



## **THE FORMATION OF AZERBAIJANI COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN IRAN**

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Iran is a multi-ethnic society in which approximately 50% of its citizens are of non-Persian origin, yet researchers commonly use the terms Persians and Iranians interchangeably, neglecting the supra-ethnic meaning of the term Iranian for many of the non-Persians in Iran. The largest minority ethnic group in Iran is the Azerbaijanis (comprising approximately a third of the population) and other major groups include the Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis and Turkmen.<sup>1</sup> Iran's ethnic groups are particularly susceptible to external manipulation and considerably subject to influence from events taking place outside its borders, since most of the non-Persians are concentrated in the frontier areas and have ties to co-ethnics in adjoining states, such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan and Iraq.

Approximately seven million Azerbaijanis live in the Republic of Azerbaijan, whereas the overwhelming majority of the Azerbaijanis live in neighboring Iran.<sup>2</sup> Many Azerbaijanis refer to most of northwest Iran as "south Azerbaijan." Across the border from the Republic of Azerbaijan, three Iranian provinces are populated predominately by Azerbaijanis: East Azerbaijan Province, West Azerbaijan Province and Ardabil Province.

The cultural rights and political activities of the ethnic minorities in Iran were severely restricted under both the Pahlavi monarchy (1921–1979), and under the Islamic Republic (1979– ). In strict departure from previous practices in Iran, President Khatami has reacted to the ethnic-based demands and is politically capitalizing on them. For example, in the 1997 presidential elections in Iran, supporters of Khatami distributed election materials in the Azerbaijani and Kurdish languages, exemplifying his recognition of the multi-ethnic composition of Iran and the importance the non-Persian groups attach to the status of their mother tongues. Khatami's lead in the conducting of the 1999 elections to local government indicates his willingness to tap into Iran's periphery and, consequently, the ethnic minority groups, as part of his struggle with the prevailing elite in Iran.

Nevertheless, most mainstream research investigating the social and political makeup of Iran tends to marginalize the ethnic factor, and overwhelmingly describes the largest ethnic group in Iran, the Azerbaijanis, as a "well-integrated minority," which harbors little "sense of separate identity," and as having assimilated into Iranian identity.<sup>3</sup>

This article examines expressions of Azerbaijani collective identity in Iran since the Islamic Revolution and in light of the establishment of the neighboring Republic

of Azerbaijan.<sup>4</sup> It examines the complex relationship between Azerbaijani ethnic identity and Iranian state identity among the country's Azerbaijanis. Most individuals hold a number of collective identities but do not usually have a clear determination of their primary collective identity, and that preference is frequently vulnerable to change. The Azerbaijanis, as a Turkic-speaking people, of Shi'i Muslim background, located on the crossroads between Russia, Iran and Turkey, have alternatively influenced and been influenced by those three empires, possess and have been exposed to multiple and alternative, and often competing identities as Turks, Iranians, Muslims, and distinct Azerbaijani identity.

The information presented in this article challenges the prevailing view on ethnic identity in Iran, by claiming that Azerbaijani ethnic identity has been asserted in Iran and played a role in political events there through much of the period of the Islamic republic. Moreover, research indicates that the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991 challenged the national identity of co-ethnics beyond the borders of the new state and served as a stimulant for many Azerbaijanis in Iran to identify with the Azerbaijani ethnic group though not necessarily with the new state itself. In addition, this article challenges the view reflected in many articles on the Soviet period, which have tended to view the ethnic Azerbaijani movements and activity in Iran primarily as a Soviet invention, and as a mere instrument of Moscow's policies toward Iran.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, this article illustrates that there are wide based Azerbaijani ethnic sentiments in Iran, which often emerged at periods when the Soviet Union was not actively encouraging them.

Study of the Azerbaijani example may provide insight into similar relationships between new states and co-ethnics residing beyond the borders in contiguous territories. Moreover, the Azerbaijani example can help us to understand the impact of the establishment of states encompassing only part of what they consider their population and historical territory on co-ethnics and lands beyond their borders, and in which a majority of the core group's co-ethnics live beyond the new state's borders. States of this type are rapidly become the norm among the emerging states in the international system.

The internal Iranian Azerbaijani ethnic factor has immense impact on the state-to-state relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Iran, and affects Tehran's policies in the Caucasus. For instance, Iran's fear that the establishment of a strong and attractive Republic of Azerbaijan could lead to a rise in identity of its own Azerbaijani minority has led Iran to adopt a policy of *de facto* support of Armenia in the conflict with Azerbaijan for Karabagh.

### **The Islamic Revolution and the Azerbaijanis**

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran has attracted the attention of many researchers and has been the subject of hundreds of historical and other inquiries. Despite the plethora of research on the revolution, and the fact that by the spring of 1979

Khomeini's regime was challenged with demands from all the major ethnic groups in Iran and was engaged in a military confrontation with the Kurds, few works have chronicled and analyzed the special role and goals of the ethnic minorities in the revolutionary period. The few studies that do touch on the role and activities of the ethnic minorities in the revolution period, relate to the Kurds, the Arabs, or even the Turkmen, but few mention the Azerbaijanis.<sup>6</sup> This is notwithstanding the fact that the main city in the Azerbaijani provinces, Tabriz, was a center of the revolutionary activity that precipitated the fall of the Pahlavi regime, Azerbaijani activists who rebelled against Khomeini effectively controlled Tabriz for over a month in December 1979, and the confrontation between Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Kazim Shariatmadari, the Azerbaijanis' most widely followed religious figure in this period, posed one of the most serious threats in the initial period to the Islamic regime.

Towards the end of 1977, the anti-Shah activity in Iran became markedly assertive and openly oppositional, especially in Tabriz. Although most of this conduct was part of the general Iranian revolutionary movement, the fact that it was particularly intensive in the Azerbaijani provinces can indicate that their inhabitants were especially alienated from the regime. Beginning in December 1977, students at Tabriz University conducted a wave of protests against the Pahlavi regime. The students chose 12 December (21 of Azar according to the Iranian calendar) to stage one of their most important demonstrations. This date has important meaning for Azerbaijanis for it commemorates both the day of the establishment and the fall of the Provincial Government of Azerbaijan in Iran in 1945 and 1946, respectively. Although most of their slogans asserted general Iranian goals, the choice of the date illustrates their special awareness as Azerbaijanis and the importance they attached to the struggle of their predecessors.<sup>7</sup> Sensitive to any signs of ethnic political activity, the Pahlavi regime intentionally distorted the connection between the demonstrations and the historical events, reporting in the newspaper, *Ettela'at*, that the demonstration had taken place on 19 December<sup>8</sup>.

In Tabriz, the anti-Shah regime activity entered a new phase on 18 February 1978. In response to the killing of approximately 162 demonstrators in Qom on 9 January, Ayatollah Shariatmadari called on the people of Iran to strike on the fortieth day of mourning for the victims.<sup>9</sup> Demonstrations were held throughout the country, but the protest in Tabriz was the most contentious and turned violent. The incidents in Tabriz were followed by a series of disturbances throughout Iran that continued and intensified, escalating the level of confrontation with the Pahlavi regime.

### **The Islamic Republic**

The activities and expressions of the Azerbaijanis in the initial period after the return of Ayatollah Khomeini and the formal establishment of the Islamic Republic, reveal

the diversity of their collective identity during this period. Even supporters of Azerbaijani autonomy often harbored both Azerbaijani and Iranian identity and believed that democratization would provide for autonomy. Thus, they struggled for democracy throughout Iran, assuming that this would lead to autonomy for Azerbaijan. The initial vanguard of the Islamic Republic included a significant number of Azerbaijanis. This group included Ayatollahs Musavi-Ardabeli, Kho'i, Khamane'i, and Khalkhali, and the first Khomeini-appointed prime minister of the Islamic Republic, Mehdi Bazargan. The existence of this group and the prominent role they played in the revolution indicates that an important segment of the Azerbaijani population held chiefly Islamic and Iranian identity. Nevertheless, even many of the members of this group played an important role in shaping Azerbaijani collective identity. In contrast to the Pahlavi period, the Azerbaijani members of the clerical elite, such as Musavi-Ardabeli and Khalkhali, often used Azerbaijani in public.<sup>10</sup> According to many Azerbaijanis who were in Iran in this period, this was an important factor in breaking down the psychological barriers built up during the Pahlavi period with respect to the public use of non-Persian languages, and instilled in them a sense of pride and the legitimacy of the use of their language. The Azerbaijani clerics' use of their native tongue was not the result of rising Azerbaijani identity on their part, but due to the fact that some of them had difficulty in speaking Persian, as well as they wanted to communicate with the Azerbaijani masses, the majority of whom did not know Persian at this juncture.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, their decision to speak publicly in Azerbaijani had an impact on the way that the Azerbaijani population felt about the open use of their language.

During the initial revolutionary period, when problems arose in the Azerbaijani provinces, Azerbaijani clerics were generally sent there to represent the regime or appeal to the residents in the name of the regime, due to their special link to their birthplace and their ability to speak Azerbaijani. Prime Minister Bazargan was of Azerbaijani origin, but he was raised as a Persian-speaker and spent most of his career working for general Iranian goals. He illustrated his support for cultural rights for the ethnic minorities in Iran when he addressed a rally on 25 March 1979 in Tabriz, and apologized for speaking to his co-ethnics in Persian: "I would have wished—and it would have been more appropriate—to have spoken in the Turkish language."<sup>12</sup>

Immediately after the Shah's departure, a plethora of new publications appeared in Iran in non-Persian languages, such as Azerbaijani, Kurdish and Armenian.<sup>13</sup> The day after the Shah fled from Iran, Azerbaijani activists began publishing the first Azerbaijani-language newspaper of the period, *Ulduz*.<sup>14</sup> The authors called in *Ulduz* for granting of ethnic rights, first and foremost, the right to use the Azerbaijani language.<sup>15</sup> This action shows that ethnic-based demands existed previously and that many Azerbaijanis assumed that the revolution would provide cultural freedom for them.<sup>16</sup> In its first year, the Islamic Republic was relatively lenient in its publication policy, but after the consolidation of the regime, many non-Persian publications,

such as *Ulduz*, were forced to halt production and publishing books in the ethnic languages became more difficult.

