

**EMANCIPATION DISCOURSES OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN IRAN:  
ANALYZING THE DISCOURSE OF IRANIAN AZERBAIJANIS AS A  
MINORITY GROUP FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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## ABSTRACT

### EMANCIPATION DISCOURSES OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN IRAN: ANALYZING THE DISCOURSE OF IRANIAN AZERBAIJANIS AS A MINORITY GROUP FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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This thesis analyzes the main discourses of the Azerbaijanis for political representation, liberation, and right to self-determination from a critical perspective in post-revolutionary Iran. The main aim of this research is to evaluate the capability of these discourses in reaching their aims. Various social movements erupted in Ardabil, West and East Azerbaijan, and surrounding provinces in reaction to minority and racial discrimination in the previous years. However, the blockage of the democratic path for demanding the minority rights in Iran has led Azerbaijanis to propound their rights in the streets and even football stadiums rather than official governmental platforms. Therefore, in order to have an understanding of these demands and discourses, this thesis is looking into the discourses of different movements and protests outside and inside Iran. This thesis is looking at certain historical epochs to understand the discourse articulation and shift of hegemonic discourses from one epoch to another. Later, it is analyzing the articulation, gaps, and flaws of the independence-seeking, federalist, and legal positivist discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis by using the critical discourse analysis method.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijanis in Iran, minority discrimination, right to self-determination, critical discourse analysis

## ÖZ

### İRAN'DA ULUSAL AZINLIKLARIN KURTULUŞ SÖYLEMLERİ: ELEŞTİREL BİR BAKIŞ AÇISINDAN AZINLIK GRUBU OLARAK İRANLI AZERBAYCANLILARIN SÖYLEMLERİNİN İNCELEMESİ

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Bu tez, Azerbaycanlıların siyasi temsil, özgürlük ve kendi kaderini tayin hakkı konusundaki ana söylemlerini devrim sonrası İran'da eleştirel bir perspektiften analiz etmektedir. Bu araştırmanın temel amacı, bu söylemlerin amaçlarına ulaşma kapasitelerini değerlendirmektir. Azınlık ve ırk ayrımcılığına tepki olarak önceki yıllarda Erdebil, Batı ve Doğu Azerbaycan ve çevre illerde çeşitli toplumsal hareketler patlak verdi. Ancak İran'da azınlık haklarını talep etmek için demokratik yolların tıkanması, Azerbaycanlıların haklarını resmi hükümet platformlarından ziyade sokaklarda ve hatta futbol stadyumlarında savunmasına neden olmuştur. Dolayısıyla bu tez, bu talep ve söylemleri anlayabilmek için İran'ın içindeki ve dışındaki farklı hareket ve protestoların söylemlerini incelemektedir. Bu tez, söylem eklemesini ve hegemonik söylemlerin bir dönemden diğerine geçişini anlamak için belirli tarihsel dönemlere bakmaktadır. Daha sonra İranlı Azerbaycanlılarının devrim sonrası İran'da bağımsızlık arayışı, federalist ve hukuki pozitivist söylemlerinin eklemesini, eksiklikleri ve sorunları eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İran'daki Azerbaycanlılar, azınlık ayrımcılığı, kendi kaderini tayin hakkı, eleştirel söylem analizi

**Dedicated to Samad Behrangi**  
**and his little black fish that never gave up on their journey of wisdom,**  
**courage, and freedom**

**Azadlıđı istəmirəm zərrə-zərrə, qram-qram!**  
**Qolumdakı zəncirləri qıram gərək, qıram, qıram!**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

### **ABBREVIATIONS**

ADP	Azerbaijan Democratic Party
AHRAZ	Association of Human Rights for Azerbaijanis in Iran
ArcDH	Association for Human Rights of Azerbaijanis in Iran
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
FDMA	Federal-Democratic Movement of Azerbaijan
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
IRIB	Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting
MPRP	Muslim People's Republic Party
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SANAM	Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement or GAMOH
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNPO	Underrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Introducing the study

Surrounded by many different neighboring countries, Iran is located in the Middle East region with a population of 79 million (Statistical Center of Iran, 2018). With discontinuities and ruptures in its history, this region faced various difficulties in integrating different ethnic groups and establishing social justice. Consequently, different national groups in Iran disposition heterogeneously.

One of the most important political and social issues in Iran is the issue of managing diversity (Asgharzadeh, 2007). Although Iranian officials are refusing to publish the exact population based on ethnic groups, Elling (2013) indicates that there are more than 17 million Azerbaijanis in Iran, and some other estimates suggest that this number is as high as 33 million (Güldiken, 1998), or 25 million (Saray, 1999). This makes Iranian Azerbaijanis the vastest minority within Iran, and their socio-political situation in Iran becomes critical as they were the triggers for most of the significant events in the past, such as the Iranian Revolution (Shaffer, 2002).

Iran is composed of national groups or, in other words, language groups or different ethnic groups. Whatever term we use to describe this social inequality, these different social groups do not have equal rights. While researching this matter, the internal distinctions of these national groups should not be ignored. Especially when looking

at a vast group such as Azerbaijanis in Iran, the diversity and heterogeneity of the interests should be taken into consideration. Therefore, the researcher should be aware that the same clusters of different national groups may have more interests in common than a set of clusters of each national group with each other. For instance, the interests of the working class in Iranian Azerbaijanis may in line with the interests of the working class of another national group rather than the other clusters of Iranian Azerbaijanis themselves. National groups such as Arabs, Kurds, Baluchs, Turks are at least linguistically or religiously different. Contemporary Iranian history reflects that one of these national groups dominated other national groups; In specific periods of modern history, it was linguistic hegemony, and in other periods, both linguistic and religious hegemony. As it will be observed from the historical chapter of this thesis, Persians were the dominant national group despite the vivid heterogeneity. Now, the hegemonic national group and oppressed national groups have proposed various socio-ideological political solutions to overcome this problem. As it will be discussed in the upcoming chapters in detail, although shattered, changed, and reshaped, this hegemony and oppression remain unresolved until today; that is why Azerbaijanis in Iran came up with different discourses to resolve this issue with their own understanding of emancipation.

This thesis aims to discuss different discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis around the right to self-determination and political representation and argue the challenges that each discourse has in its own context. Three different groups are selected to be analyzed within this thesis. Considering that there are various individuals with a wide range of interests and understanding of emancipation among the Iranian

Azerbaijanis, the selection of three different discourses made from the groups that have an established political organization or a fraction in the parliament of Iran. Thus, instead of looking at a wide range of unorganized groups with different ideologies and discourses, this selection makes the analysis of these discourses more convenient. This is because the selected groups of each discourse have certain charters, organizations, declarations, and legal frameworks that they operate within, and the analysis of these sources would provide us with necessary information regarding their discourses and plans.

Legal positivist discourse is the discourse that exists within the framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which operates only in the limitations of constitutional law of the Islamic Republic and its legislations. Therefore, emancipation for this discourse takes place within the prevailing Islamic Republic's laws and regulations. Imams of the Friday prayers (representative of the supreme leader the highest authority within the country) and the Fraction of Turkic Regions is selected as a typical representative of this discourse. This selection is made considering the high number of members of this fraction in the parliament and the strong influence of the Imams in the region as the representative of the supreme leader (Ma, 2011). This discourse mostly focuses on solving the livelihood problems of Iranian Azerbaijanis, linguistic rights, environmental and economic concerns within the framework of law in Iran, especially by putting an emphasis on article 15 and 19 of the constitutional law. Categorization of this group as legal positivist is because of their obedience towards the book of the law (in this thesis's context it is the Islamic Republic's official laws) and limiting themselves in the boundaries of the legislation of the

Islamic Republic of Iran. Whatever goes beyond this legislation is not be considered to be legitimate and justified for the representatives of this group.

Independence-seeking discourse is the second discourse that is selected to be analyzed in this research. As it will be observed in chapter four, this discourse considers emancipation only with the independence of Turkic nations from Iran. Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement is a typical representative of this discourse that is selected to be studied. This selection is made because this movement is one of the oldest and active political organizations representing the independence discourse founded in 1995 (UNPO, 2012). The main issues that this discourse focuses on are the process of assimilation of Turks in Iran and the level of national awareness (nation being defined as Turkic nations), the ethnic identity of Turks, and separation of the Azerbaijani territory (South Azerbaijan) from Iran (SANAM, 2013).

The third selected discourse is the federalist discourse. For this discourse the emancipation of the Iranian Azerbaijanis from the national oppression in Iran is considered to be in reaching a federal and democratic Iran. Federal-Democratic Movement of Azerbaijan is a typical representative of federalist discourse among Iranian Azerbaijanis. This movement is selected to be analyzed because it is the only organized political movement with a federalist discourse that has an official platform and declarations. As explained in chapter four, the main concepts highlighted within this discourse are democracy, federalism, and the notion of nation. A successful model of a federalist structure is perceived as a model that supports the working



class, resolves gender discrimination, and removes national oppression. Federal-Democratic Movement of Azerbaijan considers itself a leftist group that focuses on regional federalism, which emancipates the region of Azerbaijan with all its members rather than ethnic federalism, which only provides emancipation for ethnic Azerbaijani Turks (Açıq Söz, n.d.).

Moreover, this thesis argues the articulation of discourses for the emancipation of Azerbaijanis to analyze if this case study also (considering the reactionary nature of different minority groups mentioned in the theoretical framework) puts forward a reactionary and resentful discourse or it bases itself on a self-defined discourse. Understanding the articulation of these discourses without looking at the important discontinuities in the history of Iran that influenced Azerbaijanis is not possible. That is why the history chapter of this thesis explains how did the ruling discourse fail, and which discourses got produced and reproduced during the conflict between the dominant and non-dominant. In addition, by reading about these discontinuities in Iranian history, we can compare the current discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis for emancipation with the previous discourses and see how they are similar. This will help us investigate if the selected discourses in this thesis are self-structured or they are the reproduction of the previously failed discourses.

To this end, for the historical background, this study initially focuses on the Qajar era. Qajar dynasty was the last Turkic dynasty that ruled the territory of Iran, and the last years of this rule, especially the constitutional revolution epoch that is selected to be studied, is very important. The clash between pro-Azerbaijani and pro-Persian

groups and the eruption of these conflicts later in the Pahlavi era with the leadership of figures such as Ahmad Kasravi is taken into account. The establishment of the Azerbaijan People's Government in 1945 is the selected epoch of study for the Pahlavi Era. This epoch will show us the emergence of a new Azerbaijani government in the void of power, which led to many reforms and the reestablishment of institutions that helped Azerbaijanis to overcome the assimilation process in the Pahlavi era. The downfall of the Azerbaijan People's Government is also another shift in the power that is important to be studied in order to find out the creation of new conflicts and resentment in that epoch. Finally, the 1979 Iranian Revolution era is investigated to obtain an understanding of the current prevailing hegemonic discourse, oppression, and the promised reforms. Looking at these epochs will provide us with the necessary information on whether the position and value change in between dominant and dominated created value delusions and resentment.

According to the theoretical framework of this research an emancipatory discourse that establishes its roots in an already existing oppressive discourse is detected as a problematic discourse. These discourses are problematic because instead of reaching their desired emancipation, they may reproduce or reshape the oppressive discourse that they negate. Some features that will help this research define whether the discourses of Azerbaijanis are already established on an existing problematic discourse or not is the analyzing existence of politics of resentment in the discourse and in addition, comparing the selected discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis to the already practiced hegemonic discourses in Iran would give us an insight about the reactionary nature of these discourses.

The course of the current developments in Iran indicates that the traditional way of governance in Iran and the relationship between the state and society has entered a critical period that can be named as a stalemate and has placed a vague future in front of the people living in it (Mirdamadi, 2020). What future lies ahead for Iran, given the rapidly changing nature of political and social events in the Middle East and Iran, is a question that is not easy to answer. In the meantime, one of the issues that will play a prominent role in the arrangement of the new future order of Iran is the issue of oppressed minorities and nations. Diversity usually has been neglected, and this neglect has led to the emergence and growth of national identity and even nationalism based on cultural identity among these groups (Asgharzadeh, 2007).

According to the latest estimates, there are 600 language groups and civilizations and 5,000 ethnic groups in 184 independent countries. The number of countries where all citizens speak the same language or belong to a national, ethnic group is very rare (Kymlicka, 1995). Therefore, a land composed of a unique, unified, and self-determined nation may not be achievable considering the diversity that exists. In order to achieve a homogenous nation, different ways of governing might be utilized. As explained in this research, in the case of Iran, minorities have been treated in such a way by assimilation policies that they are eventually forced to integrate into a larger culture.

