.

2.4 Political Peripheralization of Azerbaijan

The rise of Reza Shah and his prescription of heavily centralized, racially pure Aryan Iran fundamentally changed the decentralized political administration of *Memalik-i Mahsruse*⁴⁵ (Imperial domain) of Qajar. Azerbaijan was one of the four *Iyalet* (state) of the Qajar imperial domain foreseen by the first law on the political administration in 1907. However, during the reign of Reza Shah and his centralized Iran, four major states were divided into 10 provinces. The state of Azerbaijan was divided into three different provinces.⁴⁶ With such radical laws, Azerbaijan was not only divided into different provinces but also had lost its weight in Iranian political dynamic and was excluded from the main decision making bodies. Furthermore, Reza Shah's assigned

⁴³ Parcham, "Dar bareye Azarbaijan [On Azerbaijan]". Jan 1, 1942.

⁴⁴ These figures are numerous in the contemporary history of Iran. The most prominent example is Fathali Akhundzade(Axundov). Akhundzade one of the founders of Iranian nationalism but at the same time was also a prominent figure in modern Azerbaijani literature.

⁴⁵ Protected domain of Qajars

⁴⁶ Nohekhan, Hamed. "The norms of regional devising in Iran during Pahlavi the first era." *Kherdanameh* 9, (Autumn, 2013): 120.

governors to Azerbaijan mistreated Azerbaijanis to a level that even people like Ahmad Kasravi, a supporter of the centralization, became vocal about the issue.

In the book *Gozashte Cheraghe rahe Ayande ast* (*The past is the light of future*), the authors narrate multiple stories about the mistreatment of the central government official toward Azerbaijanis. The authors of the book narrate a story about Mostofi, the appointed governor of Azerbaijan, and his behavior toward the people of Tabriz. The authors narrate that in one occasion, due to the lack of wheat, the people of Tabriz petitioned the governor to supply the city with grains from other parts of the country. Mostofi ordered rotten wheat from Gorgan, a city in north east, that was previously sent back from Tehran because even horses were not able to eat it and sold it for a very expensive price to people of Tabriz. When he received complaints about the rotten wheat, he said in the public: “there is no problem if the army horses did not eat the wheat, donkey Tabrizians⁴⁷ will eat them.”⁴⁸ The frequency of such behaviors disturbs even his old friend, Ahmad Kasravi. Harshly Criticizing Mostofi, Kasravi writes that Azerbaijanis do not deserve such behavior.

*“I have always thought of Mr Mostofi as a wise man and I am shocked to see such a person at the age of sixty, lost himself while being in charge and mistreated people for nothing. People say things about him that wont’s be the action of any wise man. What does it mean to break the cane on people’s head?! What is it mean to flog people?! A governor and doing such acts? If these are lies, why there is no response? And if they are correct, what he is not being persecuted?!”*⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Torke Khar, Tabriz Donkeys here refers to the systematic insult against the Turks which started in the period by calling them as donkey

⁴⁸ Jami, Group of authors. *Gozashte Cheraghe rahe Ayande ast* [gun *The past is the light of future*]. Tehran: Niloufar, 2001, 251-255.

⁴⁹ Parcham, “Azerbaijan az Iranast va Iran az Azerbaijan” [Azerbaijan is from Iran and Iran is from Azerbaijan]”. Feb 4, 1942.

Such oppressive measures taking place in a peripheral Azerbaijan were the result of the authoritarian reformism of Reza Shah and the efforts to forcefully integrate, assimilate, and homogenize the most “unfit” part for their imagination of Iran. A heavily centralized Iran made the everyday of life of people more difficult in Azerbaijan since the permission of state was needed for basic legal procedures, though the region lacked the infrastructure for such a system.

2.5 Economic peripheralization

Probably the most tangible result of peripheralization process in Azerbaijan was economic. Tabriz, as the heart of trade with especially Russian and Ottoman (later on Turkish) during the Qajar era, was overtaxed by the Reza Shah administration and put under restrictive regulations of foreign trade. Reza Mohammadi, in a book written on Azerbaijan during Reza Shah, relying on wide range of sources, reveals that Azerbaijanis paid higher taxes than Tehran, had very limited access to health care, and paid higher prices for electricity than any other place in Iran.⁵⁰ Mehmed Huseyn Yahyayi, in economic analysis of the situation in Azerbaijan, argues that by the end of Reza Shah’s reign, the central government in Tehran and its economic regulations had left Azerbaijan on the break of a financial crisis.

Yahyayi argues that the government’s decision in devaluation of the Iranian national currency encouraged major investors to out-migrate from Azerbaijan and export their products to the south (the rest of Iran). Thus, massive inflation and scarcity took over Azerbaijan and people, leaving them in need of daily products and even bread later on.⁵¹ Unable to do business or work in their home towns, massive out-migration from Azerbaijan within a few years flooded the other parts of

⁵⁰ Mohammadi, Reza. *Azerbaijan az saltanat-e Reza Shah ta dovlat-e Pishvari [Azerbaijan from the reign of Reza Shah to the government of Pishvari]*, Tabriz: Shayesteh, 2013, 186-195.

⁵¹ Yahyayi, Mohammad Hossein. "Firqe-ye-demokrat Va Hukumat-e-yeksale-ye-an [the Democrat Party and a Year of Its Government]." BBC Persian. March 1, 2016. Accessed April 17, 2016.

Iran and also neighboring countries with people from cities, towns and villages of Azerbaijan in search of job and business and a better future.

To conclude, Reza Shah's reign was a period of nationalism and modernism which transformed Iran to a heavily centralized political system. A Tehran-based centralization process had turned Azerbaijan from a powerful political, cultural, and economic hub to a periphery mistreated by Reza Shah and his administration. Even though some Azerbaijanis, like Kasravi, agreed with a heavily centralized Iran and enforcement of harsh cultural political and economic restrictions, many felt excluded from the Iranian society and raised their voices against the limitations of the Iranian nation-building project during Reza Shah and a peripheral Azerbaijan. The next chapter, will explain how the forgotten periphery of Reza Shah suddenly became, once more, an important strategic interest when the Soviet and British forces occupy Iran in 1941.

3 The voice of Peripheralized center; *Azerbaijan* newspaper and its legacy, 1941-1946

After the occupation of Iran by The Allied forces in September 1941, the reign of Reza Shah came to an end and the country was in a relative freedom. Within a short period of time, many political parties were established, many political prisoners were released from jail, and many that had fled the country returned. This gave a considerable number of newspapers and journals, representing different ideologies, the chance to be published. The vacuum of power in the center, Tehran, disrupted Reza Shah's nation-building process; the Iranian territories were used by the Allied Forces as a supply line to stop the Nazi aggressions. Northern Iran became the Soviet zone, while the South was under the British control. Azerbaijan was soon captured by the Soviet Red Army without major resistance from the Iranian army.

With Reza Shah gone, the peripheralization of Azerbaijan was interrupted. Locals of Tabriz, Ardabil, Urmiye and Zanzan found the situation suitable to become vocal against the mistreatments of Azerbaijanis and formed small and large groups to reclaim their rights that had been oppressed under Reza Shah. The period between the abdication of Reza Shah and the collapse of the

Azerbaijan People's Government was full of quickly-developing political, social and economic changes. Furthermore, multiple internal and external players were involved in Azerbaijan, which made these eventful five years extremely complicated. Even though the Azerbaijan People's Government was established in winter of 1945 at the very last phase of this troubled period, its formation is entangled with the series of events that started right after the abdication of Reza Shah in summer of 1941. *Azerbaijan* newspaper was one of the most important cultural products of post-Reza Shah period produced in Azerbaijan. This chapter is devoted to tracing the origins of *Azerbaijan* newspaper and its legacy from the abdication of Reza Shah to the fall of the Azerbaijan People's Government.