The only Azerbaijani-language publication that started in that period and still exists is *Varliq* (*Essence*). It is published under the editorship of Professor Javad Heyat, and its original founders included Dr Hamid Nothgi, and the poets Savalan and Sonmez. *Varliq* contains articles in Azerbaijani (in Arabic script) and Persian, along with poetry from Turkey and from Soviet Azerbaijan and its successor. In its first issue, which appeared in June 1979, it was stated that *Varliq* was the organ of the Committee in Charge of Cultural and Literary Affairs of the *Anjuman-i Azerbaijan* (The Council of Azerbaijan). *Varliq*'s opening editorial spelled out in Azerbaijani its goals:

Each and every people (*khalq*) of the world has the historical and legal right to preserve its national (*milli*) culture, identity and language, no matter how long those people have had historical and cultural affiliations with other peoples throughout history.

The people (*khalq*) of Azerbaijan, together with the other peoples living in Iran, have shared a common destiny and have contributed to the creation of a common culture, yet have retained a national identity, character, and mother tongue ...

The people (*khalq*) of Azerbaijan, although they retained their national (*milli*) culture and language, nevertheless remained loyal to Iran, even more so than those who wave the flag of "national unity"; the Azerbaijan people did not fail to carry out their historical and revolutionary duty when their services were needed.<sup>17</sup>

In this statement, the founders of *Varliq* clearly express their national culture, identity, and language as being Azerbaijani, and their state identity as Iranian, stressing that they share with other Iranians as well a common culture. The authors expressed the expectation that assertion of ethnic culture and freedom will be permitted under the new regime. In its first issue, *Varliq* published a poem by the northern Azerbaijani poet, Bakhtiyar Vahabzade, "Mother Tongue," illustrating the editors' connections to co-ethnics in the north and their awareness of the cultural activity going on there.

At this time, one of the most popular Azerbaijani publications in Tabriz was the left-wing journal *Yoldash*. Revolutionary Guards, who frequently confiscated it at checkpoints, eventually stopped the distribution of this journal. The government itself published in this period a journal in Azerbaijani, *Islami Birlig*. It appeared in both Arabic and Cyrillic characters, evidently with the hope of influencing Azerbaijanis in the Soviet Union as well. This publication, which was produced for 3 years due to its official sponsorship, had few readers.

In this period, academic scholarship on the Azerbaijani language increased, as did interest in the status of the language in Iran. One of the most important dictionaries published in the post-revolutionary period was Payfun's *Farhang-i Azerbayjani*.<sup>18</sup> This Azerbaijani–Persian dictionary includes an additional Azerbaijani (Arabic alphabet)–Azerbaijani (Cyrillic alphabet) section, to help those wishing to read texts from Soviet Azerbaijan. In this period, some Azerbaijani intellectuals in Iran

explored the question of which was the most appropriate alphabet for Azerbaijani and created revised versions of the Arabic script. In 1980, Habib Azarsina independently published a pamphlet suggesting a revised Latin alphabet for Azerbaijani in Iran. Upon its publication, however, Azarsina was arrested.<sup>19</sup> Many writers began adding vowel markers to the Arabic script when writing Azerbaijani, especially necessary in this highly vowel-based language.<sup>20</sup>

### **Azerbaijani Political Organizations**

Many political organizations were organized on ethnic lines during the period of the Islamic revolution in Iran. A week after Khomeini's supporters founded the Islamic Republic Party, devotees of Ayatollah Shariatmadari established the Muslim People's Republican Party (MPRP, known as the *Khalq* or *Khalq-e Musulman*) on 25 February 1979. This party, although encouraging membership of all ethnic groups, was composed mainly of inhabitants of the Azerbaijani provinces and Azerbaijani *bazaris* from Tehran. The MPRP's party program called for granting autonomous rights to the ethnic minorities within the framework of a united Iran. It promoted the idea that the different *iyalats* (large provinces) in Iran should have their own parliaments, and aspired for the granting of rights to all minorities in Iran, not just for the Azerbaijanis. The MPRP's official newspaper, *Khalq-e Musulman*, was in Persian, but dealt disproportionately with issues related to Azerbaijan. The aim of the party leadership was to fulfill goals for all of Iran, but in reality, the MPRP was most active in the Azerbaijani provinces and focused on issues connected with the decentralization of the regime in Iran. The MPRP had chapters in most of the towns and villages in the Azerbaijani provinces.<sup>21</sup>

The relations between Ayatollah Shariatmadari and the founders of the MPRP were very close, and in fact, Shariatmadari's son, Hasan, was one of its leaders. Both Ayatollah Shariatmadari and the movement were united in their struggle against *Velayat-e faqih*—the centralization of all state authority around one supreme leader. However, the movement did not take orders from Ayatollah Shariatmadari, nor did he attempt to run the party. It operated in a decentralized fashion, as illustrated by the elections to the Assembly of Experts.<sup>22</sup> The Assembly of Experts was elected in August 1979 in order to draft the constitution of the Islamic Republic. Participation in the Assembly of Experts elections was a point of disagreement between Ayatollah Shariatmadari and the MPRP. Shariatmadari contended that the election should be boycotted, because he opposed in principle the drafting of the constitution by a committee, instead of a full elected assembly. The local branch in Azerbaijan of the MPRP felt that it was important to participate in the drafting of the constitution despite the limited framework to ensure that it would guarantee regional rights, and decided to run candidates in this election.

At the time of the convening of the Assembly of Experts, the Azerbaijan branch of the MPRP was actively promoting the idea of establishing an Assembly of

Provinces (*Majles-e Iyalat*) as part of the Majles in Tehran. In September 1979, the MPRP organization in Azerbaijan, the United People's Party of Azerbaijan, called for the founding of a parliament body to represent the provinces. Moqaddam Maraghe'i, the leading representative from Azerbaijan, presented a proposal at the Assembly of Experts. In the local party's appeal, it stated:

The establishment of the Assembly of the Provinces and the Assembly of Iran's Peoples (*khalq*) will help prevent the concentration of all the power in the hands of the central government and will weaken the decision-making power of the central provinces. The establishment of such an institution will help achieve real equality between the peoples (*khalq*) of Iran.<sup>23</sup>

This activity and statement illustrates the desire for expanded representation of the provinces and minorities in Iran, and the Azerbaijani desire for extended decision-making power for the provinces.

One of the most important organizations established after the advent of the new regime in 1979 was the *Anjuman-i Azerbaijan* (Council of Azerbaijan). In its published manifesto, the *Anjuman* demanded the recognition of the "national language and culture of Azerbaijan" and the establishment of schools in the upcoming school year and mass media in the Turkish language, as well as the recognition of the right of the Azerbaijanis "to use their mother tongue" in the courts and other government offices.<sup>24</sup> The *Anjuman-i Azerbaijan* even went so far as demanding a confederate relationship with Tehran. While formally calling only for "regional autonomy," the *Anjuman-i Azerbaijan* demanded that all administrative, cultural, judicial, economic and even security affairs be in the hands of local representatives and councils, who would be elected directly by the people of Azerbaijan.<sup>25</sup>

In the initial period after the Islamic Revolution, many Azerbaijani politicians and intellectuals were actively involved in insuring language rights for the ethnic minorities in the new constitution of the Islamic Republic, in the charters of many public bodies such as the Writers' Union, and within many existing Iranian political movements. Article 15 of the constitution adopted by the Islamic Republic of Iran states that the use of the "local and nationality languages" in the press and mass media and the teaching "of their literature" in schools will officially be permitted.<sup>26</sup> Though the regime barred implementation of these clauses, they later served as important bases of claims by Azerbaijani activists struggling in Iran for the right to use their language. Their inclusion in the constitution illustrates that demands for language rights were voiced in the revolutionary period.

The extent of political mobilization on ethnic lines in this period is illustrated by the overwhelming support that the Azerbaijanis gave to Ayatollah Shariatmadari throughout 1979 with regard to the major issues of his confrontation with Khomeini. This confrontation came to a head over the issue of the draft constitution for the Islamic Republic. Shariatmadari objected to the centralization of power in the hands of the *Velayat-e faqih*, which he believed would usurp the sovereignty from the

people, and called for the granting of local rights. Loyal to Shariatmadari's leadership and agreeing with his view that extreme centralization of power was contrary to the Azerbaijani provinces' interests, the majority of the Azerbaijanis, in addition to most of the other major non-Persian ethnic groups, boycotted the 2 December referendum on the constitution.

### **Rebellion in Tabriz**

Despite Ayatollah Shariatmadari's decisive opposition to the proposed constitution, Radio Tabriz broadcast an announcement in his name stating that he had issued a *fatwah* to vote for its approval in the planned referendum, purposely deceiving the population of Azerbaijan. When they became aware of the deception, they were infuriated. A large demonstration took place on 2 December 1979 in Tabriz, in which protesters complained of the unfair treatment of Azerbaijanis in the media and denounced the referendum, calling it "rigged."<sup>27</sup>

On 5 December, Azerbaijanis from around the province and beyond streamed into Tabriz in order to participate in a demonstration organized by the MPRP, which was to take place on the following day. The residents of Azerbaijan became even more enraged when on 5 December, an attack was made on the home of Ayatollah Shariatmadari in Qom, and one of his guards was killed. The fact that the attack on Shariatmadari's home occurred after repeated requests by government officials to cancel the 6 December demonstration suggests that it may have been ordered by an arm of the government in order to frighten Shariatmadari and the MPRP to acquiesce to their demands.