The founders of the "Nation of Iran" founded national identity on the basis of "Persian language," "Aryan race," "thriving borders," and the mythical history of the "Iranian Empire," or in other words, "Pan-Iranianism" (Pourpirar, 2000). As also

explained in chapter three, different manifestations of Iranian nationalism in the form of pan-Persianism mostly excluded the marginalized ethnic groups within the country. This exclusion has been accompanied by a hierarchical view which places the dominant Persian group on top and the other groups below. For instance, there are shreds of evidence that the chauvinist pan-Iranist party was supported by Shah to launch campaigns against the non-Persian ethnic groups such as Arabs (Azimi, 2009). The same attitude of the central governments in Iran towards other national identities and the cases led to the collective reaction of oppressed groups that are explained with examples in the further chapters. Considering the accumulated volume of the demands of non-Persian nations and peoples in Iran, it may be inevitable that these demands will be an influential component in shaping nature and how to bring about the fundamental changes.

When the matter of concern is about the demands and discourses that would potentially ask for fundamental changes, then these discourses should be deeply studied. A misrecognition of the circumstances within Iran would lead to discourses that will not remove the oppression to bring the social justice that is desired by different discourses analyzed in this thesis but would reshape the current oppression and reproduce new types of discrimination and hierarchies. Charles Taylor believes that our identity is formed in part through the misrecognition or non-recognition and often the distortion of others. For this reason, misrecognition or distortion can be a form of repression and confines a person to a distorted, inverted, and reduced body of existence (Taylor, 1992). Such a limited definition of “self” would result in an incapable and antagonistic liberation discourse that has the potential to reproduce the

current oppressive situation. If not preserve the same oppressive and discriminatory situation, these discourses may make the situation even worse. Therefore, the problematization of the current emancipatory discourses is required by a critical perspective in order to check if they have the capabilities of their desired liberation of minorities from oppression and discrimination.

The research process in this thesis will include a brief historical analysis of the origins of Iranian Azerbaijanis in Iran, starting from the Qajar Dynasty and investigating turning points and disruptions within different epochs of this history. The right to self-determination of the underrepresented nations will be the focus of this thesis while analyzing discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis. Three important discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis, which have been highlighted among them in the previous years, will be analyzed. It should be noted that the discourse of the right to self-determination is defined for each mentioned group differently, and the desired emancipation for each one is different. Federalist movement of Iranian Azerbaijanis asking for a federal government within Iran, independence movement seeking for independence from Iran, and the discourses of the current Azerbaijani parliament members and officials who are looking for reforms of the minority rights of the constitutional law of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) are the discourses that will be analyzed in this thesis.

## 1.2. Research Questions

Post-revolutionary Iran has observed many different social movements and phenomena throughout its history. Azerbaijani movements demanding their right to self-determination is one of the main issues in post-revolutionary Iran, which most of the time neglected or ignored by Iranian academics because it is usually seen as a threat to the territorial integrity of Iran. This group of researchers examined the issue of ethnic discrimination and Azerbaijanis in Iran either from a perspective that either relates the ethnic movements to a foreign intervention (e.g., claiming that the Republic of Azerbaijan is the main reason for ethnic conflict in Iran) or it completely rejects bringing up the minority discrimination issue to help to resolve it (Shiari & Tavakoli, 2017; see also Ramazanzadeh, 1996; Abazari et al., 2013; Pourgholi, 2008; Mohammadi & Rezayi, 2019; Talebi & Eyvazi, 2014).

On the other hand, as we will observe throughout this thesis, there are a few works that bring up the minority discrimination issue while also having a critical perspective towards it. By considering Iran as a nation-state with Persians at its core, these works consider the Turkish movement in Iran as a movement of a nation without a state or an egalitarian movement (Shaffer, 2021; see also Souleimanov, 2011; Shaffer, 2000; Shaffer, 2002; Musali. 2018; Sarıkaya. 2008; Riaux, 2012; UNPO, 2017).

As a result, scholarly works either mainly ignored the right to self-determination and political representation of Azerbaijanis in Iran, or it was discussed in a holistic way without bringing any critical analysis to the structure of these discourses. The

contribution and difference of this thesis studying the Iranian Azerbaijanis is that it both brings up the discrimination and minority rights issue and also critically analyzes the reactions of Iranian Azerbaijanis towards discrimination. Three selected discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis are criticized within their own context and understanding of their perception of emancipation from discrimination.

This thesis will answer the following primary and secondary research questions.

Primary research questions:

- How do the discourses on emancipation of Azerbaijanis in Iran articulate?
- How do the discourses of Azerbaijanis contain resentment towards the current or previous hegemonic discourses in Iran?

Secondary research questions:

- Do these discourses include the emancipation of all the members of Azerbaijanis as a national group?
- By what means do Azerbaijanis in Iran want to achieve this emancipation?

Overall, the claim of this research is that the emancipatory discourses of Azerbaijanis in Iran are the reaction to the discourses that they criticize, and being reactionary makes these discourses reproduce the criticized discourse instead of establishing a new one, and this becomes problematic as the criticized discourses are seen as the reason for the oppression discrimination, and antagonism. Therefore, the resentment is believed to be existing in the case study of this research. Moreover, the emancipatory discourses may reproduce the current hegemonic discourse instead

of removing it. To put forward such a hypothesis, one should understand how the analyzed discourses were articulated throughout the time and what are the key elements and definitions within them. Later there is a need for a theoretical framework that gives the researcher the required tools to analyze whether selected discourses would reach their desired emancipation or not. The first primary question will be answered by looking at the historical epochs and discontinuities, which influenced the articulation of the demands for change in Azerbaijan. Also, by analyzing certain political leaders and organizations related to each discourse, this research will explain how these discourses define themselves. The second primary question will be answered with the help of the theoretical framework that is explained in chapter two. Analyzing the extent that each discourse contains resentment and checking the similarities in relation to the hegemonic discourse would help us to conclude whether the emancipatory discourses of Azerbaijanis are self-defined, or they are reactionary discourses that reproduce already existing oppressive discourses. Secondary questions will respectively analyze the inclusivity of each discourse and the political structure that they offer for emancipation.

The main point in this case study method is the use of theory, critical discourse analysis, and knowledge of the historical context to identify a minority group in Iran, clarify its origin, and understand how its discourses articulate and have resentment.



### **1.3. Iranian Azerbaijanis**

On February 10, 1828, after a 16-year war, Azerbaijan was divided into two with the Turkmenchay Treaty signed between Russia and Iran, the north of the Aras River was left to Tsarist Russia and the south to Iran under the rule of the Qajar dynasty (today referred to as North and South Azerbaijan by South Azerbaijan being the part that remained within the Iranian Land). The Iranian geography has been under the rule of the Turks throughout history, starting from the Gutian dynasty of Sumer in 4200 BC (Celilov, 2000). The political situation of the Iranian Turks, who have ruled Iran for nearly a thousand years and make up about half of the country's population, is quite interesting. Terms such as Azeris, Azerbaijanis, Iranian Azerbaijanis, Iranian Turks, Azerbaijani Turks, and Azerbaijani Turkic people are often used to refer to the Azerbaijani Turks living in Iran. To avoid confusion, the meaning and the usage of each term should be clarified. Azerbaijan is the name of the geography, which is located in the Caucasus and Iran. Thus, the term Azerbaijani may refer to people both living in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Azerbaijani Turks and Azerbaijani Turkic people are also the identifiers of the geography in addition to the ethnic origin of the people living in that certain geography. Iranian Azerbaijanis or Azerbaijanis living in Iran is the term that is used in order to include all the ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan part of Iran and also differentiate between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Iran. Explained with its historical background in chapter three, according to Kasravi (1993) and Afshar (1989), the word Azeri is used to refer to the Turkified people living in Iran who

once was originally Iranian and then turned to be Turks after the Mongolian invasion. Therefore, this term is only going to be used when explaining the assimilation process in the Pahlavi era.

Mohammad Amin Rasulzade, writing about the position of the Turks in Iran during the Qajar time, states that the Iranian Turks are neither dominated as in Russia, nor a dominant nation as in Turkey, and that they are equal citizens in law with Persians and have the same rights and privileges. According to Rasulzade, the fact that the rulers of Iran were Turks did not grant the Turks any special privileges, nor did it cause the pressure of the Persian nation (Rasulzade, 1993). With the end of the rule of the Qajars and the start of the Pahlavi rule, these rights and privileges diminished drastically. After the 1979 Revolution, Iranian Azerbaijanis gained relative freedom to demand their ethnolinguistic rights in the political sphere, as the constitutional law of the Islamic Republic of Iran had given some rights to ethnic minorities, such as the right to teach and learn their mother tongue in the school. However, by the start of the Iran-Iraq war and from the very beginning of the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the government started to ignore these rights and put more pressure on the different national groups.

Turkic people within Iran, especially Azerbaijan and Turkmen Turks, are considered to cause security concerns in Iran's attitude towards the Turkic Republics such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, etc. (Erol, 2002). Thus, considering Turkic people as a potential threat to the relations in the region, Iran had always aligned its domestic policies in a way that this so-called threat will not lead to any kind of sovereignty issues or

international conflict. For instance, recitation of a traditional poem by the president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in the Republic of Azerbaijan regarding the separation of North and South Azerbaijan caused serious diplomatic problems between two countries. The foreign minister of Iran, Zarif, wrote on his official Twitter account:

Pres. Erdogan was not informed that what he ill-recited in Baku refers to the forcible separation of areas north of Aras from Iranian motherland. Didn't he realize that he was undermining the sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan? NO ONE can talk about OUR beloved Azerbaijan (Zarif, 2020, para.1).

Following this tweet, Turkey's parliament speaker Mustafa Şentop and foreign minister of Turkey Mevlut Çavusoglu named Zarif's statement as baseless and not acceptable. Iranian ambassador was also summoned by Turkey after the diplomatic tension (Avundukluoğlu, 2020; see also Varan, 2020).

The national awareness of Iranian Azerbaijanis is believed to be more than before as the demands for ethnolinguistic emancipation have increased in recent years (Souleimanov, 2011). The cockroach cartoon controversy in 2006 (Peuch, 2006), protests against the drying up of Lake Urmia (Human Rights Watch, 2011), Fitolieh program protests in 2015 (Bezhan, 2015), and many other protests in the previous years indicate that there is a serious demand from Iranian Azerbaijanis for their fundamental rights to be heard by the Iranian government officials. Azerbaijani students, poets, academics, and scholars were the pioneers of the various social movements in the few years. Blockage of the democratic path for demands regarding

minority rights in Iran made Azerbaijanis come to streets and even football stadiums to mobilize and express their concerns (Souleimanov, 2011).

#### **1.4. Methodology**

This thesis is conducted by a qualitative case study method. Both primary and secondary sources are used to obtain the required information about the case study. Declarations, speeches, by-laws, charters by the organizations and movement leaders of SANAM (Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement or GAMOH) and FDMA (Federal-Democratic Movement of Azerbaijan) are among the primary sources that are used to analyze the discourses. Besides these, minority rights-related laws, claims by the parliament members of Iran, and religious leaders are among the primary sources as well. To obtain information about the declarations, speeches, by-laws, and charters, their main web pages and internet sources are used. Country-specific reports will be obtained from international organizations such as United Nations (UN), Underrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), and Amnesty International. Primary resources are used to understand the articulation of the emancipatory discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis in post-revolutionary Iran.

Secondary sources are used to understand, interpret, and explain the primary sources in the thesis. These sources include books, journals, monographs, news, and all other related texts that are published regarding the theoretical framework of this thesis, the historical background of Iranian Azerbaijanis, and their contemporary issues.

It should be noted that although some scholars have paid attention to the ethnic conflict and demands of Iranian Azerbaijanis as a discriminated minority after or before the downfall of Reza Shah, this attention is ultimately limited to minor references. Leaving aside the few dissertations devoted to this subject, it can almost be concluded that in Persian, there are a very few published works that have specifically addressed this issue with a sociological or political science approach. If we narrow down and limit the topic, for example, if we intend to follow the criticism of minority discrimination in the practices of certain institutions of active organizations, we will see that we cannot find a suitable work in the form of a dissertation or book or even an article that it was devoted to studying such a subject with sociological or political science or even historiographical approaches. So, in order to conduct this qualitative case study, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method is used. CDA will enable to look into the existing discourses of the selected case study and analyze the communicative events as a social and political practice.

According to Woodak (2009), this interdisciplinary approach should always include an analysis of historical context keeping in mind that it is problem-orientated. CDA's goal is to investigate texts, speeches, and events and see how they are affected by political structures, power relations, and the struggle for power (Locke, 2004). Krippendorff (1980) states that analyzing content is a research method that describes the content objectively and systematically. In this research, the content of the selected discourses is analyzed by looking at speeches and charters of each political leader or organization. The language used in each section is considered critical in the analysis because it is taken as content that is published or spoken deliberately with a

specific intention. Among those researchers that deal with the relationship between language and reality, attention is paid to how the components of a sentence determine the meaning of the whole sentence. The group of thinkers working in this field sought to determine the conditions for the truth and meaning of the sentence; Also, it is sought to determine what the relationship was between meaning and usage, or the meaning of the words and intentions of the speaker (Searle, 1969).