3.1 The origins and legacy of Azerbaijan newspaper, 1941-1945

Reza Shah's rapid centralization efforts accelerated the peripheralization process of Azerbaijan. Towards the end of Reza Shah's reign, Azerbaijan had lost its central role in Iranian politics and was turned into a peripheral province. As a result of two decades of centralization policies of the newly forming Iranian nation-state, Tabriz, once the main hub of political turmoil and vivid political life, had gradually lost its upper hand in Iranian politics and economy and its relations with Tehran had deteriorated. Many political activists became vocal in Azerbaijan and elsewhere and opposed the policies of the central government, but they were either ignored by the authorities or, in many cases, were silenced by imprisonment and exile.

A few months after the occupation of Iran in 1941, Ali Shabistari⁵² and his like-minded friends, who later on occupied important positions in the Azerbaijan People's Government, created

⁵² The head of the parliament during the APG. Prior to his political career in the short-lived government, Haj Ali Shabistari was one of the frontrunners of the constitutional movements in Tabriz and a companion of Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani during the *Azadistan* Movement.

Azerbaijan Cemiyeti (Assembly of Azerbaijan) and *Azerbaijan* newspaper, which soon started to appeal to the locals. *Azerbaijan Cemiyeti* Claimed the legacy of the abolished Democrat Party of Iran, *Ictimaiyyun-Amiyyun*,⁵³ the major political fraction in Azerbaijan during the Constitutional Movements 1906-1911. Reviving such a tradition and speaking to a wider audience became the reasons to publish *Azerbaijan* newspaper at its initial phase during the 1941. The chief editor of the newspaper both in 1941 and 1945 was Ismail Shams, a law school graduate. In his memoir, Shams clearly expresses that the aim of *Azerbaijan Cemiyeti* was to revive the legacy of the newspaper during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, when his father apparently was involved in its publication.⁵⁴ In parts of his memories, Shams mentions that by publishing *Azerbaijan* he had been inspired by his father who advised him to keep the tradition of the newspaper alive:

*“13 days after the Soviet had taken the control of Tabriz, with couple of like-minded friends, we have decided to create Azerbaijan Cemmiyyeti. Keeping my father’s advice in mind, I have started to publish a newspaper in the format of what Aliqulu Safarov, a friend of my father, published during the Meshrute”.*⁵⁵

⁵³ The main body of the Democrat Party of Iran were social democrat Azerbaijanis that their stronghold was the city of Tabriz

⁵⁴ Shams, Ismail. *Tercume-yi-halim[the story of my life]*. adf.org, 1981, 3-5.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 3



Figure 3: Azerbaijan newspaper 1906, Tabriz

Despite the efforts of Shabistari and Shams to keep the newspaper running, after almost forty issues, the initial phase of the newspaper in 1941 came to an end due to the opposing voices of what the newspaper called “Tehran reactionaries.”

Azerbaijan of 1941, had a clear agenda that has been frequently referred to from the first issue. The editorial board of the newspaper, Shabistari and Shams, thought of the newspaper as the reflection of the aims and programs of the Azerbaijan Assembly that had three primary concerns:

“Azerbaijan newspaper aims to explain the social situations of the past and present, identify the main caused of economic and moral corruption of the society, and it the third phase find practical solution for economic difficulties and moral corruption.”⁵⁶

A majority of the articles written in the initial phase of the newspaper, which later in the second phase in 1945 became the official newspaper of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat*, are concerned with the social, political and economic deprivation that Azerbaijan experienced under Reza Shah. The problem of unemployment, addiction, public health, language and education were among the most discussed topics in the newspaper. Even though the tone of newspaper and proposed social and political reforms made the newspaper ideologically empathic towards the Soviet Union, a detailed analysis of the newspaper shows that the published articles are multiple and fragmented voices from the left political spectrum, from hardcore Stalinists to communists and moderate social democrats, have created a fusion that makes the initial phase of *Azerbaijan* newspaper a rich but understudied source.

⁵⁶ *Azerbaijan* 1941, 1 Nov 1941



Figure 4: Azerbaijan 1941, First issue, Nov 1941

The pressures from what the newspaper called the “reactionary forces” in Tehran ended the life of newspaper in Tabriz and the Assembly of Azerbaijan was also dissolved. But four years later the newspaper returned when the Allies defeat the Nazi front, bringing hope to the people of Azerbaijan.

After the failure of the newspaper to continue its publication, many other small-scale organizations were created but also did not last long. Pishavari in his memoirs notes that after the failure of the newspaper, the Anti-Fascist Front, the Azerbaijan workers association and many other organizations were active in Azerbaijan for a similarly short duration.⁵⁷ The turning point and the main difference of the latter *Azerbaijan*, in 1945, was the return of Pishavari, the elected candidate of Tabriz, when his credentials were rejected by the Iranian parliament. In addition, the end of the

⁵⁷ Pishavri, Seyyid Jafar. *Xatireler [memoirs]*. achiq.org, unknown, 13.

Second World War and the victory of the Allies brought hopes to political activists in Azerbaijan to take the first steps of declaring the autonomy of Azerbaijan.

3.2 Azerbaijan newspaper 1945, an overview

The very first issue of the newspaper only came out two days after Pishavari and his colleges printed the declaration of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* and distributed their manifesto known as the *On İki Shahrivar Bayannamasi*.⁵⁸ Among the most important articles of this manifesto was article one, which declared the will to freedom for cultural exercises of Azerbaijan, and all other human rights for the people. Article three emphasized the importance of education in mother tongue and indicated Azerbaijani Turkish as the official language of the government. Free electoral rights were mentioned in article nine.⁵⁹ According to this article, Azerbaijan, which had only 20 seats in the parliament with a population of four million, should make up at least one third of the parliament. Pishavri's memories from those days shed light on the difficulties of the printing press in Azerbaijan on the eve of the new changes in Tabriz:

*"The declaration was published both in Farsi and Azerbaijani. It was very hard in Tabriz to find a publisher to produce 15,000 leaflets. I had no choice but to stay in the workshop for 24 hours... The night of the 1 September, after three nights without sleep, I fell asleep unintentionally on the table in the workshop. This was striking for the workers of the publishing house and they worked more to finish the job. Their behavior impressed me and also motivated me more."*⁶⁰

Wide range of materials from world politics to government meeting reports were included in the newspaper. These topics were the territorial unity of Iran, history of the region, Azerbaijani

⁵⁸ The decree of 12th of Shahrivar. Shahrivar is the 6th month in the Iranian calendar coinciding with August and September

⁵⁹ Twelfth of Shahrivar Decree (اون ایکی شهریور بیان نامه سی). Farsi and Azerbaijani version is available in: <http://www.adf-mk.com/asanal.html>

⁶⁰ Pishavri, Seyyid Jafar. *Xatireler [memoirs]*. achiq.org, unknown, 10-14.

literature, poems, in different forms such as op-eds and advertisements. Within the proclamation of autonomy, the newspaper also included regular reports on the activities of the government and its official declarations and decisions. Sections on the history of Azerbaijan offered an alternative local history that were absent in the national history writing.