The large 6 December demonstration turned into a protest not only against the new constitution, but also against the assault on Shariatmadari's home. The demonstrators proceeded to attack and gain control of the communications tower in Tabriz, which broadcast Radio Tabriz, the source of the deception of the population. The demands of the demonstrators and the intensity of their actions reveals that the issue of the constitution and the attack on Shariatmadari served only as triggers for their anti-regime activity. Their demands reflected the two issues that had been the focus of contention between the government and the representatives of the Azerbaijanis throughout the summer of 1979<sup>28</sup> local control over appointment of officials in the Azerbaijani province and influence over the local media. The protesters gained control of the civil airport, and army forces stationed in Tabriz refused to confront them. The rebels received the support of the air force units in Tabriz and soldiers in uniform participated in three demonstrations in support of Ayatollah Shariatmadari that took place in this period.<sup>29</sup>

The rebellion quickly spread beyond Tabriz and Azerbaijani opposition forces gained control of many government installations around the province, such as those in Urmiya and Ardabil. MPRP branches in Urmiya and other cities expressed support for the uprising and for Shariatmadari in his confrontation with Khomeini. Some of



the citizens of Urmiya, seeking to emulate the action in Tabriz, attempted to take over the communication tower there as well, but were diverted at the last moment.<sup>30</sup> In the town of Germei, near Ardabil, local forces took over all the government installations, including the local prison; they released all the prisoners and incarcerated in their place the local Revolutionary Guards.<sup>31</sup>

In a number of instances, the rebels stressed the people's desire to control the affairs of the province. For example, in a communiqué read on the radio, the MPRP called for the removal of the representatives of both Ayatollah Khomeini and the general government in Azerbaijan. The document also asked that "the rights of the people of Azerbaijan, like those of the Kurds, be respected."<sup>32</sup> During the demonstrations in Tabriz, some of the official MPRP banners displayed the slogan "self-determination for the peoples in Iran." According to an eyewitness who participated in the demonstrations, the banners with this slogan were professionally produced, illustrating that it was one of the articulated goals of the MPRP. Participants in the demonstrations recounted that all the speeches were in Azerbaijani and anyone (except non-Azerbaijanis expressing support for the uprising) who attempted to speak in Persian was heckled and booed.<sup>33</sup>

The rebellion received a serious blow when Khomeini succeeded in threatening Shariatmadari and preventing him from throwing all his weight behind the rebellion. On 6 December, Ayatollah Khomeini came to Shariatmadari's home on a visit that was presented to the outside as a mission of conciliation. During this visit, however, Khomeini threatened Shariatmadari, stating that the Islamic Revolutionary Council had decided that if his supporters did not vacate the communication tower within 24 hours, Tabriz would be bombed.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, Revolutionary Guards entered Tabriz by helicopter, setting up their base at Tabriz University, which was controlled at the time by Iranian Azerbaijani leftists, who predominantly supported Ayatollah Khomeini in this confrontation. Ayatollah Shariatmadari feared Tabriz would become a "second Kurdistan," where the regime's attempt to quell the March rebellion there had resulted in a large massacre of Kurds. Thus, in his characteristic manner, Shariatmadari chose to avoid bloodshed and prevent confrontation between his supporters and the regime; he called on them to stop demonstrating, and vacate the control tower and the government buildings. Shariatmadari's call to abandon the tower was falsely presented to the public as part of a compromise that had been reached with Khomeini allowing more Azerbaijani control over local affairs and Shariatmadari's approval of all major appointments in the province. The fact that the agreement seemingly granted Shariatmadari control over appointments in the province further demonstrates that the notion that a deal had been reached was untrue. Ayatollah Shariatmadari was adamant in his opposition to the direct involvement of clerics in politics, and thus, would not have requested such a role for himself.

At Shariatmadari's request, the demonstrators on 9 December initially relinquished control of the communication tower and other government installations to Khomeini's supporters. Upon reoccupation of the buildings, government forces

proceeded to attack the offices of the MPRP in Azerbaijan and to arrest many of its activists. Although unaware of the true nature of the conversation between Shariatmadari and Khomeini, the province's populace soon understood that Khomeini did not intend to honor a deal made with the rebels, and that they had vacated the government installations and communication tower in vain. The understanding of this deception gave rise to a new cycle of violence between the rebels and government forces, with the rebels regaining control of the communication tower and it passing back and forth a number of times, with the rebels having the upper hand for more than 5 weeks.

The momentum of the rebellion was again dealt a significant blow during the first week of the conflict. A soldier stationed outside Tabriz, who sympathized with the *Tudeh* Party (which at the time of the insurrection was supporting Khomeini), managed to disable the communications transmitter at Bonab, preventing the tower in Tabriz from transmitting and practically rendering the control of the tower there futile.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the MPRP lost its main means of communication with the people of Azerbaijan and its ability to mobilize and organize them easily. Nonetheless, on 13 December, a crowd of over 700,000 demonstrated in Tabriz in support of Shariatmadari. Among their demands was a call for the withdrawal of non-Azerbaijani military forces from the province.<sup>36</sup> Khomeini was forced to send in units comprised of soldiers from outside Azerbaijan to quell the uprising. The confrontations increased sharply shortly after 11 MPRP leaders were executed on 12 January in Tabriz and Revolutionary Guards occupied the MPRP offices. Ayatollah Shariatmadari did not concede to Khomeini's demands to formally disband the MPRP. Shariatmadari replied cynically to the regime's demand to dissolve the party by stating that there was no need to do so under the existing government policy which could "itself declare all the political parties outlawed, gradually branding them as American, Zionist and anti-revolutionary;"<sup>37</sup> he was referring to the government's attempts to slander the MPRP by using these labels. The MPRP has never been formally disbanded.

The events of December 1979 seemed to be a turning point for many of the Azerbaijanis in terms of their relation to the Islamic Republic. Those who had expected that the revolution would bring an end to the ban on their language and culture came to realize that they had been overly optimistic. Azerbaijanis who greatly respected Ayatollah Shariatmadari, especially older and conservative ones, saw him alienated and humiliated by the new regime, thus instilling in many of them a sense of disaffection from the government. After the quelling of the rebellion, many Azerbaijanis declined to participate in the elections to Iran's state institutions, evidently having lost faith in their ability to influence through them.<sup>38</sup>

After the incidents in Azerbaijan, Ayatollah Shariatmadari imposed public silence upon himself and stopped giving interviews and issuing public statements. He continued, though, to receive hundreds of visitors everyday in Qom, most of them his followers from Azerbaijan. When Khomeini failed to end the war even after Iraqi

forces had been expelled from Iranian territory, Shariatmadari began to speak to his followers against the war. Khomeini evidently perceived this as threatening and in April 1982 fabricated Shariatmadari's involvement in a plot against the regime. Shariatmadari had, in fact, heard of the plotters' intention, but did not treat them seriously and had actually assumed that if he knew about it, then obviously the authorities knew about it, and thus did not report what he had heard. Furthermore, the idea that Shariatmadari would actively attempt to overtake power from Khomeini was completely inconsistent with his strong guiding belief that clerics should not fulfill political positions, but rather guide politicians. Further indication that the plot charges against Shariatmadari were a sham is the fact that Azerbaijani activists frequently complained that Shariatmadari disappointed them by his consistent unwillingness to confront Khomeini and take political action.

Khomeini used the plot incident as an excuse to defrock Shariatmadari from his position as Grand Ayatollah and publicly humiliated him, placing him under house arrest and denying him proper medical care until his death in April 1986. Many Azerbaijanis in Iran blame Khomeini for Shariatmadari's death due to this treatment. Nevertheless, even if Khomeini's actions did little to contribute to Shariatmadari's death, the fact that the Azerbaijanis blame Khomeini is a reflection of how many feel about the regime and this perception influenced their identity as Iranians. In reaction to the stripping of Shariatmadari's title and his arrest in 1982, supporters in Tabriz demonstrated and rioted on 20 April.<sup>39</sup> At that time, many Azerbaijani devotees came from Tabriz to Qom to declare their willingness to defend him. Shariatmadari told them to return to Azerbaijan and not to act on his behalf.