Taking into account the ideological structures and presuppositions in the content of the speech or text of any historical period, these structures overshadow the speech space of people, and people may become unaware of it, so the CDA is in search of these naturalized ideologies that are hidden in the word (Shagaghi & Fadaei, 2013). As an example, analyzing a sentence such as “go get me water” directed from the husband to wife, we can conclude that the structure of the sentence includes a form of order to the wife. However, by utilizing the CDA method that analyzes the discourses considering the dominant social structure of the society, we may conclude that the mentioned sentence is the result of a patriarchal social system. As the founder of discourse theory and historical discourse analysis, Foucault has vaguely and marginally addressed non-discourse elements and processes in his analyzes with a historiographical approach (named the archeology of knowledge). He explicitly pays attention to the institutional and non-discourse factors of political, social, and economic daily life and considers them involved in the emergence of new institutions and socio-political changes (Foucault, 1971; see also Foucault & Khalfa, 2005; Foucault, 1972). In CDA, the concept of truth is not something innate or even qualitatively abstract and idealistic, but something discursive. According to Foucault

(1971), every society has its own regime and concepts of truth, and that is its own general political truth. General political truth is various types of discourses that society has in its core and is hidden from view; thus, it causes others to accept it as the truth and act accordingly. There is, therefore, the presupposition that systems of truth have historically been formed on the basis of specific ideologies of the hegemonic system. Therefore, in Foucault's approach, non-discourse factors are considered to be influential in social changes. For example, while examining the legal positivist discourse within this thesis, the institutional, ideological, and political structures of the Islamic Republic of Iran should also be taken into consideration. Because this discourse is not an independent part of the political structure of the Islamic Republic, and it is affected by the power relations within the country.

As mentioned before, the historical background that is provided within this thesis looks at the discontinuities and ruptures. In CDA, history is not viewed as a series of events of the past that are causally and linearly linked in a chain because it indicates nothing about how we became what we are now; Rather, history is considered a set of discrete and paradigmatic events (Fay, 1996). With this approach, an epoch of history is selected from a specific era, which has discourses with a different epistemological formulation than the whole selected era. To point out this difference, new forms of knowledge, ways of thinking, beliefs, and rhetoric are formed in this epistemic space and shape other social structures and institutions (Ahmadi, 2020). These new forms of rhetoric and new ways of thinking are highlighted in each selected epoch in chapter three by using the mentioned CDA method.

## **1.5. Organization of the Chapters**

This thesis will include five chapters with an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter will introduce the study by giving brief background information about the topic. Chapter two will consist of the conceptual and theoretical framework of the thesis. In this chapter, the explanation of the concepts of emancipation, right to self-determination, critical discourse analysis will be provided in order to achieve a concrete understanding of these concepts in the context of this thesis's topic. This chapter will also explain what is meant in this thesis by minority discrimination, discrimination of Iranian Azerbaijanis, and demands of Iranian Azerbaijanis for emancipation. In the theoretical framework part of chapter two, the resentment theory in the political theory field and its manifestations in the field of politics, in general, will be defined and discussed to build a theoretical framework that can analyze the origins, articulation, and capabilities of the emancipatory discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis. Chapter three consists of historical information about certain discontinuities in the history of Iranian Azerbaijanis that led to the shift of hegemonic discourse and alteration of the dominant and dominated. These three epochs contain key events that had influenced the identity formation of Iranian Azerbaijanis and highlighted their movements and how the hegemonic discourse of that epoch failed. Chapter four presents an in-depth analysis of three selected discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis for emancipation. Finally, chapter five concludes the analysis and the findings of this thesis.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The goal of this chapter is to introduce the thesis's major theoretical framework and provide an explanation of the main concepts and literature around those concepts that are key components of this thesis. First, the notion of resentment and its place in political theory is explained, and later the manifestations of resentment in today's politics and how it is problematized by some scholars are examined. These manifestations would help this research define what characteristics of the politics of resentment are and which political movements are likely to utilize politics of resentment in their discourses.

In the conceptual framework part, key concepts that are used in this thesis will be defined. Concepts of minority and nationalism, the right to self-determination, and emancipation are explained and then explored in the context of Iran and Iranian Azerbaijanis in particular. Oppression and minority discrimination features of the hegemonic discourse in the Islamic Republic of Iran are also explained in the subsections of the conceptual framework to provide literature in order to understand the characteristics of minority discrimination in Iran.

## **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

In this part, an overview of the theory of resentment is given, and its basic features are explained. First, a summary of the theory's development from the field of philosophy to sociology and politics is given, and its terms within the political theory are explored. Later, the concept of politics of resentment and how it is problematized by scholars is examined in a different sub-section.

### **2.1.1. Resentment**

Borrowed from Kierkegaard (1976), who defines resentment as a dangerous lack of self-defined character and a continuous want of character, Nietzsche (1887) expanded the semantic field of the word into a philosophical concept in his book *on the genealogy of morality*. According to him, the people struggling with resentment are helpless people. They are prevented from the real action, that is, the practical action, and, as a result, they compensate for the damage they have suffered from imaginary revenge and reaction. People with the feeling of resentment are deeply reactionary. Because they are powerless and helpless, and this situation causes them to feel frustrated. Every human struggling with resentment is in despair and docility (Copelston, 1985). That is, when he is unable to express his feelings and thoughts, he seeks an excuse for his inability, then he turns the desire for revenge into his mental temptation. Overall, ignoring resentment may create destructive dualities. For instance, the resentment against the superior, dominant, or hegemonic class of the society and the creation of the antagonistic duality of dominant and dominated

may not only block the way to emancipation but also benefit the dominant and marginalize the underprivileged more than before. The reality, in Nietzsche's view, is full of the will to power, and it is this will to power that is the cause and founder of all human achievements (Sleinis, 1994). The embodiment of this will lead to all the moral achievements in human life that have led to human transformation, and its main nature is perfected by adopting a new and better nature. But according to Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal has caused this internalization to condemn the power-oriented will, which is the main nature. This situation must be overcome. By teaching the superior human, in fact, Nietzsche seeks to turn the will to power against this soul in order to overcome the tendencies that lead us to this old ideal. Nietzsche, therefore, not only does not condemn the will to power but also praises it (Nietzsche, 1887). Thus, the politics of suffering and misery in order to reach an ascetic ideal that will provide more rewards in after life is considered problematic.

Deleuze (1962/1983) develops the term by explaining the value delusions and resentment's main characteristics that are the negation of the other and being a reactionary force. According to him, the origin of the values of different currents is not indicative of the qualities that underlie the value of life but is precisely against them. The existence of each depends on the negation of the other. In the same way, the most detailed decisions of each make sense in relation to the other and its values. On the one hand, the overemphasis on one's own values and the indulgence of other values, and on the other hand, the extreme reactionary nature of both forces, show that they will reach their limits of resentment and cannot overcome it even with the impulses of revenge (Deleuze, 1962/1983). Deleuze reverses Hegelian

phenomenological interpretation and narrative. He believes that the historical development of the subjectivity of self-consciousness is portrayed as a manifestation of the reactionary forces that lead to the nihilism of modernity. Considering the contribution that Deleuze brings to the notion of resentment, it can be indicated that the current situation is such that any alternative (or demand for emancipation, change, or new ways of possibilities) quickly becomes the one it was opposed to, and this is the depth of reactionary nihilism in our world. Similar to Nietzsche, who seeks to overcome this vicious cycle of dominant and dominated containing resentment, according to Deleuze, the destruction of the reactionary forces within this loop can end this cycle. Therefore, the main problem is the reactionary element of resentment and the fact that instead of self-identification, there is always a scapegoating mechanism that stops the slaves or dominated segment from enjoying a self-affirmation, and this makes the cycle continue.

Resentment is a unique and important term that is used in sociology and political science fields as well. Max Scheler (1915) used the word resentment as a technical term borrowed from Nietzsche, and it was he who introduced the term to sociology. Scheler's text is significant and thought-provoking in that, in addition to helping to explain and unravel previous philosophical analysis of resentment, it goes even further in examining the concept of resentment. This time the resentment does not deal with the historical genealogy of the concept but with the sociological conditions in which it is developed. In the term resentment, Scheler sees the trace of two resilient elements. Firstly, a passive, reactionary nature (that was also

mentioned in the previous philosophical analysis) in which there is a non-constructive response to the “other” group. According to Scheler:

First of all, resentment is the repeated experiencing and reliving of a particular emotional response reaction against someone else. The continual reliving of the emotion sinks it more deeply into the center of the personality, but concomitantly removes it from the person’s zone of action and expression. It is not a mere intellectual recollection of the emotion and of the events to which it “responded”—it is a re-experiencing of the emotion itself, a renewal of the original feeling (1915, p. 2).

Secondly, the word hatred implicitly indicates that this emotion has a negative quality; that is, it contains a hostile endeavor (Frings, 2001). This resilient element is the novel contribution of Scheler, which takes the resentment term from an individual perspective (as opposed to the previous philosophical definitions) to a more societal field and highlights the antagonistic character of the resentment. To Scheler, unlike affection, in which the value of the object of love is deepened and reveals its highest meaning, hatred is the impulse during which the value of the phenomenon in question is degraded, and if hatred finds an objective embodiment and cannot overcome itself, it leads to a reactionary statement that is named resentment.

In order to provide a socio-political explanatory and systematic definition of the Resentment, Rene Girard provides a model that enables social scientists to perform analysis on it (Tomelleri, 2015). Girard discusses a mimetic desire that is unlike Nietzsche and Scheler’s rivalry binary of master and slave highlights a relationship

in which one desires to be like the other one. That is why a mimetic relationship which is often mutually in dialogue and at the same time conflictual takes place. Therefore, Girard brings a new dimension to the resentment's reactionary feature, which does not contain an emotion that lies within a specific individual or outside them but establishes itself in relations between each other (Girard, 1996). Girard also brings another element to the notion of resentment, which is the generative nature that generates and reproduces itself in the social reality while it is also being generated in a certain historical process. Tomelleri explains the analysis of resentment by Girard by stating:

The analysis of resentment in René Girard's theory shows that this emotion evolves from mimetic desire: it is an affective experience that people have when a rival denies them opportunities or valuable resources (including status) which they consider to be socially accessible. This emotion concerns simultaneously the social structures and the relationships in which actors are engaged (Tomelleri 2015, p. 92).

Thus, by this explanation, Girard also provides us with the causes of resentment which is the denial of socially accessible opportunities and resources such as status.

While analyzing the resentment within the selected discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis, this sociological definition of resentment will be used. Defining resentment as a reactionary, mimetic, and antagonistic response, this thesis is going to check how the discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis contain resentment, meaning it is a reactionary, mimetic, and antagonistic response or is it a self-defined, self-structured, and inclusive discourse. To do this, the similarities between the

discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis and the hegemonic discourse that is explained throughout the thesis should be compared and explored.

Analyzing the desire of Iranian Azerbaijanis for political recognition and will to power is also considered in this thesis. However, while transforming to dominant, the dominated can only sustain and enjoy its power if they can go beyond what they are now and can completely shape their own discourse instead of reacting or negating the dominant group. This is possible when they destroy the reactionary forces and establish a discourse in which they affirm themselves instead of negating the other, they define themselves in their own terms instead of reacting to the other, and they enjoy this self-creation instead of resenting to the other.

### **2.1.2. Politics and resentment**

It is also very important to integrate all these political theories around resentment with the movements and politics of the contemporary era. Wendy Brown's work around resentment enables her understanding of the relationship between freedom and power and allows her to examine the ways in which so-called radical or progressive political projects are constructed by the same or the reflection of the same power relations that they claim to oppose (Brown, 1995). The fact that discrimination leads us to marginalization and stimulates an identity movement for social and political change is not an endpoint for Brown, but it is the start of her problematization of this issue. Reacting to discrimination as a call to action also requires "anger." Anger is born of the realization that the act of suffering is wrong,

it is cruel, and something must be done to prevent it. The closeness of suffering and anger in these kinds of reactionary movements is the subject of Wendy Brown's critique. She sees it as a form of resentment politics that has only the ability to react and not to act independently. However, in this research, it is argued that there cannot be a form of politics that does not contain reaction in its independent action. The non-reactive action can only be taken if we completely erase or hide past histories. No genuine action can be imagined independent of a series of historical reactions (as will also be mentioned in the historical explanation of this thesis). During these reactions, people interact with each other, and there is a dialogue between groups, so a reaction is inevitable. Brown also mentions the wounded past with injuries that make this resentment inevitable. Writing about politicized identity, Brown states:

...it installs its pain over its unredeemed history in the very foundation of its political claim, in its demand for recognition as identity. In locating a site of blame for its powerlessness over its past, as a past of injury, a past as a hurt will, and locating a "reason" for the "unendurable pain" of social powerlessness in the present, it converts this reasoning into an ethicizing politics, a politics of recrimination that seeks to avenge the hurt even while it reaffirms it, discursively codifies it (1993, p. 406).