Azerbaijan, as has been mentioned before, was a bilingual periodical and was written in Arabic script and thus was widely accessible by all the segments of the society both in Azerbaijan and elsewhere. A detailed inspection of the newspaper gives the reader an impression that the publication tended to write political news mostly in Farsi while poems and more regional and local issues were discussed in Azerbaijani. The newspaper had a large audience both in Azerbaijan and the rest of the country, as many telegrams or messages were frequently published from Tehran, Mashhad, Qazvin, Maku, urmiye, Ardabil, etc. Base on the number of these messages, it can be said that scope and circulation of the newspaper was in enough number to reach Tehran and raise concerns among Tehran newspapers. After the collapse of the APG, some of the exiled officials tried to publish it again and series of newspaper under the same name continued the legacy of the newspaper.⁶¹

Pishavari, as an experienced journalist, was very well aware of the fact that in the absence of TV and radio stations in Tabriz, a newspaper could talk to a larger audience and serve as a direct line of communication with Azerbaijanis—and what possibly could be more appealing than reviving a legacy that had been the base of Tabriz revolutionaries during the *Mashrute* (Constitutional Movement)? Albeit, Pishavari was not alone in reviving the legacy of Azerbaijan. Haj Ali Shabistari, who ran the newspaper in 1941 for a short period, was the mastermind behind the revival of *Azerbaijan*. Shabistari is introduced as the chief editor on the very first issue of the

⁶¹ These irregular publications still continue with the same name by the followers of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* in Sweden and are accessible in the following website: <http://adfmk.com/azerbaijan-newspaper>

newspaper. A few months later, when Shabistari became the head of the parliament, the newspaper was run by a group of editors until the 98th issue on 11 Jan 1946, when a person named Ahmad Mousavi becomes the chief editor. Among the frequently changing editors, Fathi Khushganabi and Ismail Shams are the key figures in deciphering the newspaper.

3.3 Azerbaijan 1945, the editorial

Since Pishavri and Shabistari were high ranking officials of the APG, the newspaper was mainly managed by Ismail Shams as chief editor and a member of the editorial group respectively. In addition to Shams, Khushganabi was also a key figure the editorial group of *Azerbaijan* and contributed to its formation and continuity. As a creative writer, he frequently wrote on social issues, stories and literary pieces for the newspaper. After the collapse of the APG, Khushganabi continues his education in Baku and Moscow and became involved with the publication of the newspaper in exile between the years of 1956-1958. Mahmizər Mehdibəyova, an Azerbaijani researcher, introduces him as one of the important literary figures of Azerbaijanis in exile.⁶²

In addition to Shams and Khushganabi, Fridun Ibrahim, the attorney general of the APG, wrote a column on the history of Azerbaijan in most of the issues. One column on the second page is devoted to the series of articles under the title of “Azerbaijan is speaking: pages of our glorious history,” in which he extensively wrote on the historical development of Azerbaijan from the ancient times to his contemporaries.⁶³ Muhammed Biriya, the minister of culture during the APG, occasionally sent some poems for the newspaper and authored articles harshly criticizing the position of Tehran.

⁶² For details see: Mehdibəyova, Mahmizər. *Güney Azərbaycan mühacirət nəsr 1947-1990-cı illər*[South Azerbaijani literature in exile- 1947-1990]. Baku: Nurlan, 2007.

⁶³ The series of articles compiled and edited and are available online and book format

3.4 Tabriz September 5, 1945; First issue of Azerbaijan

The first issue of *Azerbaijan*, published on Wednesday, 5 September 1945, has headlines that are very important in understanding of the values of the aims and motivations of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* prior to declaring the Azerbaijan People's Government. Major headlines of the first issue, including "Our party started its work," "language of the newspaper," "Our aim," and "On the horns of a dilemma; our last word!" already allow the reader to have an overall view of the sociopolitical developments in Azerbaijan and more specifically Tabriz. Because no author is listed, it is hard to clarify whose words the reader encounters. However, the director of the newspaper was Ali Shabistari and probably Pishavari himself contributed to the first issue.



Figure 5: Azerbaijan, 1st issue, 5 Sep 1945

3.4.1 Firqemiz işe başladı!

Under the title of “Our party started to work,” one of the editors, refers to the declaration of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* and introduces their vision and explains its agenda to the locals:

As much as we are in of territorial unity of Iran, we also wish people of Azerbaijan would be able to be in charge their own culture and manage their affairs according to their will. We want our culture, health and government offices, we want freedom to have our books, newspaper and literature in order to enable our people to be more prosperous.”⁶⁴

In this article, the unknown author claims that the establishment of the *Firq- yi Demokrat* is in line with the constitution of Iran and actually existed before Reza Shah. Indeed, the Iranian Constitution that was the result of many disasters in Azerbaijan and of course elsewhere in Iran has sections related to these council that will be discussed further in this chapter.

3.4.2 Our Aim

The reference to the Constitutional Revolution and the crucial role of Azerbaijan in that revolution was repeatedly emphasized in the newspaper, and seems to be one of the main strategies of legitimization for the rise of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat*. Although written by an unknown author, the author speaks on behalf of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat*: “We will work on the principle of freedom, reviving *Meshrute* and its constitution”. Here again the author reminds the reader about the foundation of the State-Provincial Councils and introduces them as the suppressed achievements of their fathers and brothers which needs to be revived:

“40 years has passed from that historical day (Victory of the Constitutionalists), and we are not only at the same place but also went backwards.... expecting the reactionaries in the center to grant us our right is an unachievable dream. We shall not wait for the people who

⁶⁴ Azerbaijan, 5 Sep 1945

have foisted themselves as the central government by force and hold elections for the State Council. This is our sacred and national aim. Having the State Council without the interference of the reactionaries in Tehran is our serious slogan today! This council should be established soon and grant people of Azerbaijan authority to sort out their local and cultural issues.”⁶⁵

This article very explicitly shows the intentions of the editors of wanting to have State-Provincial Councils within a renewed democratic system.

3.4.3 Language of the Newspaper

The attitude of the newspaper towards the question of language is also made clear from the very first issue. In “language of the newspaper,” most probably written by Shabistari or Pishavari, reviving what it calls *Azerbaijan Dili* (the Azerbaijani language and can also be read as language of Azerbaijan) is identified as a priority for the newspaper:

*“The language of Azerbaijan will be a priority for our newspaper. Our language, despite the empty claims of the enemies, is a large-scale rich language that has roots in the hearts and blood of our people.”*⁶⁶

Later on in the article the author does not hesitate to refer to Reza Shah as a brutal oppressor, citing the cruelty of his administration and their hostile history with the language of Azerbaijan. The authors also describe the literary values. Furthermore, the author (or group of authors) does not see the purification of Azerbaijani as a priority, but rather an unnecessary issue since the language has internalized foreign words from Farsi and Arabic and due to constant encounters. The author also paves the way for the future:

⁶⁵ same

⁶⁶ same

“We believe that (the newspaper) should adopt a language that is understandable by people. We are not aiming for a literary competition! Our aim is to inform people and shed light to the realities. We respect the form of language used by people which Farsi and Arabic words are part of it and, even if temporarily, we should preserve its current form.”⁶⁷

Underlining the importance of Azerbaijani language, as the newspaper writes it, from the very beginning, shows that the question of language is an important topic of the newspaper and thus an important claim of political legitimization of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* and the APG later on. The emphasis on linguistic rights, according to the bilingual structure of the newspaper, was primarily focused on promoting the language of Azerbaijan and did not demonize the role of Farsi, since a majority of political pieces were written in Farsi.