The process of exploring of collective identity accelerated after the nature of the Islamic Revolution became clear, but was abruptly placed on the back burner with the severe crack down of the regime on political opposition in 1982–1983, the apex being the repression of the Tudeh in April 1983.<sup>40</sup> Open expression of demands for expanding ethnic rights was not tolerated by the end of this period, and under the conditions of the war with Iraq, there was little opportunity for political and cultural activity. These demands resurfaced later, having been further affected by the results of the war. For some, especially villagers, induction into the armed services in the war provided their first intensive contact with Persians; they often trained in predominantly Persian cities before going to the front.<sup>41</sup> This interaction made some realize how different they were and made them aware of their minority status in Iran. Some recruits were the object of ridicule concerning their accents in Persian and their ethnic origin, and this discrimination reinforced in some their identity as Azerbaijanis and as Turks. In contrast, it has been claimed that for some Azerbaijanis, participating in the war strengthened their connection to the regime and to Iran.<sup>42</sup>

Towards the end of the war, and in the period of relative political relaxation that followed it, a number of volumes of Azerbaijani poetry and works on the Azerbaijani language appeared. This indicates that research and writing took place during the war period, while the actual publication was probably delayed until the political climate

was more favorable. Some of these poems discussed themes that were being aired concurrently by intellectual figures in Soviet Azerbaijan, and during the 1980s poets from the two sides of the Araz often dedicated poems to each other.<sup>43</sup>

After the conclusion of the Iran–Iraq War, some open calls were heard in support of expanding the use of the Azerbaijani language in Iran. In an article entitled “Some Suggestions for the Strengthening of the Azeri Language,” which appeared in *Keyhan* in June 1988, the author proposed a number of ideas for augmenting the use of Azerbaijani in Iran:

Attention to the language, literature and culture of Azerbaijan is of great importance. Since Iran’s Radio and TV Authority is the largest propaganda institution of the Islamic Revolution, it is proposed that this organization, with the permission of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, conduct activities for the development of the Azerbaijani language, such as establishing a department in this language in the university, creating of an academy of the language, publishing a newspaper and magazine in Azeri ...

... Iran Radio and TV Authority ... must do everything possible to take into consideration that there are in Iran different origins and different languages and conducting propagandist activities in such languages is very important and more effective.<sup>44</sup>

### **Impact of the Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

Following the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a flurry of activity associated with the probing of ethnic and national identity occurred among Azerbaijanis in Iran. The establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan challenged the identity of co-ethnics beyond the borders of the new state and served as a stimulant for many Azerbaijanis in Iran to identify with the Azerbaijani ethnic group though not necessarily with the new state itself. Since the early 1990s, a consequential increase in political expressions of Azerbaijani ethnic identity in Iran has been observed. This rising Azerbaijani identity has generated few calls for the Azerbaijani provinces to secede from Iran and join the new republic, but rather for increased cultural rights within Iran.

One of the first manifestations of rising identity as Azerbaijanis that emerged in Iran after the establishment of the republic was the tendency among many to refer to themselves as “Azerbaijanis,” or “Azeris.” Previously, most had called themselves “Turks.” This term had a negative connotation for some since it had been employed by the Pahlavi regime, and because “Turks” have been the object of so many jokes in Iran. The change also reflected the influence of the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan on their self-reference.

The right to use the Azerbaijani language in Iran was a major subject of the political activity that emerged in this period. In the open letter to the Iranian leadership, Azerbaijani students wrote:

It is time to pay attention to such important items as the realization of a bilingual educational system based on clause fifteen of the Iranian constitution. This does not contradict our unity, because we are united by Iranian Muslim duties, but not by the

Persian language. We must take into consideration that if we do not realize necessary issues in the sphere of native language, cultural and other demands, some undesirable phenomena may occur.<sup>45</sup>

In the first half of the 1990s, a major Azerbaijani literary revival emerged in Iran. Many authors modified the Arabic script used for writing Azerbaijani in Iran with vowel markings, in order to ease the reading of Azerbaijani and thus expand the number of readers, exemplifying their interest in the development and dissemination of the written Azerbaijani language. Many new Azerbaijani dictionaries and grammars produced in Iran in the early 1990s contained tables for translating Azerbaijani in Cyrillic script to Arabic, illustrating an interest for reading texts produced in the Republic of Azerbaijan.<sup>46</sup> From 1991 to 1992, many of the major Iranian newspapers, such as *Keyhan*, *Ettela'at*, and *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, included an Azerbaijani language page. At this time, advertisements in Azerbaijani, placed by Azerbaijanis on both sides of the border in search of relatives with whom they had lost contact during the Soviet period, appeared in these and in Baku newspapers.

Toward the end of 1991, the regime allowed the publication of a regular magazine, *Yol*, in the Azerbaijani language. Each edition of *Yol* contained a "Sözlük" page that listed translations of Azerbaijani terms into Persian, in order to disseminate knowledge of these terms. This shows that *Yol's* authors read books and articles published in the Republic of Azerbaijan and were thus familiar with many of the terms coined there for modern academic use. *Yol* often included special children's supplements, with games and stories intended to teach and encourage the younger generation to read Azerbaijani. *Yol* was quite popular among Azerbaijanis in Iran, but after 2 years of publication, the regime, evidently threatened by this popularity, stopped its issuance.

Despite the expansion of the public use of the language under the Islamic Republic, the content of official statements was still strictly controlled and non-Azerbaijanis and highly Persian-assimilated Azerbaijanis conducted the official broadcasting in Azerbaijani in Iran. In *Varliq*, Husein-Quli Salimi criticized the language used in Radio Tabriz broadcasts, calling it "pidgin Azerbaijani." He asserted that these so-called Azerbaijani-language broadcasts consisted of a Persian sentence structure, with a mix of Azerbaijani and Persian vocabulary.<sup>47</sup>

The impact of the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan on demands was clearly felt in an open letter sent by Azerbaijanis to President Khatami. In the spring of 1998, a group of over 60 leading Azerbaijani intellectuals appealed to Khatami calling for expanded rights, especially in the cultural and language fields. In their claims, the activists pointed out that their language was the same as that spoken in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and there, in contrast to Iran, numerous works were published in that language. In calling for rights to use Azerbaijani in local media in Iran, the authors pointed out that in broadcasts of "foreign radio stations" (a

reference to Baku) their language was spoken more properly than in the Azerbaijani transmissions conducted in Iran.<sup>48</sup>

In the early 1990s, a marked change occurred in the way that many Azerbaijanis responded to jokes about their ethnic origin. Contrary to the past, some Azerbaijanis reacted strongly to derogatory remarks against their ethnic group. Many of the statements issued by Azerbaijanis in this period not only demanded the expansion of their language and cultural rights, but also addressed what they termed cultural "humiliation." The feeling of being humiliated by the regime, and especially its media organs, was expressed in the open Letter of the Azerbaijani students studying in the Tehran Universities to the Azerbaijani Deputies of the Iranian Majles. The authors of the letter described the Iranian media's policy as "mimic and defame the culture and language of the Azerbaijan Shi'i," and asked, "When will it be possible to give an effective answer to all these humiliation and mockeries?"<sup>49</sup> This shift may have occurred partially as a result of the ethnic self-confidence that emerged partly in response to the establishment of an Azerbaijani republic. The need to address the intangible and not only concrete demands for expanded cultural rights, illustrates a sense of heightened ethnic awareness. In spring 1995, the results of a survey conducted by the Iranian Broadcasting Authority revealed widespread negative prejudice among Persians towards the Azerbaijanis.<sup>50</sup> The questions in the survey and its results outraged many Azerbaijanis and prompted vehement open reactions. *Salam* reported on 21 May 1995 that a group of students from Tabriz University together with Azerbaijani-speaking students from Tehran University demonstrated in Tabriz to protest this poll. According to the *Salam* report, the demonstrators claimed that the poll was an affront to the honor of the Azerbaijani community in Iran.<sup>51</sup> Ten days after the publication of the survey, the Broadcasting Authority denied any connection to it, maintaining that its research center had only published the survey results. After the denial, Azerbaijani students sent letters to the offices of the president, the Majles, and the Friday sermon leaders, and to the heads of the provinces of Azerbaijan, Zenjan, and Ardabil, calling for support for the use and study of the Azerbaijani language in Tabriz University and condemning the survey.

One of the most important developments affecting the collective identity of the Azerbaijanis in Iran was the widespread viewing of television programs from Turkey beginning in 1992.<sup>52</sup> Iranian television programming held little interest for the public at large because of the mainly religious character. Thus, many in Iran chose to watch foreign television by means of satellite, when available. In 1992, the price of home satellite devices fell dramatically in Iran making them accessible to many households. This seems to have produced important social consequences. Azerbaijanis, whose language allows them to easily understand Turkish, chose overwhelmingly to view television from Turkey. Azerbaijanis from both Tehran and the provinces recounted that from 1992 Turkish television was regularly watched in Azerbaijani homes. Broadcasts from Turkey became much more popular than those from Baku, and the English-language broadcasts which were watched by many Iranians. Many

of those interviewed stated that this had an extremely important impact on their self-identity as Azerbaijanis and as Turks. Many of the interviewees pointed out that for the first time, they saw the “Turk” portrayed in a positive light: educated, successful, wealthy, in contrast with the image presented in the Iranian media, which is chiefly that of the “Turkish donkey,” the menial laborer, the uncultured peasant.

### Splitting of the Azerbaijani Provinces

In October 1992, Tehran decided to split East Azerbaijan Province,<sup>53</sup> creating a new province in the Ardabil area. The names Sabalan, Sahand<sup>54</sup> and Ardabil were proposed for the new province. The debates on this decision revealed that many Azerbaijanis, including those connected to the government, were willing to openly criticize the regime concerning this issue, and that even those who identified with Iran strongly supported the preservation of the name Azerbaijan for this territory in Iran. Letters expressing opposition to the elimination of the name Azerbaijan appeared in the press. A letter written by a resident of Ardabil, published in *Varliq*, stated:

... Is it logically correct to give any other name to the new *ostan* except the name of our motherland—Azerbaijan?

... It is correct that Sabalan is the highest mountain of Azerbaijan and one of the nicest mountains of the world. Yet, is it nice that the name of one mountain will replace the name of such a glorious and famous country as Azerbaijan?