In contrast with Brown, Ahmad (2014) believes that a conflictual dialogue is necessary between the dominant and what dominates it so that the dominant can gain self-awareness from it. She claims that it is impossible to go through a history of injury suffering and reach the point of initial innocence. According to Ahmad, the way we react varies depending on how we detect what we are up against (For



instance, a discriminated Azerbaijani can see the cause of oppression as Persian ethnic group or the power structures within the Islamic Republic). So, the question is, what action is possible given a particular understanding of what we are against? (Ahmad, 2014). So, while the resentment manifests itself in anger and revenge, it should be analyzed what kind of understanding a certain group has from this revenge. As a result, different identity movements, as a reaction to discrimination and as a form of anger against suffering, require an understanding that is progressive and not regressive. Progressive meaning it will not take it back to its wounded past with injuries.

Salée (2011) explains the resentment politics with a literary critic between Angenot and Jacques Pelletier regarding the sovereignty of Quebec. He indicates that Pelletier cannot agree with Angenot's methodological approach of relating resentment to the situation of Quebec. This is because Pelletier believes that the notion of resentment is perverted and is used for a collective pathology which is a misrepresentation of the term. Therefore, Pelletier believes that resentment describes an individual existential weakness and has nothing to do with the goal of Quebec's sovereignty. However, Salée believes that both Angenot and Pelletier ignore a significant point that resentment can plan the actions and language of any group or individual who is in the position of powerless. So, a marginalized *other* group (right or wrong does not matter) can use resentment politics in counteraction against another group. Overall, with different degrees of action, every political discourse uses resentment to reform its relative status in society; the problematic

part of resentment politics is that it is totally inelegant, and it may be quite nasty in terms of action (Salée, 2011).

As described by Salée, resentment is used by nearly all political groups that are claiming to be unprivileged to improve their position. Fukuyama (2018) defines these groups as identities that are seeking respect and recognition. He believes this recognition and respect is not always given to these identities, and this results in resentment which is the main factor that brings these identities into politics. As all other political scientists mentioned in this section, Fukuyama also agrees that it is the right of these identities to demand equal respect and recognition, but the contribution that he makes to the literature of resentment politics is that he finds resentment problematic when this demand equal respect and recognition turns itself to the demand of superior respect and recognition. He explains that this superiority leads to domination and, most of the time to violence which is very dangerous (Fukuyama, 2018).

The term resentment had been argued throughout the time and evolved so that now scholars mentioned above are using it to explain and problematize the reactionary characteristics of the groups that are seeking political recognition and/or an improvement in their current societal status. Therefore, minority and identity movements are considered to operate with resentment according to the literature above. Considering the minority character of Iranian Azerbaijanis and their main various political movements that put forward their own discourse on emancipation

minority discrimination, this thesis is analyzing how resentment politics articulates and manifests itself within these discourses.

## **2.2. Conceptual Framework**

In this section, the most significant concepts that require further explanation in the thesis are explained. Firstly, the concept of minority and minority rights in international law and minority rights in Iran are described to determine the lines in which we will explore the minority discrimination and boundaries of their rights. The right to self-determination of people is also described in this section so that the demands of Iranian Azerbaijanis are understood better. Finally, the terms emancipation and emancipation discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis are briefly mentioned.

### **2.2.1. Concept of minority and nationalism**

Referring to Iranian Azerbaijanis as a minority group requires a concrete understanding of the concept of the minority. Individuals of societies may come together to find meaningful connections with each other, and these connections may cause the evolution and formation of various groups in the context of time and place and lead to their continuous existence. Groups are not insignificant and ineffective phenomena that are limited to their own scope, but the effect of their influence, especially in the field of power, has been different from each other. Each is developed according to the founding factors, such as the quantity and quality of the

constituent elements, the participation, and recognition in politics, power-oriented awareness, etc. (Forsyth, 2010; see also Turner, 1981). For this reason, human groups in different societies are divided into strong and weak or dominant and dominated (Hasely et al., 2019; see also Wirth, 1945).

Today, there may not be a country and system of government in which all individuals and citizens are of the same ethnicity and speak the same language or follow the same religion. In most countries, there is a group that has a common history, culture, language, religion, and nationality, and there are other groups that have their own ethnic, linguistic, and religious characteristics and are called "minorities." There are various definitions for the concept of minority in the fields of law and sociology. As the definition of minorities in law is more explicit and distinct, it will be mentioned in the international law section of this chapter. In this section, the focus will be on a more sociological definition of minority.

Most of the time, the common usage of the word minority refers to its numerical and statistical definition; however, this kind of explanation disregards the groups that are the majority in number but socially or politically, they are dominated or discriminated. According to Capotorti:

A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members - being nationals of the State - possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language (1979, p.95).

Therefore, there is a need for a complete sociological definition that focuses on the quality of the socio-political issues rather than the statistical quantity of a group. Louis Wirth's definition of the minority can be considered as a more exact one with this regard. Wirth writes:

A minority group is any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination (1945, p. 347).

Some definitions (Laurie and Khan, 2017; see also Barzilai, 2010) may associate the minority only with the absence of participation in power, while according to this definition, discrimination in the society, limitation on opportunities, rewards, and power can also highlight the line between the hegemon groups and minorities.

It is also required to clarify the term that we should use for different minorities. Minorities can be ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups. Defining the term national minority Ivanov (1998, para. 14) states that "national minority means, most generally, a minority of citizens of the country (nationals of the State), who have certain characteristics which are different from those of the majority." Such national groups, while in the country of their residence, are a minority; their descendants in another country may constitute the majority. However, these definitions are still not concrete enough to decide what makes a group of people a nation and what can constitute a national minority. The non-existence of an exact definition of national minority makes things more complicated as it gets hard to know what the exact

boundaries are of being a nation and in what ways national minorities should be protected (Skurbaty, 2005). As a result, we can look at the literature around nations and nationalism, and the dialogue within that literature may shed light on the definitions of what binds a group as a nation.

Nationalism is considered to be the main line that binds people of the modern world or separates them (Smith, 1998). From the time that the issue of nationalism is debated, there are different discussions on how it got created and articulated. This is why scholars such as Smith, Gellner, Anderson, etc., came up with different ideas about nationalism and nation. In fact, modernists such as Gellner (1968, 1983) want to extract meanings of both nation and nationalism from the new processes of modernization and show how states, nations, and nationalisms, and especially their distinct classes, have united populations in new ways in order to cope with modern conditions. On the other hand, there is the approach from another important theorist; Although Anthony Smith attributes the emergence of nationalism to modernism, he has no such view of the nation (Smith, 1998, 2004). The debate between two different sides is around the question nation is a modern phenomenon that completed its pillars in the modern industrialization era or is it a historical phenomenon. Modernists believe that the roots of the concept of the nation should be traced back to later times, around the sixteenth century, or to the late eighteenth century, under the influence of the French, American, and British revolutions. Gellner (1998) argues that nationalism has a coincidental character: nations are not predetermined but are created by states and nationalists. Most people must choose between several types of rival nationalism. Yet nationalism, in some forms, is the inevitable fate of the modern

world and has deep roots in it (Gellner, 1998; see also Giddens, 2013; Anderson, 1991; Mann, 1993). For Gellner, nationalism is the cultural form accepted by the industrial system. He states that nations do not create nationalism, but nationalist movements define and create nations. In his view, nationalism is not about awakening the consciousness of nations, so even if there is no nation, nationalism creates it (Gellner, 1998).

Anthony Smith's argument, on the other hand, was intended to show that neither the views of those who claim that nationality and nationalism or the nation in principle is an eternal and very ancient phenomenon can be accepted nor the views of modernists such as Gellner and Anderson and their followers who believe that the phenomena of nation and nationalism are fundamentally new phenomena and the result of modern developments such as the new capitalist economic structure or the system of industrialization. In his view, nations cannot be considered products of the modern era designed by the nationalist elite; although the elites may have a significant influence, the main sources of nations and national identities must be sought in more distant history (Smith, 2004, 1998). They were considering such a definition that the meaning of nationalism is a national sense or nationalist ideology which constitutes itself around beliefs such as common historical memory, common language, culture, etc. (Smith, 2008). For Smith, attachment to the sacred homeland, memories of the historical golden age, sacrificing for the homeland, and destiny are factors that are essential to describe the stability and continuity of nation-building through enduring cultural traditions over time. Nationalism is also a form of public and politicized culture based on originality, as well as a kind of political religion that

seeks to uphold the identity, independence, and national unity of the sacred community of citizens in their ancestral homeland. In other words, nationalism seeks to create nations based on the spirit and original image of former religious and ethnic communities, but changes in the face of geopolitical, economic, and cultural conditions (Smith, 1998).

Anthony Smith's views can be used to examine nation, nationalism, and ethnicity in all countries, especially on issues of identity and national identity in Iran. One of the important points in Anthony Smith's thought is that by making a distinction between "nations after post-nationalism" and "nations before nationalism," he tries to prove the ancient foundation of nation and identity in various countries. This analysis can also be valid for Iranian Azerbaijanis with an ancient history as a nation that dates back to thousands of years ago, according to Celilov (2000), Erol (2002), and Rasulzade (1993). Smith's ideas on issues of identity have the important feature that makes him be aware of the historical, cultural, and social structures in different places. Thus, unlike Gellner's ideas on nation, Smith's ideas are not structuralist and refuse to generalize identity issues. This makes it important to distinguish between nations with ancient histories and backgrounds against nations that are the product of modernity and nationalist movements. Therefore, such an approach (Smith's historical sociology) can be used in the study of nation, national identity, and ethnicity in Iran. The historical chapter of this research will elaborate on how cultural, historical, and social factors had more effects on the identity formation and binding Iranian Azerbaijanis as a nation even before the industrialization revolution reaching Iran. Consequently, analysis of the discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis as a



national minority would show us how the elements of the historical golden age, sacrificing for the homeland, and claims for sharing the same destiny as a nation, operates within this group.

### **2.2.2. Minority rights in international law**

Many international documents, laws, and states; specifically addressed the rights of minorities. Published by The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination adopted by the General Assembly (OHCHR, 1965), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (OHCHR, 1979), Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960) are among the international documents that do not specifically use the term minority when defending the rights of different groups being discriminated by the claims of superiority. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (OHCHR, 1966), in addition to the general provisions on the observance of the rights of all persons without discrimination on the grounds of race, language, or religion, and specifically in article 27, emphasizes the right of the minorities. This article mentions:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language (OHCHR, 1966, article 27).

Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted in 1992 by the UN General Assembly, clearly presents a statement on the protection of the identity of minorities. Article 1 of this declaration states: “States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity” (OHCHR, 1992).

Iran's membership in the UN Charter, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Ratification date: 24 Jun 1975), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Ratification date: 29 Aug 1968), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Ratification date: 24 Jun 1975), and other international conventions makes the requirements of these conventions binding for the government of Iran. However, according to OHCHR (n.d.), none of the complaints from the UN towards the reports against these conventions within Iran has not been accepted and approved. Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, in its introduction, refers to the United Nations goals for the human rights and freedoms of all individuals without discrimination and highlights the obligation of the member states in paragraph 1 of Article 4 as: “States shall take measures where required to ensure that persons belonging to minorities may exercise fully and effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and in full equality before the law” (OHCHR, 1992, article 4).

As it can be observed from the most significant declarations and rules, international rights on minority rights oblige the member states of the UN to follow these rules and apply them as fundamental human rights. They are referring to these rights, and checking whether they are being applied or not can be considered as a tool to measure the level of discrimination of minorities in specific countries.

### **2.2.3. Minority rights in Iran**

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran does not mention ethnic, linguistic, and national minorities; but article 19 states: “The people of Iran enjoy equal rights, regardless of the tribe or ethnic group to which they belong. Color, race, language, and other such considerations shall not be grounds for special privileges” (Islamic Parliament of Iran, 1979). Another important article which is about linguistic freedom within the country is article 15 that its implementation is highly debated.

This article states:

Persian is the official and common language and script of the people of Iran. The documents, correspondence, official texts, and schoolbooks must all be in this language and script. However, use of regional and ethnic languages in the press, the mass media, and the teaching of their literature at schools, alongside the Persian language, is freely permitted (Islamic Parliament of Iran, 1979, Article 15).