3.4.4 On the Horns of a Dilemma; Our Last Word!

The editors of the newspaper were very well informed of the events after the Second World War in Tehran and thus highly critical of the uncertainty and chaos it had created in the whole country. Again, most probably written by a group of authors, the article describes the chaotic situation among of the politics in Iran on the eve of the Cold War:

“According to the news coming from Tehran, it has already been more than 3 months and still there is no official and legal government in the center(Tehran). The majority is trying to force the Sadr government and alike... thy have started to limit even more of the artificial democracy and close down democratic associations and the free press... they aim and dream of a strong repressive state and let the London politicians run it. They want to make a new Reza Shah, a contemporary Iranian Hitler. Azerbaijan cannot remain indifferent to these developments!”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ same

⁶⁸ same

Speaking on behalf of Azerbaijan, the authors give the Tehran government a harsh ultimatum: Tehran should know that they are on the horns of a dilemma; Azerbaijan has chosen its way and will be moving towards freedom and democratic principles. If Tehran chooses to follow the path of despotism, we say goodbye and say continue down your despotic path without Azerbaijan! This is our last word!

3.5 The Content and Tone of the Newspaper

The first issue of *Azerbaijan* shows the initial phase of intentions, aims and critiques of people who soon will become a critical concern for major world powers, thus experiencing their interference. Even though the newspaper is consistent on cultural and language rights and economic developments, over the course of fifteen months it changes gear from time to time and changes its tone to position *Firqe-yi-Demokrat* in world politics. The life of the newspaper in Tabriz can be divided into three phases. The first phase, from the establishment of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* in early September to the declaration of autonomy in mid-December, is the initial phase in the life of the newspaper. During this initial phase, from being a party newspaper to the voice of a self-declared autonomous government, the newspaper was mainly focused on claims, critiques and plans of a newly put together party. Major claims of legitimization, language, and autonomy are given a lot of spaces in the pages. The second phase is from the declaration of the APG until the agreement reached with Tehran in mid-June 1946, when Tabriz and Tehran signed a cooperation agreement. The Third and the last phase is the period that lead to the collapse of the APG. In this period the newspaper seems to soften its position towards Tehran and is concerned with the Soviets officials who turned their back on the APG officials.

3.6 The Audience

Having received unexpected attention from the media, the newspaper created excitement among like-minded Azerbaijanis, but also caused tension in Tehran. Many people from all over the country congratulated *Firqe-yi-Demokrat* and the staff of *Azerbaijan* by telegram. Tehran newspapers also widely reacted to the events in Tabriz and expressed their concerns over the creation of the *Firqe-yi-Demokrat*. Furthermore, from the very first issue, the newspaper frequently publishes names, and sometimes the occupation, of the people who had joined the *Firqe-yi Demokrat*. More than 300 names registered as the members of the *Firqe-yi Deomkrat* from multiple cities in the first two issues alone. From Tabriz, for example, out of seven names written, three are said to be merchants, one a real estate agent, one a factory owner, one a carpet seller, and one a watch seller.

3.7 Other printing press in the APG

Many newspapers were born as a result of the occupation of Iran by the Allied Forces and the abdication of Reza Shah. However, with the rise of the APG, publication of various kinds has dramatically increased. By the end of 1945, in addition to *Azerbaijan*, dozens of other newspapers were on the shelves for Azerbaijanis to read. Muhammadreza Heyat, a researcher in Tabriz Institute, lists more than ten periodicals that were officially published in the APG territories. These include, “Azad Millet,” “Qelebe,” “Yeni Şerq,” “Azerbaijan Ulduzu,” “Medeniyyet,” “Urmiye,” “Azer,” “Veten Yolunda,” “Shafaq,” “Gunesh,” “Covdat,” and Cevanlar.”⁶⁹ Some of these periodicals, *Veten Yolunda* for example, were directly financed and published by the Red Army,

⁶⁹ <http://tebareh.org/fa/?p=80>.

while others were published locally by independent journalists.⁷⁰ For example, “Azad Millet” as the official newsletter of the APG parliament reflects the decisions of the meetings, “Urmiye” is a serious daily newspaper with many vocal voices and telegrams included.

3.7.1 Urmiye Newspaper

As the second major city in Azerbaijan, Urmiye, has been historically an ethnically and linguistically diverse city. The city and surrounding towns and villages is also home to a large number of Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians and Yaresans. *Urmiye* was on shelves on the Jan 23, 1946, few months after the establishment of the Azerbaijan People’s Government. The editorial board of the newspaper were either members of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* in the city or, in many cases, grassroots supporters of the APG and its agenda. Sold for the price of 1 Rial in a bookstore called “Tamaddun,” the newspaper deals with daily world news, local politics, health, poetry and literature. From the very first day, the editorial board encourages the readers to read and write in mother tongue, defends the language policies of the APG, and also asks the readership to contribute to the newspaper:

“Dear writers of our city, science and literature enthusiasts, and all of our respected readers, from today, with the freedom we have gained, thanks to the establishment of the Azerbaijan People’s Government, we have started to publish our national (Milli) newspaper in our mother tongue. Thus, we request the readership to makes our pages richer by their literary, technical, and social pieces. The editorial board hopes to receive articles form the intellectuals and all workers to support us with their thoughtful comments and make this land and its people prosperous.”

⁷⁰ Memmedli,Pervane. *Cənubi Azərbaycan mətbuatı tarixi*[history of South Azerbaijani printing press]. Baku: Elm,2009,110-125.

Being inspired by *Azerbaijan*, *Urmiye* also has concerns on the maintenance of the city and public health and increasing awareness of towards diseases. For instance, an article with the title of “Doctor’s advice” extensively discussed the ways Typhus can be prevented and fought, is placed on the very first page of the first issue. In addition, in coming pages some short reports complain about the roads and the need for asphalt and the necessity of having a mechanism to support orphan children.

3.7.2 Azad Millet

Serving as the official bulletin of the newly established parliament, *Azad Millet* came to life much later than *Azerbaijan* and was initially set to be published every other day, as set out in the first issue. However, the bulletin did not publish on such a frequent basis, and while some issues are a complete four-page paper, many issues are comprised of only two pages. In addition, the archived version also are missing some issues and pages from available issues.



Figure 6: Urmiye newspaper, 1st issue, 23 January 1946

Azad Millet was disseminated on a much smaller scale. The subscription for 100 issues was 100 Rial in Tabriz, and subscription from other cities required the reader to pay for the postal expenses. The first issue of *Azad Millet* was published on 24 February 1946, and Ismail Shams is introduced as the head of the editorial board. The first issue includes world news, decisions of the parliament and also a page long compliment of the Red Army for the 28th anniversary of establishment with a picture of Stalin as its victorious leader. The description of the Red Army in the first issue was written when the uncertainty in of Tehran, Moscow, and Baku brought chaos to Tabriz. Hoping for the help of the Red Army, the unknown author seems to be concerned about the talks of Moscow and Tehran and the soon starting withdrawal of the Red Army. However, the author also does not hesitate to show the APG's hopes for the Red Army:

*"The Red Army entered many bloody wars to rescue small nations from the claw of the brutal fascist occupiers. In the west, with the German and Italian fascists, and in the east, the Japanese Imperialists who have allied with fascists, the Red Army tried to destroy their roots. As a result, small nations gained their freedoms and found the opportunity to have their own national (Milli) government."*⁷¹

The hope of the APG to have the support of the Red Army and the Soviet Union did not last long. The praise and respect for the Red Army came to end when the Soviet administration decided to

⁷¹ *Azad Millet*, 24 Feb 1946

withdraw its forces from the Northern Iran, creating political chaos among the officials of the APG.