... The name of Ardabil, the historical center of Azerbaijan, cannot be a substitution for Azerbaijan ... The new province consists of such towns like Sarab, Meshkinshahr, Astara, and Khalkhal ... Their residents are not Ardabilis but Azerbaijanis. Thus, taking the name of East Azerbaijan for a new province with the center in Ardabil is more logical. Removal of the word of Azerbaijan from the name of the province with the center in Ardabil—the eldest son of our motherland—for us Ardabilis is like struggle and oppression with us and with our mother, is it not?<sup>55</sup>

Initially, on 15 October 1992 the government announced its decision to establish the new province and name it Sabalan.<sup>56</sup> However, as opposition to the name change continued, the final wording of the legislation to the Internal Affairs Committee of the Majles in January 1993 stated that the new province was to be called East Azerbaijan, and the province of East Azerbaijan, with Tabriz as its capital, was to be changed to Central Azerbaijan.<sup>57</sup> A member of the commission that was in charge of making these changes presented the bill and remarked that:

In the bill it presented, the government chose Sabalan Province as the new province name, but in view of the discussions that took place in the commission and in view of the fact that the name Azerbaijan is associated with the luminous history of the brave uprisings of the valiant, self-sacrificing, believing, and committed people throughout Azerbaijan and that this name has always held memories for the noble people of this land, to preserve this epic memory, the name Azerbaijan was given to the new province. Consequently, the Islamic Republic of Iran will have three provinces with the name Azerbaijan: West

Azerbaijan with Urmiya as its center, Central Azerbaijan with Tabriz as its center, and East Azerbaijan, with Ardabil as its center.<sup>58</sup>

However, the government remained adamant about removing the name Azerbaijan from the new province and persevered in pursuing this aim, while various Azerbaijanis continued to oppose this action. In the end, the government prevailed and in the final form of the legislation approved on 11 April 1993, the new province was declared Ardabil Province.<sup>59</sup> In response to the final approval of the legislation, Nur-eddind No'i-Eqdam, a Majles deputy from Ardabil, linked the establishment of the new province to a desire to combat political influences from the Republic of Azerbaijan. He commented that one of the "political fruits" of the final decision on the new province was that it "disrupted the criminal and lifeless dream of Pan-Turkism, an ugly phenomenon ... which took shape across the border," referring to the Republic of Azerbaijan.<sup>60</sup> This statement illustrates that the decision to split East Azerbaijan, and evidently the government's tenacity regarding the removal of all onomastic links to Azerbaijan, is based in part on its desire to preempt potential ties between the Iranian provinces and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Even after the name change, some Azerbaijanis continued to express indignation over the removal of the name "Azerbaijan" from the new province. In the 1994 letter-writing campaign of Azerbaijani students to the Iranian leadership, this issue was again aired. In the open letter addressed to the Majles deputies from the Azerbaijani provinces, a group calling itself "The Azerbaijani Students of Tehran Universities," complained that the new province's name did not include the name "Azerbaijan."<sup>61</sup> In the open "Letter from the Meshkinshahr Students Studying in the Universities of the Country to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran," which was originally published in the Zenjan local weekly *Omid-e Zenjan*, the students, who were from a city which was part of the new province, expressed total disagreement with the removal of the name Azerbaijan from the new province.<sup>62</sup>

### **Political Activity**

The period following the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan is marked by the emergence of open, coordinated political activities that brought together Azerbaijanis from all over Iran. One of the most important political developments was the formation in 1993 of a faction in the Majles—The Assembly of Azerbaijan Majles Deputies—composed of delegates from the Azerbaijani provinces; it focused on issues concerning the Azerbaijani provinces and fostering relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan.<sup>63</sup> Azerbaijani members of the Majles have openly aired their opinions about problems affecting all Azerbaijanis, and not just those living in their constituencies. For instance, in July 1993, Ibrahim Saraf openly criticized Tehran for appointing many non-Azerbaijani officials to the Azerbaijani provincial government bodies, and for central government discrimination against Azerbaijanis.<sup>64</sup>



The Republic of Azerbaijan press and Azerbaijani nationalist organizations based outside Iran often reported about the existence of several Azerbaijani nationalist organizations in Iran, among them the Azerbaijan Feda'iyin Organization, the South Azerbaijan Popular Front, and the Azerbaijan Liberation Organization.<sup>65</sup> It is difficult to assess the extent of the activities and following that these organizations command in Iran.

In terms of Azerbaijani political activity, one of the most dramatic events in this period took place during the spring 1996 elections to the Majles. In Tabriz, Dr Mohammad Chehregani ran on a platform which openly called for strengthening the use of the Azerbaijani language in East Azerbaijan and for concentrating efforts on the economic development of Azerbaijan. Among the goals enumerated in his platform:

Constant activities for the revival of the Islamic national culture, and particularly—strengthening and reviving of the literature, traditions, and native language (Azerbaijani–Turkic).<sup>66</sup>

This statement is quite striking since Chehregani defines the strengthening of the Azerbaijani–Turkic language as part of “Islamic national culture.” Indeed, Chehregani’s election platform contained some items that were quite unusual in Iran. On the cover page of the election material he distributed, Chehregani addressed the voters as Azerbaijanis, calling them “the patriotic and brave children of Sheikh Mohammed Khiyabani and Satter Khan,” two Azerbaijani origin heroes in Iran. Under his own picture on the platform, he also included a phrase in Azerbaijan that states: “Heydar Baba raise truthful children,” referring to the mountain endeared by Azerbaijanis and a symbol of their land. In itself, the phrases in Azerbaijani are an extraordinary act in Iran. Through them he was attempting to appeal to his constituents’ sentiments as Azerbaijanis, telling them to continue to bring up their children in the spirit of their people. In addition, the Ark of Tabriz, a symbol that Azerbaijanis cherish, also appeared on the cover page. When describing his background, Chehregani stressed his work expanding the use of the Azerbaijani–Turkic language in Iran. He noted that his doctoral dissertation was on the influence of Turkic words and the Persian language, and that one of his findings was that modern Persian contains 4,000 Turkic words. Thus, by emphasizing the influence of Azerbaijani on Persian, Chehregani seems to be disputing the frequent claims by Persians that their language is more developed and challenging the higher status accorded to Persian.

In the April 1996 elections, Chehregani received the overwhelming support of the electorate. However, security services detained him for 2 weeks until he agreed to resign from the parliamentary race. The announcement of his resignation led to large demonstrations in Tabriz on 12 May. Many participants were arrested, and, according to various press reports, five Azerbaijanis were even executed following the demonstrations. Tehran claimed that the five men were executed on the charge of drug trafficking. However, their bodies were hung in public from construction

cranes, a very unusual practice in this period, evidently as a warning sign to the public. After his release from jail, Chehregani was frequently summoned for interrogations by the Iranian security services, and in September 1996, he was again held for 60 days. Chehregani attempted to register as a candidate for the February 2000 Majles elections in Iran, but was denied participation.

In addition to Chehregani, other Azerbaijanis also felt that the prosperity of Tabriz and Azerbaijan had been neglected. They openly expressed indignation over the Azerbaijani provinces lack of development and the need for more resources. In the Azerbaijani students' letters sent to the leadership of Iran in 1994, they pointed out the decline of economic development in those provinces, and called on the Azerbaijani delegates to the Majles to work towards obtaining more resources for them. Azerbaijanis in Tehran have also protested over their economic situation. In April 1995, violent demonstrations against the regime took place in the Tehran suburb of Islam-Shar, which is predominantly inhabited by Azerbaijanis. The demands of the demonstrators were chiefly economic, but the fact that this violent reaction to regime policy was being voiced by Azerbaijanis may indicate their increased alienation from the regime.

The authors of the letter from the "Meshkinshahr Students Studying in the Universities of the Country," called for the election of regional officials by local residents.<sup>67</sup> The students criticized the fact that the new governor appointed to Ardabil province was not "selected from among the local residents," and that he did not even speak Azerbaijani:

Unfortunately, after waiting for some months, we said "Welcome" to our governor (*ostandar*) who does not understand our language. This took place despite the fact that half of our population does not understand Persian. Indeed, is it not a matter for regret, or is it impossible to elect a governor from the residents of the native town of Ayatollah Meshkini and among the Ardabilis???

The students described the policy of recruiting non-locals to the provincial bureaucracy in Ardabil as "a kind of insult to the able local figures."<sup>69</sup> The students said:

At the same time with the assignment of the new governor, some very active, devoted and revolutionary figures were dismissed from their administrative posts and they were replaced by non-local persons who do not have sufficient experience in our region. They don't know our cultural and geographical peculiarities, our language, etc. We are sure that such steps will cause the continuation of failures in the spheres of education and the environment.<sup>70</sup>

Many Azerbaijanis in Iran have been exerting pressure on Tehran to change its position toward the Karabagh conflict and to adopt a more pro-Azerbaijani stance, and this internal activity seems to have influenced the shift in the Iranian rhetoric and a modification of Tehran's stance in spring 1993. Iran's fear that the establishment of a strong and attractive Republic of Azerbaijan could lead to a rise in identity of

its own Azerbaijani minority has led Iran to adopt a policy of *de facto* support of Armenia in the conflict with Azerbaijan for Karabagh. Iranian Majles deputies from the Azerbaijani provinces led campaigns aimed at impelling Tehran to minimize its relations with Armenia and they have issued protests against Yerevan. In the Majles, Azerbaijani delegates openly called for Tehran's assistance to Azerbaijan,<sup>71</sup> and the Azerbaijani delegates have participated in demonstrations against Armenia.<sup>72</sup> The delegates succeeded in attaining the signatures of the majority of the Majles members on a petition calling for a change in Tehran's stance on the conflict. On 13 April 1993, Kamel Abedinzadeh, Azerbaijani deputy from Kho'i, even spoke in Azerbaijani in the Majles when he condemned Armenian actions against Azerbaijan. In addition, he issued press releases for publication in *Hamshahri* and other journals on this issue.<sup>73</sup> On 6 April 1993, Mohammed 'Ali Nejad-Sarkhani, a deputy from Tabriz, read a resolution in the name of the Assembly of Azerbaijan Majles Deputies condemning Armenia's attacks on Azerbaijan and calling for Iran to support the Republic of Azerbaijan.