Regarding the recognition of the minorities in Iran, The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Islamic Parliament of Iran, 1979, Article 13) states that “Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are considered the only recognized

religious minorities. They may exercise their religious ceremonies within the limits of the law.” They are free to exercise matters of personal status and religious education, and they follow their own rituals.”. Reading the text of the constitution of Iran, we can see that there is no categorization for different minority groups as there was in the international conventions. A more general term such as national minorities is not used as well. Therefore, it should be noted that in Iran, due to the reliance of the government on religion, only religious minorities have been identified, and different ethnicities with different cultures, races, and languages are not considered minorities but are treated like any other citizens. This issue became the bedrock of many challenges regarding minority rights. Turning the terms such as ethnic and linguistic minorities to a security concern has led to a situation in which the groups seeking their fundamental rights to be seen as a threat to the integrity and sovereignty of the lands of Iran. For instance, individuals are ill-treated by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) just for bringing up various issues about their identities and their right to freedom of expression (Dyke, 2020). Detaining and arresting activists in peaceful gatherings, torture, limiting access to lawyer in trials, unfair trials, depriving of ethnic groups from learning their mother tongue (Amnesty International 2020, 2018, 2011, 2000), environmental destruction, economic exploitation, and cultural discrimination (ArcDH, 2021; see also AHRAZ 2018; UNPO, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2011) are also reported in this context.

#### **2.2.4. The right to self-determination**

It is necessary to point out the a priori point first; Legal norms are not necessarily legitimizing. That is, regardless of what the legal standards mention and what they require, a collective demand or demand can still be legitimate or legal. Thus, regardless of whether the pursuit of a particular political demand is legitimate or not, it can be commented on independently. However, the right to self-determination of a nation has a specific and defined place in international law in addition to public opinion.

After World War II, colonized nations, some Third World countries, and, of course, the Eastern Bloc countries were major supporters of the execution of the right to self-determination. Following the post-war developments and the formation of social movements, numerous legal documents and human rights were drafted, and it was, of course, in such an atmosphere that the right to self-determination was also widely addressed (Unterberger, 1996).

The right to self-determination of nations is mentioned in article 1 of the joint convention on Civil and Political Rights (1996) and in article 1 of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). Article 2 of the UN Charter had also referred to the right to self-determination. But the most significant and important document in this period is the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1960. According to this declaration, as well as other UN documents, including the binding 1966 resolutions, “All peoples have the right of

self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (OHCHR, 1966, Article 1). We will see in chapter four that independence-seeking discourse will emphasize the colonization and exploitation of Southern Azerbaijan by Iran, and that is why they refer to this kind of international legislation for emancipation.

The exact definition of “people” is not provided and was very much debated over the years when the issue of self-determination was brought up (French, 2013). In the case of people who are under or unrepresented, they become separate from the ruling state and government (Gudeleviciute, 2005). This separation would happen in a situation where the underrepresented or unrepresented groups are deprived of their fundamental human rights and are not recognized or politically represented in the existing political institutions. UNPO considers South Azerbaijan as one of its current members and reports that besides cultural and political repression, the economy and environment of Azerbaijan in Iran is also being destructed (UNPO, 2021). UNPO (2017) report on South Azerbaijan indicates that being deprived of mother tongue, destruction of Ark castle in Tabriz, changing the name of the locations from Turkish to Farsi, stereotyping the minorities are among the cultural discrimination of Iranian Azerbaijanis. Among the economic discrimination factors, the same report indicates that lack of investment in the region of South Azerbaijan has led to the mass immigration of people to the central regions of the country. The drying of Lake Urmia, the second biggest Salt Lake in the world, is a big factor in the environmental destruction of the nature of the South Azerbaijan region, according to UNPO (2017). Moreover, the arrestment of many political activists during the peaceful protests and

their unknown condition is among the political repression factors of UNPO. There are also several reports from the Association of Human Rights for Azerbaijanis in Iran (AHRAZ) (2018) and the Association for Human Rights of Azerbaijanis in Iran (ArcDH) (2021) regarding the economic, cultural, and political discrimination in Iran by the central government. This discrimination and destructive policies of the central government increases the national gaps and cleavages, and as a result, it encourages the othering of Azerbaijani Turks in Iran so that they can see themselves as a distinct part of the region and not as a citizen of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

#### **2.2.5. Emancipatory discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis**

One of the key components in analyzing the demands of the selected discourses of Azerbaijanis in Iran is their desire for emancipation. To analyze these demands, first, the discourses that propose these demands should be investigated, and secondly, the end goal or meaning of the emancipation to Iranian Azerbaijanis should be clarified. As mentioned in the first chapter, Azerbaijanis are the vastest national minority group in Iran, and the population of Azerbaijanis being high in number makes it very difficult to consolidate their demands for analysis. With respect to the pluralistic and diverse range of ideas and discourses among the Azerbaijanis, three main emancipatory discourses will be analyzed that will be further explained in chapter four with details.

### **2.2.5.1 Social Movements**

With the rise of the role of the people in the political systems, the social scene of different countries witnessed an action by the citizens, which is referred to as social movements. Social movements, which are generally defined as collective behaviors, are fundamentally different from the various social actions that occur at different time intervals. Thomas Cohen considers the social movement as an organized effort of a group of people who want to change or maintain some aspects of society (Kuhn, 1996). Giddens (1993) defines this social phenomenon as one of the forms of collective action to achieve change in some aspects of the existing order in society outside the realm of formal institutions. With the changes that took place in human societies and the emergence of various collective needs in human life and the collective responses to these needs, new social movements emerged that could not be understood in the classical definitions of social movement. Traditional social movements have a class nature or affiliation with a particular group, while its new type is identity-oriented, collective, and at the same time independent of a particular class and is a coalition of several classes, strata, and identities (Diani & Della, 2006). New movements have been organized around the politicization of identities and issues such as women, the environment, peace, human rights, and ethnicities. The most important function of social movements, especially those that revolve around the rights of ethnicities and minorities, is to change the public sphere and guide public opinion and put pressure on the government to grant democratic privileges and, in some cases, transfer power to democratic systems (Diani & Della, 2006).



Another major difference of modern social movements is the less organized nature of these movements. Belonging to a movement is more about advocating a particular social vision or belief principle, expressing it in everyday political debates, and being willing to participate in occasional activities such as street protests (Bottomore, 1993). The logic of these civil protests in modern social movements is to mobilize the movement's supporters based on non-violence and civil disobedience.

In post-revolutionary Iran, these kinds of social movements (Bezhan, 2015; see also Human Rights Watch, 2011; Peuch, 2005) also erupted in different regions that Azerbaijanis live in. In addition to these street protests, sports games are among the other places where the Azerbaijani Turks in Iran continuously emphasize their presence in the social arena in Iran. The slogans chanted at the games of the Tractor football club and the Urmia volleyball teams indicate that the emphasis on Turkish identity and the demand for repressed rights in Iran is institutionalized in the political culture of the Azerbaijani Turks. The formation of Azerbaijani social movements in Iran in recent years around the issue of minority rights, identity, and discrimination may be the indicator that there is an increase in the demands for a change in the existing discriminatory politics. The main three discourse of these demands with a different manifestation of “emancipation” is analyzed in this thesis. However, before understanding the demand for change, we should first know what the characteristics of this discrimination are.

### **2.2.5.2. Discrimination and demands**

Regardless of what is stated in articles fifteen and nineteen of the constitution of IRI, Amnesty International (2020) reports torture, detention, and violation of minority rights of Azerbaijani Turks with unfair trials of many activists behind closed doors without having access to lawyers. Amnesty International (2018) released a report on the suppression of Azerbaijani Turkic human rights activists, citing the arrest of about 120 people and numerous cases of torture, calling on Iranian authorities to release all human rights defenders of the Azerbaijani Turkic minority and stop suppressing their cultural gatherings. In the same report, there is also a general overview of the situation of the basic human rights of the Azerbaijanis:

The Azerbaijani Turkic population is concentrated largely in the north and northwest of Iran. Like other ethnic minorities in Iran, Azerbaijani Turks face discrimination, arbitrary restrictions to their access to education, employment, adequate housing, and their enjoyment of their social, cultural, and linguistic rights. One of the grievances repeatedly voiced by Iran's Azerbaijani Turks concerns the lack of opportunities to learn, promote and use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without any interference or discrimination. Azerbaijani Turkic activists have been subjected to years of oppression at the hands of the Iranian authorities, including through intimidation and harassment, arbitrary arrest, detention, and imprisonment, and torture, and other ill-treatment (Amnesty International, 2018, p.6).

Raha Bahreini, an Amnesty International researcher, notes that following the publication of the Amnesty International report on the discrimination against the

minority groups, several social media users protested the use of the word "minority" in the Amnesty International report (Bahreini, 2018). The combination of these reactions highlights two aspects of the ideological implications of the issue of minorities in Iran. Firstly, denial of such kinds of discrimination. The common argument of such people is that we are all human beings, or we are all Iranians, and the majority/minority categories are wrong, and the main problem is the lack of democracy in Iran. Secondly, being a minority in Iranian society is so associated with a sense of inferiority that sometimes even minorities themselves prefer to avoid using this term. This contrasts with the prevailing approach in societies with a democratic legal system, in which the identification of discriminated groups as a minority is considered important and necessary and involves special protections. In these systems, discriminated groups are generally reluctant to be categorized as a minority and, incidentally, seek the legal protections that follow this categorization (Bahreini, 2018).

According to Elling (2013), one of the key issues that triggered the mass protests of minorities in Iran is the issue of linguistic rights and cultural discrimination. By promising the representatives of minority groups in the drafting process of the constitutional law the instruction of minority language in educational institutions, the authorities wrote article 15. However, Elling states that the problem is not the articles and rules in the constitution, but it is the failure of guaranteeing to execute this article. Although small freedom has been given to minorities to publish certain texts in their own native language at the beginning of the revolution, there was still strict control and restrictions on even these few publications (Tohidi, 2009).

Another important factor is the issue of political representation in Iran for minorities. At the beginning of the revolution, there were promises for transforming the “fascist demands,” such as assimilating all minorities into an “Aryan” identity and all minorities should be represented in a parliamentary system with their own identity; Self-rule of people was seen as a solution by some of the leaders of the revolution (Elling, 2013). Elling also states, except for some specific religious minorities being represented in the parliament nominally, no political activism for forming a political organization is allowed, and this was always seen as an act of separatism. Despite formally accepting social and cultural diversity within the political structure of Iran, even those political activities that only have a purpose of promoting cultural and ethnic rights are prohibited by authorities (Shaffer, 2021). In this regard, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran Javid Rehman reports:

Human rights violations affecting many of the ethnic and religious minority groups include the arbitrary deprivation of life and extrajudicial executions; a disproportionate number of political prisoners; arbitrary arrests and detention in connection with a range of peaceful activities such as advocacy for linguistic freedom, organizing or taking part in peaceful protests and being affiliated with opposition parties; incitement to hatred and violence; the forced closure of businesses and discriminatory practices and denial of employment; and restrictions on access to education and other basic services (Rehman, 2019, para. 9).

In addition to these, the issue of core and periphery regions that existed in the Pahlavi era still exists even after the Iranian Revolution. The flow of capital to the central parts of Iran and the neglect of the regions in the borders of Iran (which constitute a

high proportion of non-Persian groups) led to the mass migration of people to the central parts of Iran to find a job and high skilled jobs are not very much developed in the periphery regions (Elling, 2013). Instead, the government opted for an agricultural policy in these regions, but that was not also successful. Inadequate and unfair budget allocation is seen as one of the main reasons for this slow growth and failure in policies to decrease rural unemployment, underemployment, and rural-urban migration (Haghighyeghi, 1990).

Upon all these issues being mentioned, the systematic discrimination of the Azerbaijanis in Iran caused a gap between the national groups within the country as well. Therefore, there are changes proposed by Azerbaijanis to emancipate the discriminated groups; however, as mentioned before, emancipation is defined differently because of the existence of diverse ideologies among Iranian Azerbaijanis. Although we can merge the understanding of most of the Azerbaijanis from emancipation under the term of the right to self-determination, applying the right to self-determination can lead to different outcomes. Categorization of the emancipatory discourses will help to analyze them better. Therefore, in this thesis, the term emancipation is used as the reflection of what three main selected discourses understand from exercising the right to self-determination. These discourses (also mentioned in chapter one) may prefer full independence, federalism in Iran, or reforms within the currently prevailing system in different fields.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **IMPORTANT HISTORICAL EPOCHS FOR AZERBAIJANIS**

This chapter presents some significant epochs of history that influenced identity formation, social movements, and their current discourse articulation. These historical epochs are selected on the basis of explaining the shift of the hegemonic discourses that affected Azerbaijani Turks and, as a result, created a past of injury so that the current discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis would be established on it. Moreover, these epochs would provide us enough information to understand the characteristics of different failed hegemonic discourses in the history of Iran. It is impossible to have a comprehensive analysis of the identity formation, ethnic conflict, and discourse articulation of Azerbaijani Turks living in Iran without knowing their historical background. Each epoch that is explained in this thesis has some kind of link in the creation of the three main discourses that are going to be analyzed. To grasp an understanding of the link between history and today's discourses of Iranian Azerbaijanis, it is important to investigate disruptors, discontinuities, and important events of each period such as ethnic movements, oppression, treaties, and policies, and the hegemonic discourse of the rulers of each epoch. For this purpose, historical events in the Qajar dynasty, as the last Turkic origin ruling dynasty in Iran, the Pahlavi era, and the post-revolutionary Iran, are chosen. The occurrence of the separation of Azerbaijan from the domain of the guarded domains of Iran, social movements against the oppression in the Pahlavi era,

efforts for nation-state building, and the 1979 revolution makes these three epochs critical. It is not possible to read the history of Iran in a historic interval throughout a progressive linear line because what created the turning points in this history was its discontinuities.