Figure 7aZaD Millet newspaper, first issue, Feb 24, 1946

The bulletin also includes brief autobiographies written by the parliament members, publishing them on frequent bases. These autobiographies are particularly useful to learn more about the less-familiar faces of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* from other cities and towns in Azerbaijan. Qulam Ali Zare⁷² is an elected deputy from Mehranerud⁷² in the APG parliament who introduces himself as a comrade of Sattar Khan and Baqir Khan during the *Mashrute*, and also was among the supports of Sheykh Mahammad Khiyabani in 1920:

“From the age of sixteen, I have been among the Constitutionalists and fought alongside with Sattar Khan and Baqir Khan in Tabriz, in Sarabi, Qaradagh, and even during the Park

⁷² Name of the main river of the city and refers to a region close to Tabriz.

*Incident*⁷³ I fought against despotism. Also, I was with Sheykh Mahammad Khiabani and alongside him fought against reactionaries.”⁷⁴

Mr Zare’ also mentions that, prior to become the head of the *Fedais*,⁷⁵ he was a farmer for many years and had not interfered in government affairs. Later on, he finishes the autobiography by expressing his support for the APG and its aim. Both *Urmiye* and *Azad Millet*, papers with limited number of readers, and constantly refer, use and cite *Azerbaijan* as the source of their information and the official stance of the short-lived government towards different issues.

To conclude, this chapter was devoted to an in-depth analysis of *Azerbaijan* newspaper and its legacy as a cultural production of a periphery in post-Reza Shah Iran. *Azerbaijan* of 1945 was inspired and claimed the legacy of a newspaper published with the same name four decades earlier in 1906 during the constitutional movement. The abdication of Reza Shah became a reason for Azerbaijanis with different ideologies to form the assembly of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaycan Cemiyyeti*, to once again *Azerbaijan* to life in 1941. Even though the life of the newspaper was very short in 1941, it prepared the ground for Pishavari and his comrades to start republishing *Azerbaijan* and make it the official bulletin of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* and later on the Azerbaijan People’s Government. The newspaper in 1945 had the same editorial board, but aimed for a bigger audience. Many people not only in Azerbaijan but also in rest of the country read the newspaper and reacted to its articles. After a detailed analysis of the newspaper in this chapter, the next chapter will explain how the newspaper became the voice of a periphery amid a complex political situation,

⁷³ Referring to the siege of the Tabriz revolutionaries headed by Sattar Xan, in a Atabak Park in late 1914. The government forces disarmed them and created an atrocity with large number of casualties. Sattar Xan himself was shot from his ankle and died short after the incident.

⁷⁴ *Azad Millet*, 2 June 1945

⁷⁵ Lightly armed volunteers from part members to peasants and ordinary citizens.

objecting to the peripheralization process of Azerbaijan and using the concerns of periphery as strategies of legitimization.

4 The Voice of a Peripheralized Center; “Azerbaijan” Newspaper, 1945-46

In previous chapter, it was mentioned that periodicals with the name of “Azerbaijan” had a long history prior to the rise of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* and were published in 1906 and 1941 in Tabriz. With the declaration of autonomy and the establishment of the Azerbaijan People’s Government by Pishavari and his comrades in December of 1945, *Azerbaijan* became the official bulletin of the autonomous Government and functioned as an effective mean of political legitimization for the *Firqe-yi Demokrat*. Over the period of fifteen months, in more than 350 issues, the newspaper becomes a venue for the short-lived government to voice its problems and concerns, which were the results of the peripheralization process in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan was the voice of a periphery subjugated to a strong center amid the global crisis on the eve of the Cold War. The newspaper reflects the constant struggle of the autonomous government in Azerbaijan to gain regional support and also position itself within international politics. More overt claims of the APG were primarily criticisms of Iranian politics and society rather than of

international politics. However, through subtler means, the newspaper also reflects how the APG officials tried to position the autonomous government in international politics and deal with global powers and regional actors. Through both overt and subtle strategies, Pishavari and his comrades aimed to legitimize their decision to declare autonomy in Tabriz. The aim of this chapter is to show how, *Azerbaijan*, through overt and subtle strategies, tried to legitimize the APG a self-declared autonomous government. Among more overt ways, are their discussions on language, history, economy, political administration; among the subtle ways are, the position of the APG towards the Soviet Union, the United States, and the Turkish government.

4.1 Overt strategies of legitimization

Since the newspaper was widely circulated in Azerbaijan, it played a significant role for the *Firqeyi Demokrat* in justifying their decisions on declaring autonomy for the locals. The newspaper was openly critical of Tehran's attitude towards Azerbaijanis and promised the locals to resolve problems and concerns that authorities in Tehran neglected for many years. Years of centralization in Tehran and peripheralization of Azerbaijan left enough space for any political establishment to openly object to the central government and offer alternatives to Azerbaijanis. The official newspaper of the APG was very successful in drawing the attention of the public to the damages done by Reza Shah and his mistreatment of Azerbaijanis. The internal problems in Iranian society thus were enough for the APG to convince the audience that the declaration of autonomy was the best decision to make Azerbaijan prosperous. The most important strategies of legitimization of the voice of the peripheralized Azerbaijan were those that had not much to do with global politics but rather were reactions to the central government. The following pages are devoted to some of the overt strategies of legitimization of the APG.

4.1.1 Question of language

The controversial language policies of Reza Shah were a major claim for the *Firqe-yi-Demokrat* and its officials to appeal to Azerbaijanis and promise them freedom of language under their rule. Indeed, Pishavari and his government kept their promise and for the first (and the last) time in the history of modern Iran, (Azerbaijani) Turkish became the language of the government and started to be taught in primary schools and universities. Many books and periodicals were, for the first time after the Constitutional Revolution, allowed to publish in non-Farsi languages. Pishavari himself, as the head of the short-lived government, was a strict defender of his mother tongue and criticized those who defended assimilation of the Azerbaijanis:

*“We have learned our mother tongue with the exquisite welkin of motherland. Those that insult our language and claim that it is imposed by invaders are our enemies. Tehran’s intellectuals should understand that Azerbaijani is not an accent of Farsi but it is an old language with a thousand years of history and roots in the souls of people of Azerbaijan. It’s our duty to preservg our language!”*⁷⁶

What Pishavari calls the “Tehran intellectuals” were predominatly those who had been in charge of cultural affairs of the newly forming Iranian nation-state during the reign of Reza Shah and the formation of the Pahlavi historiography. Some of these intellectuals that were discussed in the first chapter, Kasravi and Dr Afshar, openly advocated the necessity of eliminating the language of Azerbaijanis by any means. Not only Pishavari, but also a majority of the authors in the newspaper, were crtical of the central government’s attitude towards Turkish as a language that was not only spoken in Azerbaijan but also many other regions in the Iranian plateau, like Khorasan, Fars and Tehran itself. In an article criticizing Dr Asfshar and the Pan Iranists, most probably written by

⁷⁶ *Azerbaijan*, 6 Nov 1945.

Pishavari or Shabistari, the author reminds Dr Afshar that his ancestor, Nadir Shah Afshar, spoke Turkish and remind him to pay a short visit to the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf and read the inscriptions in Turkish,⁷⁷ ordered by Nadir Shah Afshar:

*“If you wanna know the truth, Dr Afshar, you should know that Nadir Shah was from the tribes of Azerbaijan and also liked Azerbaijani language a lot. If you are looking for an evidence, go to Najaf and see what has been written on the gates of Imam Ali’s Holy shrine.”*⁷⁸

Referring to one of the most charismatic kings of Iran, the author tries to confront the cultural peripheralization of Azerbaijan and oppression of its language as one of the primary indicators of Azerbaijani culture.