In addition, at the grassroots level many Azerbaijanis in Iran expressed their solidarity with the Republic of Azerbaijan in its struggle with Armenia over the control of Karabagh and criticized Tehran's support for Armenia in this conflict. On 25 May 1992, 200 students demonstrating at Tabriz University chanted "Death to Armenia" and, alluding to Tehran, described the "silence of the Muslims," in the face of the Armenian "criminal activities" as "treason to the Koran."<sup>74</sup> According to the Iranian newspaper *Salam*, the Azerbaijani demonstrators in Tabriz urged Tehran to support the Republic of Azerbaijan in this struggle during the march that was marked by "nationalist fervor and slogans." Azerbaijani-language publications in Iran showed a special interest in the Karabagh conflict and carried many expressions of solidarity with the plight of the Azerbaijanis there.<sup>75</sup> Ayatollah Musavi-Ardabili often mentioned the Karabagh conflict in his Friday sermons, and was more assertive than other non-Azerbaijani clerics in supporting the Republic of Azerbaijan.<sup>76</sup> In addition, Azerbaijanis in Iran have been involved in providing aid to their co-ethnics in the Republic of Azerbaijan. In 1992–1993, much of the humanitarian and refugee assistance from Iran to the Republic of Azerbaijan was organized directly from the Azerbaijani provinces.<sup>77</sup>

### **Ties Among the Azerbaijanis**

Among the Soviet Azerbaijanis, there was an extensive outpouring in the 1980s and early 1990s of desire for ties with their co-ethnics in Iran, which served as a major focal point for expressing their own sense of Azerbaijani national identity and pride in their culture. This drive for expanded contact, both in the cultural and political realms, increased as restrictions were lifted in the USSR and as Moscow's control eroded. Western researchers have tended to portray the "longings" during the Soviet period for ties with the Azerbaijanis in Iran purely as part of Moscow's "campaigns"

for gaining influence in Iran.<sup>78</sup> While Moscow was unquestionably aware of Baku's activity in this regard, and often purposely encouraged that policy when it served its interests, the augmentation of this desire after the disintegration of Soviet power demonstrates that the yearning for ties was also based in authentic and deeply-rooted sentiments that existed in the north.

The interest of the Azerbaijanis in the new republic is illustrated by the fact that Baku's museums present the history and culture of the Azerbaijanis in Iran as an integral part of their people's general history. For instance, in the Nizami Museum of Azerbaijani National Literature authors, historical figures, and literary works from Iranian Azerbaijan are presented as part of Azerbaijan's national literary heritage. Authors such as Nizami, who were of Azerbaijani ethnic origin but wrote most of their works in Persian, are presented as Azerbaijani authors and their works as part of its national literature. No distinction is made between figures from the north and those from Iranian Azerbaijan. Likewise, in the National Carpet Museum, carpets from Tabriz are labeled as products of Azerbaijan.

The popular outpouring of emotions in the drive for the renewal of ties culminated in the winter 1989–1990 border incidents. The enthusiastic reception of the Azerbaijanis from the north by their co-ethnics on the other side of the border in Iran illustrates that despite the great differences in mentality, lifestyle, and the degree of national identity development, most Azerbaijanis still possessed a feeling that they belonged to the same people with those from the other side of the Araz. Throughout 1991–1992, ads frequently appeared in Azerbaijani newspapers both in Baku and in Iran in search of lost Azerbaijani relatives. The fact that many relatives from both sides of the border looked for each other and were able to find each other after almost 70 years of separation, demonstrates that within families, stories of relatives “on the other side” and information about them had been passed down from generation to generation. It is important to note the value of family ties is strongly emphasized in Azerbaijani culture and that most Azerbaijanis have relatives of some degree on the other side of the border. These family ties seem to have played an important role in preserving the self-perception of belonging to one people, despite the differences that evolved between the two communities. An Iranian reporter described the interaction between the Azerbaijanis from both sides of the border in January 1990:

They also exchanged messages with their Iranian relatives standing on the other side of the river. The information included addresses, phone numbers and identities, written on scraps of paper and wrapped around small stones that were thrown across the river. Those who managed to trace their relatives after more than 50 years were so overcome by emotion that they beat their chests and heads out of joy.<sup>79</sup>

Following the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, dramatic changes took place in the nature and intensity of the contacts and relations between the Azerbaijanis on both sides of the border, and this may have affected the identity process. According to the Governor of Astara, Hasan Reza'i, at the Astara border crossing

alone an average of 400 families a week from Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan visited one another in 1992.<sup>80</sup> Improvements also took place in communications and transportation links between the Azerbaijani provinces in Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan. On 11 July 1993, direct flights were inaugurated between Tabriz and Baku. In addition, regular daily bus services were established between the various cities in the Azerbaijani provinces in Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

One of the most momentous developments was the establishment of formal, direct cooperation and interchange between the local government of the Azerbaijani provinces in Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, circumventing Tehran. Delegations from all three Azerbaijani provinces visited Baku and established formal direct cooperation in many fields, including trade, education, and scientific research.<sup>81</sup> In addition to the role they played in facilitating relations between Tehran and Baku, Iranian Azerbaijani Majles members encouraged cooperation and contacts between the Azerbaijani provinces in Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

These direct interchanges and cooperation efforts seem to have contributed to an increased desire for expanded local control over affairs in the Azerbaijani provinces, especially in East Azerbaijan province. The direct bilateral cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan served as a precedent and prompted the Azerbaijani provinces to expand independent activities with foreign countries, especially with other Turkic peoples. For instance, on 8 May 1994, the governor of East Azerbaijan Province visited Istanbul, where he conducted talks on trade activities and the exchange of technical information between Turkish industrialists and their counterparts in East Azerbaijan. In addition, West Azerbaijan Province signed a trade agreement with the Tatarstan Autonomous Republic in Russia on 14 February 1996.<sup>82</sup> One of the most significant developments was the request by Majles Deputy Saraf for more independent authority for officials in East Azerbaijan province to organize assistance to the Republic of Azerbaijan without the interference of Iranian customs authorities.<sup>83</sup>

The contracts and cooperation between the Azerbaijani provinces and the Republic of Azerbaijan raised the importance of these provinces, whose economic position had deteriorated in comparison to other parts of Iran throughout the Pahlavi period and under the Islamic Republic. Trade abroad from these provinces increased dramatically, and they became an important transit point for the expanding exchange between Iran and the newly independent republics of the former Soviet Union. Azerbaijani Majles representatives in Iran often stressed the role of the three Azerbaijani provinces in building links with the Republic of Azerbaijan in order to underscore their own importance and as justification for their requests for resources from Tehran.<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, after an initial "honeymoon" period following the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the renewal of ties, Azerbaijanis from both sides of the border seemed to have felt a sense of mutual disappointment, having discovered many differences in the prevailing attitudes and cultural norms on the opposite side.

Many from the Republic of Azerbaijan commented that the Azerbaijanis in Iran were too religious and conservative, while many Iranian Azerbaijanis viewed those in the republic as very “Russified,” and as having lost Azerbaijani or Muslim culture. In the interviews, many of the Azerbaijanis expressed a sense of “superiority” over their co-ethnics from the other side, with the northerners tending to view themselves as more cosmopolitan than the southerners, whereas the southerners tended to view themselves as culturally richer and more “civilized” than their co-ethnics from the north. A sense of rivalry was detected in many of the interviews, with each side seeing their own as the center and the other group as the periphery.<sup>85</sup>

Many people interviewed from both the Republic of Azerbaijan and from Iran used the metaphor of East and West Germany, paralleling the differences between the two sides that were caused by the separation. Yet, even those who perceived vast differences expressed the view that all the Azerbaijanis were part of one people. Many groups and individuals in the republic have openly declared their interest in unity with “south Azerbaijan,” yet from the south few have openly articulated an interest in unification. Hence, a limited irredentist movement exists at this stage in the north, but there is not an active partner in the south. Clearly, activity of this type would be severely curtailed by Tehran.

## Conclusions

In Iran, distinctive Azerbaijani identity is retained by vast numbers of Azerbaijanis. Many times throughout the twentieth century when central control over freedom of expression in Iran has diminished, such as during the initial period of the Islamic Revolution, Azerbaijanis have taken advantage of this, amplifying their expressions of Azerbaijani identity and augmenting their demands for expanded cultural and language rights. At the same time, in terms of primary identity, great diversity exists among the Azerbaijanis in Iran. Many, such as those who form a significant portion of the ruling elite in Iran today, see their primary identity as Iranian and Muslim,<sup>86</sup> although many members of this group express ties to Azerbaijani ethnic culture and language and identify as Azerbaijanis as well. Others, including many intellectuals who were active during the period of the Islamic Revolution, harbor primary collective Azerbaijani identity, but strive to maintain state identity as Iranians in a supra-ethnic Iran. Most see no contradiction in maintaining both Azerbaijani and Iranian identity. Others see their primary identity as Azerbaijani, though not all of them are actively pressing for a political manifestation of that identity. Yet, especially since the early 1990s, a small number of Azerbaijanis have become involved in political activity in order to manifest their Azerbaijani identity. Azerbaijani students in Iran have become especially active in this sphere. The ratio between Azerbaijanis whose primary identity is Iranian, versus those whose principal identity is Azerbaijani is not clear and seems to be quite fluctuating. However, open expression of particular Azerbaijani identity is on the rise in Iran, fed by disappoint-

ment from the failure of the Islamic revolution in Iran to bring democratization, and in contrast to expectations, expansion of cultural and language rights to the non-Persian ethnic minorities in Iran. This trend has received further impetus by the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the borders of the Azerbaijani population in Iran, and by the interaction of the Azerbaijani populations on both sides of the border. Additional changes have taken place in the self-perception of the Azerbaijanis in Iran, as a result of the widespread viewing of television from Turkey since 1992.