### **3.1. Qajar Dynasty (1789 – 1925)**

Qajars were the last Turkic dynasty that ruled Iran, and the coexistence of Persian and Azerbaijani language within the territory of Iran was visible in mostly a non-conflictual manner. The separation of the Azerbaijan domain as a result of the Qajar-Russian war from Iran is a significant event on the identity formation and distinction of Iranian identity and Azerbaijani identity.

#### **3.1.1. Azerbaijani Turks in Qajar Dynasty**

During the Qajar period, Iran was ruled with the name of Guarded Domains of Iran, and different regions of Iran were independent in some respects. Qajars used a traditional governmental system that gave authority to the local rulers, such as regional chiefs who used to be the representative of the central government in the region. These chiefs were officially recognized by the central government. (Ahmadi, 2014). In fact, all the tribes accepted the king's guardianship and privilege to elect local officials, but he approved of the leaders and officials of the tribes, and as a result, the tribes did not pose a problem for the government (Good, 1997). Azerbaijan being a part of this territory, was also an autonomous land ruled by a traditional and

primitive form of federalism. Due to the lack of centralism and relative independence of different regions, there was no ethnic movement, and ethnic identity had not become a political issue. The situation was similar in Azerbaijan, and the borders of Azerbaijani and Iranian identities were not clear (Malekzadeh, 2016).

In the Constitutional Revolution of Iran movement, the uprising of Shaikh Mohammad Khiābāni, as well as the Abolqasem Lahouti uprising that took place in Azerbaijan, had no secessionist slogans or ideas inside (Cottam, 1993). On the other hand, some historians indicate that the Turkic Azerbaijani identity seems to be very bold in both the perspectives of the rulers and the people. According to Musali (2018), the Azerbaijani identity was very well-formed and can be easily observed in the Qajar's time. He also indicates that Azerbaijani identity and language were essential parts of the power relations and politics of Qajar rulers.

From the very beginning of the Qajar rule in Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan not only did not lose its political, economic, and cultural position but also retained its former prestige that existed in the Safavid period. To implicitly indoctrinate this issue, the Qajar kings traditionally chose Azerbaijan and Tabriz for the rule of the Crown Prince - the future king of the country. The first ruler of the Azerbaijan domain during the Qajar period was Abbas Mirza. After the official annexation of North Azerbaijan to Russia and the treaties of Gulistan (October 12, 1813) and Turkmenchay (February 22, 1828), Abbas Mirza officially settled in Tabriz and became the head of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces (Khurmuji, 1965). In his book, written in a travel literature format, Browne (1893) states that the language of the province of



Azerbaijan is Turkish and is adjacent to the Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire on both sides, and the two countries are also inhabited by Turks; The population of Azerbaijan is very similar to the neighboring Turks in terms of language and customs, and the Iranian government is constantly afraid that Azerbaijan might become a part of the Caucasus or Ottoman Empire. It is indicated that each of the languages in the Qajar period had a specific use; for example, many people, although completely fluent in Persian, preferred to speak Turkish, which was the common language in the army. Also, those who were familiar with this language could easily travel throughout Asia. The Arabic language was used only in religious matters (Drouville, 1985). Qajar's rulers' attitude towards different ethnic groups in guarded domains is also indicating that the notion of a modern nation-state and a united Iran with a single nationality did not take place at that time. Jaubert (1968), the French dragoman explains his travel to Azerbaijan and by stating that once Abbas Mirza, the crown prince of Qajar in Azerbaijan, is asked about his homeland, he did not say that I am Iranian; this type of public naming was not known in Iran. The same attitude existed for the Shah of the guarded domains.

### **3.1.2. Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911)**

Despite the Shah of Qajar Nasser al-Din Shah's (1831-1889) efforts to reform the affairs of the guarded domain, the domains were not fully reformed, and his attempts for reform ended by getting assassinated. His son Mozaffar al-Din Shah (1853-1907) left Tabriz to go to Tehran and take the Qajar throne. Like previous rulers, Muzaffar al-Din Shah was raised in Tabriz in a completely Azerbaijani tradition, and due to

his father's long reign, he remained the crown prince and ruler of Azerbaijan until middle age. Muzaffar al-Din Shah's most important act was the proclamation of a constitutional government, and one of its most influential parts was the right of the people of different states to have state and provincial associations. The association's primary role as representing the central government was to oversee local affairs and to collect and allocate regional taxes (Atabaki, 1997). As a result of this right, the provincial council (*Anjoman*) of Tabriz was established in 1906. There were no linguistic or national restrictions in this association. The school guaranteed the writing of languages, regardless of being Persian, Turkish, Arabic.

Following the economic downturn, foreign intervention, and in order to limit Shah's authority and bring more democracy, different segments of the society started protests, and the constitutional movement intensified. The biggest achievements of the constitutional revolutions were the establishment of *Majlis* (parliament), constitutional law, and provincial associations with various local rights. According to Mahammad Amin Rasulzade (1993), the role of Azerbaijan in the constitutional revolution was vital; Azerbaijan was the square of the freedom movement, and Tabriz was the center of its heroism, the role of Tabriz in the revolution was the same as the role of Marseilles in the French revolution and Thessaloniki in the Ottoman revolution. Undoubtedly, the Azerbaijanis living in Baku and Istanbul also played a major role in the formation of the constitutional movement. The role of the Akhtar newspaper, which was published by Azerbaijanis living in Istanbul, in encouraging people to participate in the movement should not be overlooked. It should also be acknowledged that the current of modernity and intellectualism in North Azerbaijan,

which was growing rapidly after the Russian Revolution of 1905, had a great impact on the liberation and modernization movement in Iran, especially in South Azerbaijan (Heyet, 2015). Although North Azerbaijan was under Russian rule, their participation in the Constitutional Revolution and their close cooperation with their compatriots in Iran can be considered a historical event. Mahammad Amin Rasoulzade, who later succeeded in establishing the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, also published the newspaper *Iran-e No* while providing intellectual assistance to the movement. At that time, not only most of the intellectuals abroad were Turks, but also many had migrated to Russia and the Caucasus for work, and after the 1905 revolution, they returned to the country from Russia and joined the constitutional movement (Hashemi, 1999).

Another important event related to the Azerbaijanis that happened in Tabriz during the constitutional movement was the uprising of Mohammad Khiabani (1880–1920). In 1917, Khiabani became one of the key figures of constitutional revolution by reestablishing the Democrat Party and starting a revolt in Tabriz, and captured Tabriz and surrounding areas. With the reestablishment of the Democrat Party (which was a secular progressive and revolutionary party) by Khiabani, the party and the Turkish-centered faction of this organization were revived. In a short time, he took control of East Azerbaijan and its surroundings (Malekzadeh, 2016). The Democrats symbolically changed the name of Azerbaijan to Azadistan (Land of Freedom) to clarify the role of Azerbaijan in history, and by this move, Azerbaijanis got more distinct from Iran although the aim of the Democrat Party was not separation from Iran (Abrahamian, 1982). Abrahamian also indicates that Khiabani's demands from

Tehran were the commence of democratic reforms such as the division of lands, the appointment of a governor trusted by the people for Azerbaijan, the immediate reopening of the National Assembly in Tehran, and establishment of the provincial associations mentioned in constitutional law. At the same time, Azerbaijanis rejected the credibility of two governors, including Ahmad Ghavam, and did not allow him to travel to Tabriz. The pro-Turkish Khiabani turned away from other pro-Persian Democrats, including Ahmad Kasravi, who allied with Tehran entered a new organization that opposed the idea of giving autonomy to various provinces (Abrahamian, 1982).

The concepts of nationality and nationalism that were influencing Iran at that time, although manifested among the Turks as the Iranian nation and Iranian nationalism, but among the Persian intellectuals led to the spread of the Persian nation and nationalism. However, Persian intellectuals who were conservative during the constitutional period promoted Persian nationalism under the guise of Iranian nationalism (Rasoulzade, 1993). The rise of national awareness among Turks in Qajar time can be seen in various situations. According to Rasoulzade (1993, p. 30), "When we say Turkish parliament members or Turkish associations, we should not think that they acted only in the name of being Turkish. The Turkish constitutionalists of Iran made all their sacrifices in the name of a common homeland."

Although the Constitutional Revolution led by Turkic intellectuals can be considered and evaluated as an important step towards the formation and growth of democracy

in Iran, according to the results obtained, it cannot be described as a successful movement (Heyet, 2015). Because in the end, important developments such as the establishment of parliament, the constitution, and provincial associations became history in a short time, and with the sudden and undemocratic shift of power to the Pahlavi regime, all the achievements of the constitutional revolution were deliberately forgotten one after another. The path that was supposed to turn the primitive traditional federalism (Guarded Domains of Qajar) in Iran into modern federalism was blocked. Moreover, the intervention of foreign countries, especially the United Kingdom, turned extremist nationalism which was based on Pan-Persianism, into the official policy of the country in a country that had no ethnic structure in common with any ethnic nationalism (Heyet, 2015).

The Constitutional Revolution, which began with the aim of delegating some of Qajar Shah's powers to the parliament and establishing democracy, gradually became a factor in weakening the Qajar government by increasing the influence of non-national and affiliated elements, eventually leading to Reza Khan's coup d'état. This regime change not only did not contribute to the formation of democracy in Iran but also completely destroyed all the achievements of the Constitutional Revolution, including the establishment of *Majlis*, the Constitution, state and provincial associations, and freedom of linguistic rights. For the first time in the history of Iran, a system based on Persian nationalism was established (Heyet, 2015). While looking at this shift of power, the identity crisis of Azerbaijani Turks in the Qajar period should be taken into consideration. Thus, the problem was not only the new Pahlavi regime that denied the Turkic identity of Azerbaijanis (explained in the next section)

but also the identity crisis among the Azerbaijanis themselves in that period that brought a centralist ethnocentric regime to power. We can observe that the domain of Azerbaijan and its culture, by being the most important domain in the Qajar era, played a huge role at the state and society level. However, the decline of this role towards the end of the Qajar era and its replacement with another hegemonic discourse rise up as a reaction to the Qajars by replacing and reshaping most of the achievements of the Qajar dynasty and establishing a country based on a single identity which is explained in detail in the next section. According to Majd (2008), this shift of power was not very popular among the different segments of society as serious uprisings started against the rise of the first possible Pahlavi Shah in 1925 and 1926 in Azerbaijan, Khorasan, Kurdistan, and Arabistan. The US-backed Pahlavi dynasty remained highly unpopular and constantly needed foreign support and intervention to stay in power (Majd, 2008). Thus, the lack of consent in the society for the new Shah and new establishment triggered conflicts, disagreements, and resentment. Failure of uprisings in Azerbaijan, the blockage of achievements of the constitutional movement, and the diminishing privileges that they had in the Qajar era can be considered among the important reasons for Azerbaijanis to have wounded memory or past of injury.

### **3.2. Pahlavi era (1925 – 1979)**

Pahlavi dynasty officially came to power in 1925. Reza Shah Pahlavi (Reza Khan), the first shah of Pahlavi, was crowned in Golestan Palace. With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the Allies entered Iran. Due to Reza Shah's opposition to the

presence of foreigners in the country, he was deposed from the kingdom and exiled to the island of Mauritius. After Reza Shah, his son Mohammad Reza Shah ascended the throne. Pahlavi dynasty was in power until 1978, and the downfall of Mohammad Reza Shah happened with the 1979 revolution in Iran and the emergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Katouzian, 2000). The establishment of the Azerbaijan People's Government in this era may be considered as the start of a remedy to the past of injury among Iranian Azerbaijanis; however, the crackdown of this government made wounds even deeper, as will be explained in this section.

### **3.2.1. Azerbaijan in the Pahlavi era**

Following the crackdown of Khiabani and seizure of the cultural, political, and social leadership of Azerbaijan by the Persian-centered authorities, the persecution of Turkish-centered activists in Iran spread in the Pahlavi era. During the Pahlavi period, Persianism officially spread, and Turkish-oriented activists and activities were persecuted in Azerbaijani cities, including Urmia. The new Persian officials of Azerbaijan considered any Turkish activities in Azerbaijan as a kind of separatist act (Araghi, 1996). After the Qajar dynasty and nationalist or ethnic movements in that period during the second phase of nationalism in contemporary Iran, which was shaped by the failures of constitutionalism and the crises caused by the outbreak of the First World War, the formation of a unified nation-state based on "Aryan nationalism" became a dominant discourse among elites and modernists. This stage of nationalism was the result of a shift from the discourses of liberalism and pluralism to a single nation-state discourse and political centralism (Towfigh, 2006).