One of the devastating results of imposing a non-native national language on Azerbaijan was in the education system. Forced to learn Farsi at the very early ages, the majority of Azerbaijanis, especially the children of Azerbaijan, faced difficulties in adapting to the education system in Iran. The official newspaper of the Azerbaijan People’s Government was a venue for many of these voices to be heard. The newspaper frequently brought this issue to the public and laid out the language policies of the autonomous government in enabling Azerbaijanis to read and write in their own language and have their elementary education in Turkish. In an article, Mohammad Fakhr describes enforcement of Farsi on Azerbaijani children as a torture that deeply effects the outcome of the education system:

“It is a torture to send seven years olds to school and force them to study in a language that they do not understand. Ask all the education experts and pedagogues, they will both laughing and feel sorry. This is a wring path and an incorrect system of education! I do not

⁷⁷ The poem compiled in Turkish and is one of the oldest inscriptions of the shrine. The poem in Turkish:

Şəh-i cəm hişmət-i Dâra dərayet ‘Nâdir-i dövrən/Ki tæxt-i dövlət-i Cəmsid’ə vârisdir cahan üzrə,
Bədəşşan lə’l-u Umman incisin vermiş xəracında/ Günəş tək hökmü nâfiz müttəsil dərya vü kân üzrə
Çəkilməz kəhkəşânın yayı tək nəqqaş əgər çəksin/Misâl-i quvvət-i bazu-yi iqbālın kəman üzrə

⁷⁸ Azerbaijan, 7 Oct 1945.

know what was our children's misdeed, and also us in childhood, that we were sentenced to such a torture!"⁷⁹

The officials of the APG did not remain silent and from the very first days of the establishment of the autonomous government, Azerbaijani Turkish became the official language of the government and the education system. During the short life of the APG, elementary schools in all over Azerbaijan were thought in Turkish. The material, style, and content of these books were mainly from series of books prepared by Mirza Hasan Rushidye, the father of culture (Maarif) of Iran during the last decade of the nineteenth century.



بیرنجی درس گونی

به به بوگون نه خوش گونددر . شکر اولسون که کنچن
ایلکی همدرس یولداشلاریمیز بیز ایله وارددلار .
کنچن ایل مدرسه یه گان وقت یازیب اوخوماق بیلیمزدیک :
بیرنجی کلاسدا یازیب اوخوماق نوکره ندیک . آزاد وقتلریمیز
شیرین اویونلار ایله کنجدی . دوغروسو نه یاخشی گونلر ایدی
او گونلر !
ایندی که ایکنجی کلاسه کلمیشیک ، اوخویوب یازماق بیزیم

Figure 8: Second grade elementary school book , 1945

⁷⁹ Azerbaijan, 29 Jan 1946

4.1.2 Revisiting the history of Azerbaijan

Even before the establishment of the Azerbaijan People's Government, local historians started to oppose a national history writing, rejecting the assumed racial and linguistic unity of all Iranians. However, with the rise of *Firqe-yi-Demokrat*, historians were able to openly criticize the centrist nationalist approach and offer alternative narratives as they struggled to bring back Azerbaijan to Iranian history and introduce it as region that traditionally has been a frontrunner of political changes in Iran, especially during the times of the Constitutional Revolution. *Azerbaijan* newspaper became the main camp of these historical narratives and was trusted by the officials of the APG as an alternative local history for the region. The officials instrumentalized it as one of the justifications of their claims to seize political power.

In most of the issues of the newspaper, one column on the second page is devoted to the series of articles under the title of "Azerbaijan is speaking: pages of our glorious history." These articles were written by Fridun Ibrahim, a young politician which served as attorney general in APG, and cover the history of Azerbaijan and the hostility of the central government toward Azerbaijan. Inspired by the national self-determination and its central position in the Soviet historiography, Ibrahim's motivation for writing the history of Azerbaijan, as he mentions in these series of articles, is to oppose a centrist history:

*"These people (Tehran intellectuals) undermine the Azerbaijani history and language as undemocratic principles in contrast with the constitution of the country, a constitution that we have built with our blood and is there to protect people. Why they are act in such way is 'land distribution, yer bölgüsü, is the concern that worries both for both the Firqe(-yi Demokrat) and people. Because our Firqe, and our government believes hat to reach political freedom and democracy economic freedom and independence, is a must.'"*⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Azerbaijan*, 6 March 1946

The newspaper also constantly referred to the contemporary history of Iran and the role of Azerbaijan in its formation. The Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11 was a crucial legacy that the both the newspaper and also the APG constantly affiliated themselves with.

Azerbaijan newspaper was in constant struggle to draw a continuity between the Constitutionals of the Constitutional Movement. Numerous articles in the newspaper introduce the APG as an entity that inherited the legacy of a struggle that started in that period. An As'adi named author, for example, that seems to be a first hand witness of the upheavals in Tabriz of 1906, reminded the audience about the sacrifices of constitutionalists against despotism and the duty of all Azerbaijanis to continue their path⁸¹.

4.1.3 Economic devastation of Azerbaijan

The economic crises in Azerbaijan during and after Reza Shah was one of the fundamental strategies of legitimization for the Azerbaijan People's Government. The main promise of the APG in rural areas was a large-scale land distribution among the peasants. Pishavari, Shabistari and other high rank officials in their op-eds, short pieces and articles in the newspaper were critical of how the major land owners, *Khans*, exploited the peasants. The economic promises of the APG on land distributions and abolishment of the landlords (*Khans*) could be heard not only from hardcore communists, but also from social democrats. Even nationalists in the Iran of 1945 had such promises in their agenda. However, the most tangible and evident result of Reza Shah's mistreatment of Azerbaijanis could be seen in the economy:

⁸¹ Azerbaijan, 2 Oct, 1945.

“land distribution, yer bölgüsü, is the concern that worries both for both the Firqe (-yi Demokrat) and people. Because our Firqe, and our government believes hat to reach political freedom and democracy economic freedom and independence, is a must.”⁸²

As has discussed in the first chapter, the economic peripheralization of Azerbaijan by the central government Reza Shah’s reign turned the region from the most important economic center during the late Qajar period into a periphery in need of basic life commodities on the eve of the crisis in 1945. The official newspaper of the APG, constantly referred to such policies as the examples of discrimination against Azerbaijanis. The occupation of Iran by the Allies in 1941 interrupted an already malfunctioning economic system in Iran and, among many other negative impacts, caused grain shortage. During the reign of Reza Shah, the central government was also unable to provide a steady supply of grain. Consequently, not only major cities, but also mid-size towns in Azerbaijan faced difficulties in feeding the population. Many telegrams from different places in Azerbaijan were published in the newspaper and informed the audience about their daily struggle of the grain shortage. The officials of the Azerbaijan People’s Government understood this problem and promised locals that they would resolve this issue.