The conclusion that a distinctive Azerbaijani identity exists on a meaningful level in Iran challenges the view propounded by mainstream contemporary Iranian studies, which contends that little is left of separate Azerbaijani identity in Iran. This work asserts that the Azerbaijani ethnic factor must be part of studies on Iranian society and assessments of regime stability in Iran. Furthermore, ethnic identity in Iran is not merely a domestic affair and is considerably subject to influences from events taking place outside its borders, such as the establishment of ethnic-based states like Azerbaijan.

The case of the Iranian Azerbaijanis demonstrates that primary collective identity is often unclear to many members of a group. Many Azerbaijanis in Iran identify as both Azerbaijanis and Iranians, and few of them have a clear idea of which identity is primary. Most see these identities as coexistent and seem to hope that they will not become incompatible. Moreover, primary collective identity of a group can change over time. Researchers often point to the historic bonds and common nationhood as Iranians shared by Azerbaijanis and Persians and use this to dismiss the existence of separate Azerbaijani national identity. While historical relationships influence the present-day choice of a nation, they do not dictate it, and new circumstances can give birth to new identity preferences.

Most Azerbaijanis view their desire for expanded cultural rights as compatible with their identity as Iranians. In contrast, throughout the twentieth century, observers in Tehran and researchers outside Iran have tended to interpret any serious articulation of demands for expanded cultural and language rights by various Azerbaijani movements or other ethnic groups as attempts at secession or the result of foreign intervention and meddling. These explanations have helped delegitimize the ethnic groups' claims and to rally support for their suppression. In order to cast aspersion on these movements and brand them as secessionist, scholars and politicians alike have consistently used terminology, which the movements themselves never employed; for instance, they referred to the Provincial Government in Tabriz (1945–1946) as the “Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.” Thus, it is the government in Iran that often forces the ethnic minorities to choose between their particular ethnic identity and their Iranian identity. This has strengthened the Azerbaijani identity of some, while it has led others to assimilate into the Persian majority.

The existence of a major Azerbaijani community in territories in Iran contiguous to the new Republic is an important factor affecting relations between Baku and

Tehran. Iran's fear that the establishment of a strong and attractive Republic of Azerbaijan could lead to a rise in identity of its own Azerbaijani minority has led Iran to adopt a policy of *de facto* support of Armenia in the conflict with Azerbaijan for Karabagh; whereas Baku often flaunts the internal Azerbaijani card in efforts to put pressure on Iran to change some of its policies toward the Republic of Azerbaijan, such as border closures.

Significant networks of political links exist between many of the Azerbaijanis in Iran. The letter-writing campaigns and demonstrations involving students from Tabriz, Tehran, and other Azerbaijani population centers in Iran, indicate that they are well organized and that networks connect different Azerbaijani communities in Iran. In the early 1990s, Azerbaijani students in universities throughout Iran played the leading role in political activity aimed at expanding their cultural rights in Iran. The ethnic factor facilitates cooperation of people from different regions, due to the existence of long-established ties that traverse Iran.

Analysis of the Majles discussions revealed a general, growing trend of regionalism in Iran. A large number of the delegates' speeches dealt with attempts to obtain resources and allocations for their home provinces. Their statements and interviews reflect a sense of regional identity and that many Azerbaijanis in Iran, including those who view themselves primarily as Iranians and are associated with the regime there, such as Majles representatives, feel attachment to the area of Azerbaijan and are interested in its prosperity. This trend of regionalism appeared in statements of Majles representatives from other provinces as well. Rising provincialism is developing as an added pressure and challenge to the central government.

Rising ethnic demands may renew inter-ethnic strife within Iran if the varying groups will confront each other over the demarcation of borders and resources within the state. A future adoption of some kind of confederate or federative relationship between Tehran and the ethnic minorities in Iran may provoke conflicts between the various minority groups. Clashes of this type are most likely to emerge between Azerbaijanis and Kurds, who throughout the century have violently engaged each other in West Azerbaijan over disputed lands and control in the area and this could impact other regional actors.<sup>87</sup>

It is often suggested that the more access members of subgroups have to the state's means of power, the more they will be inclined to identify with that state. The case of the Azerbaijanis in Iran demonstrates that acquisition of power and professional equality can actually stimulate identity with collectives that compete with state identity, due to the gaps that are often created between newly acquired structural status and existing social status. This observation places doubt on the potential effectiveness of many enacted social engineering policies. In Iran, the higher the Azerbaijanis climbed professionally and economically and into positions of power in the state, the more they have become interested to address past injustices and gaps and to raise the issue of Iran's treatment of sub-state groups. Under the Islamic Republic, many Azerbaijanis in Iran have attained financial wealth, higher education



and positions of power; nevertheless, they are still outsiders in many social circles in Iran, and their language is still considered by many Iranians as inferior to Persian. The first half of the 1990s is marked by many expressions of indignation over their lower social status that contrasts with their self-image based on the Azerbaijanis' marked political and economic success in Iran. While the rise in Azerbaijani identity does not seem to be leading, at this stage, to calls for separation from Iran, it has placed additional demands on the regime for greater liberty and lessened centralization. Some of the political forces are reacting to these demands, and like President Khatami, have politically capitalized on them. Women and youth are often indicated as the main supporters of Khatami, yet it seems that the ethnic minorities should be added to that list. This rise in Azerbaijani identity and its challenge to both center-periphery relations and to official Persian-linguistic and cultural dominance in Iran, will be an important issue in the political arena of Iran, and may affect the stability of the regime there. Moreover, Khatami's policy of limited appeal to ethnic sentiments in Iran and to provincial sources of power may have long-term consequences in Iran. While this policy is useful in the short-term in building his base of support, once these groups are empowered they may not acquiesce to accepting again their secondary status at Khatami's command, and like his application of students as part of the struggle for reform in Iran, it could lead to the escalation of contention in Iran.

## NOTES

1. There is a considerable lack of consensus regarding the number of Azerbaijanis in Iran. Official Iranian sources tend to deflate the number of Azerbaijanis in order to project a clear Persian majority in Iran, whereas Azerbaijani political groups, especially in the Republic of Azerbaijan, tend to inflate the numbers in order to project the image of a large people and reinforce their claims for Azerbaijani rights in Iran. Most mainstream estimates on the number of ethnic minorities in Iran claim that the Persians account for approximately 50% of the country's population. Most conventional estimates on Azerbaijani population range from one-fifth to one-third. Azerbaijani groups in Iran have published higher estimates of the number of Azerbaijanis living in Iran. Azerbaijan student groups in Iran claim that there are 27 million Azerbaijanis residing in Iran. The editor of *Varliq*, Javad Heyat claims that one-third of Iran's populace is Turkic. Taking into account the significant Azerbaijani population that lives outside the Azerbaijani provinces, especially in Tehran, as well as the tribal Turkic population, it seems that the Azerbaijanis comprise between one-third and one-fourth of the population of Iran, or approximately 20 million. This estimate is reinforced by the fact that most pre-Pahlavi surveys that related to the ethnic makeup of Iran estimated that the Turkic groups comprised at least one-third of Iran's population.
2. In referring to the Azerbaijanis and in self-reference, there is great diversity in the terms used. Among the terms in use are Azerbaijani, Azeri, Turk, and Azerbaijani Turk. The term Azerbaijani has been chosen for use in this article. Azerbaijani is the most widely used name in use by the Azerbaijanis themselves in self-reference, especially in their written sources. When used by them the choice is usually neutral and rarely implies additional meaning as a reflection of an identity choice. Rather, it is generally a result of custom. For instance, many