The first strategy of the Iranian nationalists in confronting the issue of the Turks in the history of Iran was to show them as "invaders" and "foreigners." According to Purdavud (1924), this approach was not limited to past historical periods such as Ghaznavids, Seljuks, Khwarazmians, Timurids, Turkmens, Safavids, and Afsharids, but being a Turk was also a contemporary political issue. As in the nationalist and intellectual literature of this period, Qajars were considered as the remnants of "Tatar" looters and "wolves" who sat on the "Persepolis" throne of the Iranian kings and an obstacle to the establishment of a government with Aryan race and its cultures (Purdavud, 1924). Iranian nationalists living in Berlin, influenced by the German Aryan nationalism, which promoted the superiority of the white Aryan race over other races, called the Iranians as "white Aryan race" and claimed that Turks with the "yellow race" (Mongolian) should be separated from Iranians (Motadel, 2014).

In the Pahlavi era, Persian was considered the old and original language of Azerbaijan. In the shadow of these actions, Ahmad Kasravi presented his theory of Azerbaijanis in Iran being Azeri and not Turks in 1925. Ahmad Kasravi claimed that the common identity and language in Azerbaijan is Azeri by using the term "Azeri language"; he believed that the Turkish language later entered Azerbaijan and imposed itself on the Azeri language, and something should be done to bring the people of Azerbaijan back to their historical origin which is Persian (Kasravi, 1993/1925). However, in his articles published in the Egyptian magazine *Al-Irfan*, he acknowledged that this view was political and that it was wrong (Kasravi, 1944). The same policy, which became the official doctrine of the Pahlavi regime in Iran, caused the use of the word Turkish in the original language of the Azerbaijani people



in official and governmental writings to be gradually abandoned and the word Azeri which was the false indicator of Iranian Azerbaijanis with Persian origin to be used in all the diplomatic and official matters. Reza Shah's pan-Iranist policies aimed at transforming a multi-ethnic empire into a single state with a single identity and one nation. Single language, culture, and political power were exercised at that time. It created widespread discontent among religious, national, and linguistic minorities. The policy of closing schools and publications has been very harmful to minorities, especially Azerbaijanis (Rashedi, 2008).

Mahmoud Afshar (1893 – 1983), who was a member of culture minister and judiciary in the Pahlavi era, offers more comprehensive and fundamental policies in establishing a nationalist policy based on the elimination of the works of non-Persian languages in Iran, including Turkish and the introduction of Persian as the national language. In his views, the establishment and operation of the educational system and the executive apparatus necessary for the spread of the Persian language in Iran required a centralized and superior governmental and political power; in a way that this could not be achieved except having a centralist state (Afshar, 1927). Basically, this theorization of nation-state puts its fundamentals in a notion that believes the consistency and permanence of any nation-state occur when there is a powerful and centralist state that can protect itself from any internal and external threats. With the help of the Pahlavi government, widespread use of the term Azeri occurred both in international literature and Iranian literature. As a key figure in this assimilation policy of the Pahlavi government, Afshar states that if the people of Azerbaijan could easily read Turkish newspapers and write something in Turkish and write poetry,

then there would not be any need for the Persian language. Moreover, he indicates that he cannot even tolerate five minutes of a Turkish class in any university or college in Iran. He claims that, If the government accepts this cultural policy and the nation helps the government, whether in Azerbaijan or in other cities, there is no doubt that they can achieve their goal without any hassle and trouble; for fifty years, Azerbaijanis will speak the Persian language of their region, which should be called the "New Azeri" dialect. It must be done by the Azerbaijanis themselves. The Turkish question for Afshar lies between these two solutions: Azerbaijanis are either Iranian or not. If they are not Iranian, then for sure they are not Turkish (Afshar, 1989).

Following these policies, studying, publishing, and even public speaking any other language other than Persian was prohibited (Ghods, 1989). Many associations, schools, institutes promoting languages other than Persian was closed. Moreover, giving non-Persian names to newborn babies was banned, and non-Persian names of many places were renamed (Shaffer, 2002). Overall, Iranian nationalists in this epoch (Pahlavi era), with a reductionist definition of the concept of Iranianism, considered being Iranian equal with being Aryan or Persian, and in this regard, introduced the history of ancient Iran as a historical model. This historical model had its roots in the pre-Islamic Achaemenids and Sasanid empires. This nationalism, under the influence of the political situation and crises after the Constitutional Revolution, the First World War, during the political and military presence of the Ottoman Empire in the western borders of Iran and the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan from Tsarist Russia, considered the Turkish identity in conflict with the Iranian

identity thinking that there is a dangerous threat of the separation of Azerbaijan from Iran. For this reason, anti-Turkism emerged as one of the negative traits of Iranian nationalism. In other words, with the Pahlavi dynasty coming to power, the implementation of ethnic policies instead of national policies, democracy was suffocated (Rashedi, 2008). According to Rashedi (2008), the adoption of such an approach led Turks to be excluded from the definition of being Iranian as one of the ethnic and linguistic groups located in the geography of Iran. The Iranian elite, sensing the danger of the disintegration of Turkic-speaking Azerbaijanis and the possibility of their inclination towards the Ottomans, neglected many Azerbaijani intellectuals, and the government encountered the question of Azerbaijan by ideological means.

### **3.2.2. Azerbaijan People's Government (1945-1946)**

The first Pahlavi period (Reza Khan's rule) ended in 1941 with the occupation of Iran by Allied forces. The arrival of Allied forces in Iran in September 1941 weakened the Iranian repressive apparatus. Suddenly, social conflicts erupted, and various political parties and groups were formed based on existing social cleavages. On September 3, 1945, with the efforts of Jafar Pishevari, the Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP) issued a statement in both Turkish and Persian, signed by 68 prominent Azerbaijani intellectuals and politicians, and officially announced the party's establishment. Immediately after the announcement of the existence of the sect, the Azerbaijan branch of the Tudeh Party and many other smaller organizations joined the ADP (Abrahamian, 1982). Thus, in the first days of its existence, ADP became

the largest political organization in the contemporary history of Azerbaijan. After the end of the first Pahlavi rule and his oppressive policies against national groups within the country, the intellectuals in Azerbaijan were able to meet, communicate and cooperate with their northern compatriots in Soviet Azerbaijan. Thus, they started publishing books and magazines in Azerbaijani Turkish. At that time, Azerbaijan was in a weak economic situation. Azerbaijan, on the one hand, was at the center of tension due to the loss of its economic and political power, and on the other hand, they had to encounter the hardships caused by the occupations of the Soviet Union and World War II (Moradi, 2003). In such a situation, the intellectuals who wanted to save Azerbaijan from the catastrophe caused by oppressive politics and form their own national identity had no choice but to get the help of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and particularly Soviet Azerbaijan. It was by no means possible for the intellectuals of Azerbaijan to expect the Soviet army to leave Azerbaijan so that they could start their activities. These developments, willingly or unwillingly, have been effective in the tendency of the Azerbaijani intellectuals towards socialism. What was observed was the activity of the intellectuals of Azerbaijan for making the Turkish language official and did lots of activities to preserve it for the first time in history (Heyet, 2016).

The statement of the ADP shocked the politicians in Tehran. Some members of parliament called the establishment of ADP unconstitutional and called for the arrest of the party's founders. The negotiations between the representatives of the Democratic Party and the representatives of the central government ended without any results. ADP, which did not get any results from the talks with Tehran, decided

to form the National Assembly of Azerbaijan. The Constituent Assembly sent the final resolution to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Second Pahlavi Shah), the National Assembly, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the resolution, it was emphasized Azerbaijan's autonomy by mentioning that Azerbaijan does not want to separate from Iran or join any other countries. It was also indicated in the resolution that this government is being established based on the provincial association law, which was started in the constitutional law (Moradi, 2003). As a result, Azerbaijan People's Government established its parliament and started planning for its own election. For the first time in the history of Iran, women got the right to vote in elections in Azerbaijan People's Government. The Turkish language started to be taught officially in schools and colleges. Azerbaijani theaters and concerts took place in Tabriz and surrounding cities. Land reforms, which became a very popular policy of the government, also occurred during this period (Rahmanian, 2017).

Finally, the Azerbaijan People's Government fell in 1946 following the support of Moscow and the invasion of the central government and military of Iran. Most government leaders were forced to leave Tabriz without any serious resistance and went to Soviet Azerbaijan. The army brutally killed supporters of the Azerbaijan People's Government. Turkish books and newspapers published at the time were collected from homes and set on fire in the squares. Once again, the Turkish language was prohibited in Iran (Moradi, 2003).

As the freedom of learning and practicing their own culture and language got interrupted again by this phenomenon, it made the historical wounds of Azerbaijanis

even worse; however, after learning that there are possibilities for liberation, the Separation Literature got created, which manifested itself in the Azerbaijani literature, poetry, and art mentioning about the forceful separation of North and South Azerbaijan (Qaffarov, 2008).

### **3.3. Islamic Republic of Iran (1979 – present)**

Although on the verge of the 1979 Revolution, the Shah's government sought to industrialize the economy and carry out land reforms, as well as modernize the cultural sphere, its strict conservative policies in the political and legal spheres deepened the country's economic, social, and political cleavages. These cleavages finally resulted in mass protests and resistance against the Shah regime. In 1979 with the return of Ruhollah Khomeini to Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran declared its victory. The important epoch in this period was the rise of the reformist government in Iran, which promised the execution of minority-related constitutional articles, and its failure to achieve which led to a disappointment and increased ethnic tension in the country, which is illustrated in the following section.

#### **3.3.1 Azerbaijanis and first years of post-revolutionary Iran**

As opposed to the Persian national identity, which used to be implemented in the Pahlavi era to unite all segments of the society and resulted in failure, the IRI tried to use a religious identity in Iran. Due to the same policies, IRI insists on not providing an accurate population of Azerbaijani Turks and ethnic identities. Also,

the only minority group recognized in the constitution of the IRI are certain religious minorities. A study of various articles published by foreign scholars (outside Iran) on the process of national awakening among the Turks in Iran shows that these scholars examine the national activities of the Turks and the protests in the form of ethnic-minority movements and in the framework of theories related to social movements.

During the revolution, nearly no national demands were made in Iran. Only after the victory of the revolution did national demands and ethnic rights come up. During the revolution, some political figures, including Ayatollah Khomeini, indicated that the oppressed peoples would be given the right to self-determination. Khomeini generally supported the notion of resistance against oppression and called upon the uprising of different nations to determine their own future by standing against despotism and inequalities. According to him: "...The nations themselves should carry out something. They should not sit idle waiting for their governments to get involved in these issues. They will act only on those issues that will serve their interests" (Khomeini, 1979, p. 502). The country's most powerful religious and political party ruled by the most prominent religious leaders of IRI, the Islamic Republic Party, also stated in a statement that the language, literature, culture, and traditions of every nation are worthy of respect. They claimed that people are free to use their national language, literature, and culture; ethnic and national discrimination is haram (Morshedizad, 2001).

According to Riaux (2012), although the Azerbaijanis showed a common position on the protection of national rights, their views for the revival and development of national culture, language, and literature were different. At first, attempts were made in the provinces to resolve the issue independently from below without waiting for the consent of the new Iranian leadership. At this stage, the issue of national and cultural rights, especially the mother tongue, became more prominent in the activities of non-political socio-cultural organizations with a background of socio-political and democratic demands. Riaux also states that these rights were not advocated separately but mainly in conjunction with anti-imperialist, national-democratic slogans. Established in Tehran in 1979, *Anjoman-e Azerbaijan* (Azerbaijan Society) made national issues a key part of its activities, raising the political and national demands of not only Azerbaijanis but also all Iranian peoples. In their statements, they called for the recognition of the rights of the Turkic people, the expansion of the functions and status of the Turkish language. Azerbaijan Society, the main members of which were prominent intellectuals, put forward the idea of establishing self-governing bodies in the provinces of Azerbaijan. At the same time, they wanted all central departments, ministries, cultural, economic, and even judiciary issues to be in the hands of provincial councils, and the members of these councils to be elected independently by Azerbaijanis. Azerbaijan Society was in favor of resolving the national issue in Iran on the basis of democratic principles. These requirements were mainly to be implemented within the state borders of Iran. In other words, they aimed to restore the legitimacy of the Turkish identity in Iran (Riaux, 2012).