In an article, Pishavari explains the causes the of the grain shortage in Azerbaijan and harshly criticized the decisions of the Tehran administration in decreasing the purchasing price of grain from the locals. Pishavari reminds the reader that such policies of the ancien regime had destructive effects on the economy of Azerbaijan and that while people in the villages were in need of their own product, the grain of Azerbaijan was sold to neighboring countries and the central provinces of Iran:

⁸² *Azerbaijan*, 6 March 1946

*“Before, our grain from Azerbaijan was exported to Turkey and Russia, and even to Germany in recent years! The less fertile provinces of Iran were fed by the grain of Azerbaijan. The question of grain is a vital concern for the people of Azerbaijan and one of our priorities.”*⁸³

Pishavari also notes that the grain produced in Azerbaijan should first feed the locals, and only then, if anything remains, should it be marketed and exported properly, to encourage farmers and also promote the economy of Azerbaijan.⁸⁴

4.1.4 Administrative structure of Iranian, reviving the State-province councils

Another major claim of the APG was to restore the state-province councils (*Anjoman-e- Iyalati va Velayati*) that were included in the first constitution of the country. These councils were designed to give a certain degree of autonomy in provincial affairs and city management. The newspaper on several occasions refers to these councils as a legal legitimization for the establishment of the APG. Pishavari repeatedly reminds those who oppose the establishment of the APG to read the constitution and be aware of the rights that were granted to all the provinces until Reza Shah abolished these laws. Furthermore, officials of the APG proposed a federative system of governance as a better alternative to a heavily centralized state. This attitude of the newspaper was clear even from the very first issues of *Azerbaijan*. The third issue of the newspaper includes an article that defend autonomy as a natural right of citizens and directs opponents to notice the success of this model elsewhere:

“to prove the advantage of this system it is enough to look at the administrative structure of countries like Switzerland, the United States, and The Soviet Union and consider the administration of internal affairs of all these countries. History shows that those nations

⁸³ *Azerbaijan*, 7 Dec 1945.

⁸⁴ Pishavari both in his speeches and his articles insisted on land distribution. For a further research on the economic policies of the APG please read a research done by Aliriza Mitnali : <http://www.achiq.info/yazi/miyanli%20iqtsad.htm>

who were thought of autonomous administration earlier than the others, were able to strengthen to reach a better harmony, and their existence was not interrupted by any global crisis.”⁸⁵

By taking the Swiss, the United States or the Soviet Union as the most well-fit legal system for linguistic and ethnic diversity in Iran, Pishavari and his comrades aimed to justify the autonomy of Azerbaijan and argue in favor of a federative Iran.

4.2 Subtle strategies of legitimization

In addition to the above mentioned overt strategies of the autonomous government that were primarily concerned with the local politics, *Azerbaijan* also reflects subtler strategies that the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* employed to position itself within world politics. The editorial board of the newspaper closely followed quickly-developing events after the Second World War and tried to develop strategies that could fit their purpose. With the hope of recognition from global and regional actors, the newspaper celebrated victories of the Allies and clearly sided with them. Such an attitude was the main subtle strategy of legitimization for the self-declared government. The following pages will further explain the position of *Azerbaijan* as a periphery amid a global tension.

4.2.1 The APG and the Soviets administration

The Soviet administration was the primary hope of the APG officials after declaration of autonomy. Articles of the newspaper carefully followed the global developments and were very hopeful to gain the full support of the Soviet administration and the Red Army. The presence of the Red Army in Azerbaijan and the peak of its glory right after the Second World War raised the

⁸⁵ *Azerbaijan*, 12 Sep 1945.

hopes of the editors of the newspaper for the assistance and support of the northern neighbor. However, it did not take long for Pishavari and his comrades to witness how the Soviet Union, despite its promises, betrayed them and took advantage of the situation to maximize its own interest. The newspaper and its content over the period of publication showed empathy toward the Soviet Union, but did not affiliate themselves with any government. The officials of the APG were aware of such claims and denied such accusations:

*“our enemies, instead of saying the truth, confessing their felonies and reveling people responsible for recent atrocities, distract the discussion and affiliate us (the APG) sometimes with the Soviets, sometimes with Turkey and sometimes separate us from Iran but, we have proved to the world that we defend the independence and territorial unity of Iran”.*⁸⁶

Denying accusation of the opponents of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat*, however, did not stop the newspaper from showing its support of the Soviet Union and praising its establishment and its leaders. In the forty eighth issue of the newspaper, devoted to the twenty eighth anniversary of the October Revolution, the editorial board published pictures of Stalin and Lenin together with a poem of Biriya, the minister of culture, praising the establishment of the Soviet Union:

*“The October Spring came and abolished the injustice, October came and the motherland retrieved the freedom.”*⁸⁷

In another article on Iran and the October Revolution, an author named Novruz, evaluates the results of the collapse of the Tsarist regime as an event that not only changed the destiny of People in Russia, but also as an important historical event that “revived the independence of Iran and rescued its people from the dark clouds of horror and aberration.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Azerbaijan, 30 Nov 1945

⁸⁷ Azerbaijan, 7 Nov, 1945

⁸⁸ same



Figure 9: Azerbaijan, 7 Nov 1945

4.2.2 Hopes towards the United states

The Soviet Union was not the only government that the APG officials hoped would support and recognize their self-declared autonomy. Pishavari, as the head of the government, met with the United States consulate in Tabriz and explained the aims and the agenda of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat*. The newspaper on few occasion addressed these meetings and published reports of the meetings. According to a report published on 30 December 1945, only few days after the declaration of autonomy, the officials of the APG set a meeting with Robert Rossow and negotiated the situation of Azerbaijan. The report argues that the meeting was the first meeting that Pishavari had with representatives of the big powers, and took almost two hours. The report indicates that at the early stages of the autonomy in Tabriz, the officials of the APG were also hopeful to be recognized by the US Government:

“The meeting between Mr. Robet Rossow and our prime minster, Pishavari, was very friendly, sincere and war. During the meeting, the representative of the US government asked questions about the principles and the agenda of our government and our prime minister, explained our principles and the needs of Azerbaijanis in details. This meeting, is a big step in strengthening our government and its recognition by foreign countries.”⁸⁹

In addition to number of meetings with the general counsel of the US government, the newspaper also reported that on several occasions other representative of the United States had travelled to Tabriz to meet with the officials of the APG. On 11 December 1945, only one day before the declaration of Autonomy in Tabriz, the American press attaché in Iran, Mr. Young, was warmly welcomed to Tabriz. In reporting the meeting of Pishavari with the attaché, the newspaper describes the United States as a friendly government that fought for democracy and freedom:

“Azerbaijanis did not and will not forget the sacrifices of Mr. Baskerville⁹⁰ who was martyred for the freedom of Azerbaijanis during the Constitutional Movement. This is an evident example of the commitment of Americans for freedom and sacrifices that people of America made for the sake of freedom and democracy, in different times, especially during the current war (The Second World War). Azerbaijanis, have known Americans as true friends and the great defender of freedom for small nations.”⁹¹

Of course, such attributes presented to the US press attaché was to gain recognition for the short-lived government and shows their hope to have the support of the US government; a hope that like the hope they had for the Soviets, did not last long.

4.2.3 The friendly people of former Yugoslavia

⁸⁹ Azerbaijan, 30 Dec 1945.

⁹⁰ American teacher of memorial school in Tabriz who had fought side by side the constitutionalist and was murdered by the government forces.

⁹¹ Azerbaijan, 11 Dec 1945

In addition to efforts of *Azerbaijan* to legitimize the rise of the APG in the eyes of big powers such as the Soviet Union and the United States, it also tried to establish friendships and gain recognition with other countries. The former Yugoslavia was one such country: the APG officials met in person with its representatives and expressed their empathy towards them. The newspaper occasionally included news and reports from Yugoslavia and discussed the developments of the country. The APG officials' particular interest in Yugoslavia was in the multi-ethnic structure of the country in 1945, and they thought of the Yugoslav system as a possible option for a federative Iran. In their articles, the APG sought to inform the audience about the empathy of the Yugoslav nation toward the APG and its establishment. Similar to the United State press attaché, the Yugoslav press attaché also travelled to Tabriz to meet with the officials of the APG:

“Recently the Yugoslav press attaché visited Tabriz. Mr. Pavle Mijovic⁹², is from originally from Montenegro, a region with four hundred thousand people, that has gained autonomy with new Yugoslavia. He (Mijovic) was a medical science student who had left the university and took a weapon to defend his country.”⁹³

With a detailed explanation of the federative structure of the former Yugoslavia, the author of the article described Yugoslavia as a democratic and free nation that, under the leadership of marshal Tito, allowed six different nationalities to live side-by-side, like brothers, with all their rights and privileges.