- Azerbaijanis in Iran refer to themselves as Turks, but they do not imply in using this term a greater Turkic identity than that of the Azerbaijanis in the Republic of Azerbaijan, where the term is in less common use.
3. Patricia J. Higgins, "Minority—State Relations in Contemporary Iran," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Winter 1984, pp. 37–71; Hooshang Amirahmadi, "A Theory of Ethnic Collective Movements and its Application to Iran," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 10, 1987, pp. 363–391; Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and Autonomy in Twentieth-Century Iran* (London: British Academic Press, 1993), p. 182.
  4. A major source of this article is interviews conducted with Azerbaijanis from Iran. One of the chief methodological problems with interviews is that open field research cannot be conducted in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Interviewees in Iran, when access to them is allowed, cannot be expected to speak freely on opinions that contradict the prevailing ideology of the regime. Moreover, researchers from many countries are not allowed to enter Iran or conduct surveys there. Thus, most interviews connected to attitudes in Iran had to be conducted with Azerbaijanis who are not residents of the country, and all were conducted outside of Iran. Many of the interviewees were students temporarily living outside Iran, who have not made the decision to leave Iran permanently. Many of the students frequently visit Iran and most of them have close family members there. Moreover, the sample of interviewees used in this research is composed of almost 80 subjects and includes members of various age groups and political orientations. In the interviews an attempt was made to concentrate on concrete facts, such as what was written on a banner, what took place at a demonstration, the country of origin of television broadcasts frequently watched, etc., and less on attitudes. Most of the interviewees from Iran specified that their names could not be mentioned in this study, due to fear of reprisals toward them or towards family members in Iran.
  5. For a comprehensive review of Soviet attempts to foster Azerbaijani ethnic sentiments in Iran, see David Nissman, *The Soviet Union and Iranian Azerbaijan: The Uses of Nationalism for Political Penetration* (Boulder: Westview, 1987).
  6. On the demands of the Kurds and other ethnic groups in Iran at the time of the Islamic Revolution, see Shahrzad Mojab and Amir Hassanpour, "The Politics of Nationality and Ethnic Diversity," in Saeed Rahnama and Sorab Behdad, eds, *Iran after the Revolution: Crises of an Islamic State* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 1996), pp. 229–250.
  7. E. Ch. Babayev, "İuzhnyi Azerbaidzhan v İranskoi Revoliutsii 1978–1979 gg," *Jänubi Azärbayjan Tarikhi Mäsäläläri* (Baku: Elm, 1989), p. 104.
  8. This is equivalent to the 28 of Azar of the Iranian calendar. See *Ettela'at*, 24 December 1977.
  9. Muslims traditionally commemorate mourning on the fortieth day after death.
  10. For example, *Resalat*, 24 January 1990, p. 5 (FBIS-NES-90-050, 14 March 1990).
  11. An interviewee who had met Ayatollah Musavi-Ardabeli pointed out his limited ability in Persian.
  12. Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 25 March 1979 (FBIS-MEA-79-059). The Azerbaijani language is often referred to in Iran as Turkish.
  13. See Hasan Javadi, "Research Note: Azeri Publications in Iran," *Critique*, No. 8, Spring 1996, p. 85.
  14. *Ulduz* began publication on 17 January 1979, and included articles in Azerbaijani and in Persian.
  15. Babayev, "İuzhnyi Azerbaidzhan v İranskoi Revoliutzii 1978–1979 gg," p. 128.
  16. This expectation is reflected as well in the early articles published in the Azerbaijani journals *Varliq* and *Ulker*.

17. Editorial in *Varliq*, Vol. 1, p. 3. English translation found in Ilhan Bashgoz, "Varliq" (Book review), *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 2, September 1979, p. 36.
18. Muhammad Payfun, *Farhang-i Azerbayjani* (Tehran: Danishneye Publishing, 1983).
19. From an interview with Habib Azarsina, February 1998, Washington, DC.
20. Described in Azäroghlu, "Fäkr Etmäyä Hagliyig," *Ädäbiyyat vâ Injäsänät*, 9 April 1982, p. 6.
21. Based on interviews with former MPRP activists.
22. In addition, the MPRP and Ayatollah Shariatmadari also disagreed over the staging of a demonstration against the government's closing of the newspaper, *Ayandegan*, in May 1979. Shariatmadari called on the people not to participate in this demonstration, while the MPRP supported the protest.
23. *Khalq-e Musulman*, 1 September 1979 (15 *Mehr* 1358), p. 8.
24. Manifesto of Anjuman-i Azarbayjan, *Varliq*, No. 1, 1979, pp. 10–11.
25. *Ibid*.
26. *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Keyhan*, 17 November 1979.
27. Tabriz Domestic Service in Azerbaijani, 2 December 1979 (FBIS-MEA-79–234).
28. In June 1979, a number of demonstrations were held in Tabriz, demanding the reinstatement of Moqaddam Maraghe'i as governor general of East Azerbaijan and freedom from censorship in the official media of the province. Maraghe'i was supported by the MPRP and was closely associated with Ayatollah Shariatmadari.
29. Based on an interview with an eyewitness. See also Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 126, 237.
30. Tabriz Domestic Service in Azerbaijani, 7 December 1979 (FBIS-MEA-79–238, Supplement 036).
31. Based on a conversation with an eyewitness to the events.
32. AFP in Spanish, 6 December 1979 (FBIS-MEA-79–237).
33. Based on interviews with two participants.
34. Based on a conversation with Ayatollah Shariatmadari's son, Hasan Shariatmadari.
35. This apparently took place on 9 December. *Tehran Times*, 10 December 1979, and interview with Hasan Shariatmadari.
36. Nicholas M. Nikazmerad, "A Chronological Survey of the Iranian Revolution," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 13, Nos. 1–4, 1980, p. 366.
37. *Tehran Times*, 12 December 1979.
38. Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1989), pp. 59–62. Abrahamian cites low Azerbaijani participation in the presidential elections and the elections to the parliament in 1980.
39. Nikola B. Schahgaldian, *The Iranian Military Under the Islamic Republic* (Santa Monica: Rand Corp., 1987), p. 143.
40. Many of the activists of the Tudeh and other left-wing movements were Azerbaijanis.
41. According to Cottam, in the Pahlavi period most of the Azerbaijanis served in the military in their native provinces under Azerbaijani officers, primarily because of the language difficulties of the recruits and the expense of transport. See, Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran (Updated Through 1978)* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), p. 130.
42. This assertion is made in H.E. Chehabi, "Ardabil Becomes a Province: Center—Periphery Relations in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 29, 1997, p. 235.
43. See, for example, *Ädäbiyyat vâ Injäsänät*, 15 June 1984, p. 4; Sonmaz's letter (dated 25 October 1986) and poem, as published in *Ädäbiyyat vâ Injäsänät*, 12 December 1986, p. 4.
44. "Chand Pishnahad Bara-ye Taqviyat-e Zaban-e Azeri," *Keyhan*, 15 June 1988, p. 2.
45. Letter of the Azerbaijani students studying in Tehran Universities to the Azerbaijani Deputies of the Iranian Majles (Persian), June 1994 (unpublished).

46. For instance, ‘Abed Alkarim Manzuri Khamena, *Mukalemat-e Ruzmarah-e Turki-Farsi* (Türkçe-Farsçe Me’amuli Danışıqlar) (Tehran, 1993).
47. Husein-Quli Salimi, “Tabriz Radiosunun ve Erişilən İşlərinin Bir Bəxışi,” *Varliq* January—April, 1992, pp. 38–48.
48. “Letter to President Khatami of Iran,” 5 May 1998, printed in *Qurtuluş*, spring 1999 (Persian), p. 54.
49. Letter of the Azerbaijani students studying in Tehran Universities to the Azerbaijani Deputies of the Iranian Majles.
50. *Salam*, 21 May 1995.
51. *Ibid.*
52. In the 1960s and 1970s, television from Baku was frequently watched in the border towns which had good reception.
53. See Chehabi, “Ardabil Becomes a Province: Center—Periphery Relations in Iran,” pp. 235–253, for an in-depth discussion of the author’s views on the motivations for the creation of the new province, and the processes involved.
54. Sabalan and Sahand are two major mountains in the Ardabil area. Azerbaijanis refer to Sabalan as Savalan.
55. Letter from ‘Ali-Reza Hamide Khoo about the formation of Ardabil Province (Persian), *Varliq*, October—December, 1992, pp. 109–110.
56. IRNA in English, 15 October 1992.
57. *Resalat*, 13 January 1993, p. 5.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Resalat*, 12 April 1993, p. 5.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Letter of the Azerbaijani Students Studying in Tehran Universities to the Azerbaijani Deputies of the Iranian Majles.
62. Letter of the Meshkinshahr Students Studying in the Universities of the Country to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Varliq*, April—June 1994, pp. 93–96 (originally published in the weekly *Omid-e Zenjan*).
63. The first reference found to this body is from April 1993. See *Resalat*, 7 April 1993, p. 3.
64. Reuters World Service, 27 July 1993.
65. *Turan*, 7 April 1995.
66. Muhammad Chehregani’s election platform, 1996 (unpublished). It was widely distributed as part of his campaign materials.
67. Letter of the Meshkinshahr Students Studying in the Universities of the Country to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
68. *Ibid.*
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Resalat*, 19 April 1993, p. 5.
72. IRNA in English, 13 April 1993.
73. *Resalat*, 14 April 1993, p. 5.
74. *Salam*, quoted by Reuters, 25 May 1992.
75. Javad Heyat, *Varliq*, April—June 1994, pp. 25–30; “Khujali,” *Varliq*, April—June 1992, pp. 31–33; “Shahidlar,” *Varliq*, January—May 1995, pp. 135–136.
76. In some of his Friday sermons in January 1990, at the end of his presentations in Persian, Ayatollah Musavi-Ardabili stated that instead of giving a sermon in Arabic, he would speak in Azerbaijani. At times during the Azerbaijani sermons, he addressed the Azerbaijanis in Soviet Azerbaijan, expressing sympathy with their plight.

77. See, for instance, IRNA in English, 31 August 1993.
78. For example, Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 144.
79. IRNA in English, 14 January 1990.
80. IRNA in English, 26 February 1993.
81. See, for instance, IRNA in English, 22 February 1993.
82. IRNA in English, 14 February 1996.
83. *Resalat*, 8 March 1993, pp. 5–6.
84. *Resalat*, 23 December 1992, pp. 5–6.
85. This rivalry is common in the relations of many centers with their diasporas. For a discussion of the rivalry between Israel and the Jewish diaspora, and among the Palestinians, see Gabriel Sheffer, “A New Field of Study: Modern Diasporas in International Politics,” in Gabriel Sheffer, ed., *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 10–11.
86. The relationship between Muslim and Iranian identities is under debate among the general population in Iran, and was especially disputed in the period of the Islamic Revolution.
87. For instance, in April 1979 violence erupted between Kurds and Azerbaijanis in the area of Naqadeh in West Azerbaijan province, evidently over land allocation.