4.2.4 Criticism of the Turkish Government

Since the earliest signs of an autonomous movement appeared in Azerbaijan in 1941, the local intellectuals were critical of the role of Ankara in Iranian politics and their hostile relations with

⁹² Biography of Pavle Mijovic is accessible via:

<http://www.maticacrnogorska.me/files/43/19%20rezime%20pavle%20mijovic.pdf>

⁹³ Azerbaijan, 14 Feb 1946

Azerbaijanis who shared their language. Ali Shabistari, who was the director of *Azerbaijan* newspaper in 1941 and later on became the head of the parliament of the Azerbaijan People's Government, was particularly vocal about the role of the Turkish state in Azerbaijan even before the Second World War. He frequently reminded the audience of the newspaper about the suppression of the *Azadistan* Movement in 1920. Shabistari criticized the position of Radio Ankara toward the APG and saw it as a propaganda station that undermined Azerbaijanis' right to have their own language and culture:

*"The Turkish government pretends to be the defender of the Iranian patriotism (Iran-Pərəstlik) but whenever they had a bit of power, (Azerbaijanis) were the first victims of their ambitions. We read in our history that during the occupation of Azerbaijan by the Turkish forces in 1920's, they have arrested the beloved son of Azerbaijan, Shaikh Muhammad Khiabani, and sent him to exile in Kars. People of Azerbaijan have not forgotten these events."*⁹⁴

Much like the Turkish media, which expressed concern about the events in Azerbaijan, the official newspaper of the APG also frequently devoted columns to new developments in Turkish politics and their alliance with the Americans. For instance, on the 28th of July 1946, the newspaper devoted a half page to analysis of the election in Turkey, and saw the participation of different political parties as a positive sign that Turkey was moving toward a multi-party system.⁹⁵

Officials of the APG introduced the Turkish government and Radio Ankara as one of the centers of imperialist propaganda that were frightened by and could not digest the freedom movements in Azerbaijan. In an article devoted to the reaction of the world press to the rise of the APG, the

⁹⁴ *Azerbaijan*, 27 Nov, 1945.

⁹⁵ same

(unknown) author attacks Radio Ankara and accuses the radio of deceiving the public about the claims of the Azerbaijanis:

“The first government that was frightened by our movement was the Turkish government. Radio Ankara discredited itself with sentences like “bloody struggle continues in the Tabriz streets” or “the Azerbaijan Movement is set by couple of adventurers” and attacked our struggle for freedom.”⁹⁶

Such narrations implied an image to the audience of the movement in which the Turkish government was one of the regional powers that opposed the rise of the APG despite the will of Azerbaijanis to have their autonomy and freedom.

To conclude, *Azerbaijan* newspaper tried to legitimize itself as the voice of peripheralized center through overt and subtle strategies. More overt strategies were primarily concerned with the problems of the Iranian society including question of language, economy, history, and political administration. Through subtler strategies, the newspaper tried to legitimize and position the autonomous government within the chaotic political developments after the Second World War. The newspaper reflected the hopes and criticisms of the short-lived government towards global powers, The United States, and also regional actors, Former Yugoslavia and Turkey.

⁹⁶ *Azerbaijan*, 30 Nov, 1945.

5 Conclusion

The rise and fall of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* has been a matter of controversy in writing the contemporary history of Iran since the declaration of autonomy in Tabriz on 12 Dec of 1945. The complex political situations after the Second World War and multiplicity of actors had turned the historiography of the short-lived government into a battlefield between different history writing traditions and ideologies. The rise and fall of the Azerbaijan People's Government has been either studied in the context of great power politics or is dominated by *Azerbaijanist* or *Iranist* traditions that try to defend or reject the short-lived government. The common ground and the primary focus of all these traditions was the "Soviet element." Whether macro-level analysis or national histories, the available literature had either demonized the APG as a Soviet plan or praised it as a spontaneous mass mobilization that had no foreign support.

This thesis did not aim to reject or confirm the claims of these traditions, but rather is a contribution to the available literature that can coexist with different traditions. Instead, this thesis aimed to explain the rise and fall of the autonomous government in Tabriz as a result of a multidimensional

peripheralization process during the reign of Reza Shah in which Azerbaijan gradually lost its political, cultural and economic position within the Iranian society and was turned to a periphery. The primary concern of the thesis was to focus on *Azerbaijan* newspaper as the official bulletin of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat*, introduce it as the voice of a peripheralized center, and finally to inspect the ways they sought recognition within Iranian society and global politics.

The first chapter aimed to discuss the process of peripheralization in Azerbaijan during the reign of Reza Shah. Aiming to build a strong nation-state, the authoritarian modernism of Reza Shah was also accompanied by rapid centralization of the state structure. A heavily centralized Iran had started a process that, within few decades, changed Azerbaijan from the main hub of the political, economic and cultural life during the late Qajar period to a periphery unable to feed its own population. Through a few examples, this chapter illustrated what the outcome of the peripheralization process in Azerbaijan were, and how this process affected the economic, cultural and political position of Azerbaijan.

The second chapter dealt with the legacy of *Azerbaijan* newspaper, providing a detailed analysis of the newspaper and also of other printing presses during the life of the Azerbaijan People's Government. Tracing back the legacy of the newspapers to the years of Constitutional Revolution of 1906, the predecessors of *Azerbaijan* were two periodicals with the same name that were influential in 1906 and 1941. With the establishment of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* in Tabriz in September of 1945, *Azerbaijan* was brought back to life and was the official bulletin of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat* and, later on, the Azerbaijan People's Government. The chapter ended with a brief overview of other printing press during the short-lived government and short analysis of two different examples.

The final chapter was an analysis of the newspaper as the voice of a Peripheralized center when the peripheralization process of Azerbaijan was interrupted by the Allies. This chapter aimed to evaluate the strategies of legitimization of a self-declared autonomous government in the absence of a strong central government and amid a global conflict. *Azerbaijan* newspaper, as the voice of a peripheralized center, was vocal about wide range of issues and developed different strategies of legitimization. Through more overt strategies, the newspaper was a venue for the autonomous government and its officials to gain recognition from Azerbaijanis over criticisms regarding the questions of language, history, economy and political administration, that primarily were problems and concerns within the Iranian society. Moreover, through subtler ways, the newspaper showed how a peripheral autonomous government tried to situate itself in global politics and gain recognition from global actors such as the Soviet Union and the United States and regional powers like former Yugoslavia and Turkey.

The life of the autonomous government, their plans, aims and agenda was forgotten in the ideological confrontation of the Cold War. *Azerbaijan* as the official newspaper of the *Firqe-yi Demokrat*, was the voice of a periphery in a struggle to seek recognition and legitimacy on the eve of the Cold War. Thus, a rich source that enables historians to familiarize themselves with political, social and economic dynamics in Azerbaijan of 1945 in specific and Iran of 1945 in general. In addition, the newspaper also allows to have a local perspective on global issues and investigate the not only great power politics and regional through a peripheral voice. that Finally, the short life of the autonomous government and multiplicity of local, regional, and global actors makes it a difficult case study for historians and thus almost impossible to make any big claims and draw general conclusions.

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