During this period, the Muslim People's Republic Party (MPRP), founded on February 25, 1979, was particularly active among political organizations fighting for the rights of Iranian Azerbaijanis. The leader of this MPRP was one of the most influential religious leaders of the country, Seyid Mohammad Kazim Shariatmadari. Party's Azerbaijan branch was based on liberal and democratic values. Shariatmadari chose the liberal path as a method of tactical struggle and opposed the participation of the clergy in administrative positions of politics, especially in the executive branch. In a statement to the Liberation newspaper, Shariatmadari said that autonomy is the right of Azerbaijanis and that he wanted provincial associations to be established (Morshedizad, 2001). Far from being revolutionary, Shariatmadari repeatedly emphasized in his official statements that Azerbaijanis should achieve their demands with reforms. However, many party members believed in radical actions to ensure the national rights of the Azerbaijani people. Although the party's press was published in Persian, it was dedicated to the problems of Azerbaijan. It should be noted that although the party declared itself as the defender of all Iranian people, it paid more attention to the issue of Azerbaijan (Tagiyeva, 1997). Khomeini's exclusion of the Shariatmadari from the post-revolutionary process, and disagreements between them in drafting and adoption of the constitutional law, led to a breakdown in relations between the two religious leaders. The constitutional law of the Islamic Republic of Iran finally got drafted by the *Majles-e Khobregân-e Rahbari* (Assembly of Experts), which is only constituted of selected religious leaders of IRI. All these disagreements and tensions were the indicator of the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran will also ignore the rights of ethnic minorities.

Despite all the efforts mentioned, it can be observed that although there was an emphasis on preserving all the rights for national minorities at the beginning of the revolution, there is no executive guarantee for minority-related laws.

### **3.3.2. Reforms, social movements, and repression**

After the victory of Mohammad Khatami in the presidential election in 1997, the Iranian political scene witnessed the presence of a current in the government that criticized some of the dominant discourses in Iranian governance. Khatami and his supporters, known as *Reformists (Eslah-Talaban)* within the government, challenged the *Principalists (Osul-Garāyān)* who had military institutions such as the IRGC, in their grip on the power during the post-revolution period. The victory of Mohammad Khatami, who ran in the presidential election with the slogan "Iran for all Iranians," provoked various reactions at that time. Some opponents of the Islamic Republic of Iran referred to the reformists as the lever of confidence in the regime. According to some, whenever the level of expectations for change rose in Iran, the regime reduced the level of social upheaval by promoting the reformist discourse and confiscating popular demands was making the voters think that there are still possibilities for change and reform within the IRI. Some other considered this process as an inevitable process for the Islamic Republic of Iran in the transition to a state governed by political rationality.

Khatami's election as president was considered an important victory for democracy in Iran. Along with several democratic and social reform promises on his election

platform (Jahanbegloo, 2001). Khatami won the sympathy of Azerbaijanis by promising to ensure the rights of national minorities under Article 15 of the Iranian constitution. Azerbaijanis, who make up the majority of voters, voted for Khatami. The reformist government had a different approach to the issue of national and ethnic affiliation. For them, the National affiliation of Iranians should remain within the framework of the Persian language, and ethnic affiliation should remain in the cultural sphere and not enter the political arena (Shahed, 2021). According to Khatami, Iran is a country with ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences. Being an Iranian is an identity that transcends all these differences. Reformists believed that Iranianism should have included Sunni, Shia, Persian and Turkish identities within itself (Keskin, 2005). To achieve this kind of inclusivity under the identity of being an Iranian, Khatami should have provided the social and individual citizenship rights of the society members. Although the idea of promising citizenship rights to all the Iranian citizens regardless of their ethnic, religious, and linguistic background changed the political atmosphere in the country and made many people hopeful about the country's future for the first years of the reformist government, later they failed to practice these promises. This blockage of all the efforts of Azerbaijanis to reach their ethnic and linguistic rights in these years started Azerbaijan National Movements outside and within Iran (Cavadbeyli, 2014). These movements could not become influential in their national movement, which was based on the Turkish consciousness and uniting politically active forces in Iran, as in previous years. The reason for this was the lack of the perfect mechanism and experience (Cavadbeyli, 2015).

The widespread presence of Azerbaijanis each year in the Babak Fort is one of the most important collective actions of Azerbaijani Turks after the revolution. The presence of hundreds of thousands of Turks in Babak Fort, carrying placards with national themes and holding political rallies in which nationalist symbols were used, showed the presence of a movement in the Iranian political scene that is neither Principalist nor Reformist. According to Khorshidi (2017), The popularity of these annual rallies forced the military and intelligence institutions of the Islamic Republic to react and prevented the annual Babak Fort gatherings from taking place due to the so-called security issues. This period coincided with the period of extensive activity of Azerbaijani students in universities and the publication of hundreds of publications, holding Turkish poetry nights and various festivals (Khorshidi, 2017). As mentioned in chapter two and also reported in Amnesty International reports nearly all the gatherings, peaceful protests, environmentalist campaigns, student activism in the universities were harshly cracked down on and repressed by the official security organizations of IRI regardless of the fact that the government was a conservative Principalist one, or it was a more “democratic” Reformist government.

One of the most important consequences of global change in the world is the democratization process that had lots of effects in Iran. The democratization period became one of the means of pressure on Iran by major powers. On the other hand, the continuation of the anti-democratic situation in Iran made the national movements such as Azerbaijan National Movement more powerful (Riaux, 2008). Riaux states after the revolution, the attitude of the political and socio-political

movements formed by the Azerbaijani Turks in Iran to resolve their national issue at different stages of history differed depending on the events happening in the world and the region as well as the existing socio-political atmosphere in Iran. He also states that the Azerbaijani Turkish language and culture were always the main themes that were prior to the other issues in the agenda of the Azerbaijan National Movement. Due to its extremely diverse heterogenous characteristic and different historical experiences in different fronts causes difficulties in the mass mobilization of the National Movement of Azerbaijan. Different understanding of political morality, strategy, and internal contradictions also block the communication of different Azerbaijani national movements with each other.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYZING THE DISCOURSES OF AZERBAIJANI TURKS IN IRAN

A reading of the political discourses prevailing in the Turkic-speaking regions of Iran indicates that the emphasis on Turkic identity have become the dominant discourse in the political and collective minds of various Turkish activists, which manifests itself in different stages at different times and is rooted in the new socio-political demands of the Azerbaijani Turks in Iran as we discussed in the previous chapter. After the continuation of the oppression against Iranian Azerbaijanis for a long time and the blockage of civil, peaceful, and lawful demands made other various non-nationalist movements joined the national movement of Azerbaijan by emphasizing the perseverance of Turkish identity and its rights (Shaffer, 2002). What forms the basis of this attention to Turkic identity can be defined in the context of the Azerbaijan issue in Iran. This chapter divides these movements into three different discourses, then discusses how they are articulated and if they contain resentment and to see whether the definitions of the literature around politics of resentment and its elements exist in the same way that is explained in the theoretical framework or not. Also, it is analyzed if these discourses reinforce their dependence on an antagonistic “othering” and whether they construct an oppressive hierarchy or not.

#### **4.1. Legal Positivist discourse**

One of the most important indicators of the level of development of the struggle for national rights was the initiative of several Azerbaijani representatives working in government of IRI agencies to ensure the rights and raise the status of the Azerbaijani language based on Iranian legislation. This is an important indicator because of the fact that it created a potential for possible reforms in resolving some of the problems of the discriminatory politics against Iranian Azerbaijanis within the framework of law in Iran. Moreover, the authoritarianism in the political structure of IRI creates an image in which any reform would not seem possible without the consent of the centralized higher authority within the country (Parsa, 2020). Analyzing this discourse by selecting a certain organization is not possible as there are different Azerbaijani representatives in various political spheres of the government. That is why Iranian parliament members, provincial officials, and Imams of Friday Prayers, who are appointed directly by the supreme leader of IRI for each city, are taken into consideration when analyzing this discourse. The term legal positivism is used to refer to the representatives of this discourse because they all put their political discourse forward within the limits of the laws of IRI. The main characteristics of these representatives being obedient to what is written in the book of Islamic Republic's law is the main factor for choosing this term for referring to them.

#### **4.1.1. Content of legal positivist discourse**

After the election of the reformist government of Khatami and his promises to promote the ethnic and linguistic rights of all Iranian citizens, minorities were very hopeful for gaining the executive guarantee of what is stated in the constitutional law of IRI. However, as mentioned in the previous chapters, none of these rights were provided. That is why many Azerbaijani government officials started expressing their demands to the government within the framework of the IRI legislation.

After the establishment of IRI, the fifth election of the parliament elections in 1999 marked the most important moment in the introduction of legal positivist discourse into the parliament of Iran. During this election, Mahmudali Chehregani, a candidate from Tabriz, was able to gather a considerable number of votes in the first round of the election, heading to the second round. In the second phase, in which he had gained more popularity, he was forced to withdraw his candidacy and was sent to prison after getting arrested (Amnesty International, 2000). Chehregani emphasized the implementation of the constitutional articles on the rights of minorities which exists in Article 15 and Article 19 of the Constitution Law of Islamic Republic of Iran. He later found that this type of legal demand is inadequate to secure the national rights of Azerbaijanis set up a new political organization that its demands went beyond the Islamic Republic of Iran's legal system. That is why Chehregani and his political organization will be analyzed under the independence-seeking discourse.

Attempts were made in the IRI parliament to gain some autonomy to decide for and help the development of Azerbaijan. By the leadership of Masoud Pezeshkian, the



parliament member elected from East Azerbaijan province from the city of Tabriz and the former health minister in Khatami's government, Fraction of Turkic Regions has established. Reports indicate that this fraction has 100 members in the IRI parliament that has 290 seats overall (Jafari, 2017). This faction was formed with the aim of preventing and solving livelihood, economic and educational problems in Turkish-populated areas so that there is a development balance within the country (Saei, 2016). The chairperson of the Fraction of Turkic Regions, Pezeshkian, believes that centralism of political power in Iran is one of the main problems of the underdevelopment of periphery regions. Many times, he stated that there should be a federal political system in Iran that gives provincial autonomy to different regions of Iran, including Azerbaijan. He claims that Azerbaijan can prosper and preserve its own natural resources and use them in a more efficient way by having its own autonomy. In one of his interviews, he states:

What Rasoolullah [Prophet of Islam] was doing in his time with the tribes was something similar [Federalism]. We should do whatever Hazrat Ali was doing. At that time, Malik al-Ashtar could appoint the army commander, could appoint managers of organizations, collects tax, cuts tax, this means he has power, governance, and he is governing. But what we [Islamic Republic] created is nothing like that, and what we structured is not even like what has been constructed in the other parts of the world. Then where is the problem? Were all our presidents problematic, or is it our structure that is problematic? (Monali R, 2020, 0:14 – 0:58).

Although there is an attempt to reform and bring egalitarianism by giving federal autonomy to the region of Azerbaijan, as indicated in the thesis's theoretical

framework, this discourse is established on the terms of the hegemonic discourse of the Islamic Republic. Instead of expressing a new form of thinking and possibilities for the proposed political system by Pezeshkian, he chooses to use an Islamic terminology that bases itself within the political structure of the IRI. The inability to define a self-structured system without referencing Islamic terms in the existing hegemonic discourse of Iran is clearly observed in this discourse.

Nader Ghazipour, a member of the Iranian Parliament between 2008 – 2020 elected from Urmia, an Azerbaijani city located in the West-Azerbaijan Province of Iran and the first vice-chairperson of Fraction of Turkic Region, in a live tv program expresses his demands and his discontent from the central government in the issue of the drying of Urmia Lake as an environmental disaster. Various environmental campaigns that began in the social media and various gatherings in 2010 resulted in a widespread protest in September 2011. In September 2011, Azerbaijani Turks were in the streets in various cities, including Tabriz and Urmia, accusing the Islamic Republic of Iran of deliberately drying up the lake. In these demonstrations, many Azerbaijanis were arrested, and the government used violence to suppress the demonstrators (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Drying of Urmia Lake is considered as being very dangerous as it is the second biggest salty lake in the world, and the drying of the lake could lead to the forced migration of people surrounding (mainly Azerbaijani provinces). By referring to Azerbaijan as wounded Azerbaijan, Ghazipour wants to remind it was the region that had many martyrs in the Iran-Iraq war. Later Ghazipour states these words:

...We must save Azerbaijan by providing justice. We [Azerbaijanis] will not migrate; we will not settle in the desert. We will take out the eyes of those who look in a bad way to the Islamic Republic of Iran. If possible, we will dig the ground with our hands and prepare food for ourselves. We have shown this in the past as well. For the liberation of Iran, our women sold their gold and jewelry to the oppressive Russians to liberate Iran. Imam Khomeini said that Azerbaijan has been and will be a supporter of Islam all the time ... they oppress our farmers. If you sit next to our farmers like us, you will surely cry like I am crying now... (Youssefi, 2017, 0:01).

The same issue mentioned in the claims of Pezeshkian exists in this speech by Ghazipour. Instead of proposing a systematic reform or solutions to the problem, he bases his argument on Islamic terms and with reference to the leader of the Islamic Republic. The emotional reaction by him is also a result of resentment that avoids creativity and leads to a lack of dynamism proposing solutions to the problems as mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter.

As also mentioned in the second chapter, security organizations of IRI had arrested many Azerbaijanis and cracked down on the peaceful environmentalist gatherings of Urmia Lake, and Ghazipur publicly requested the head of the parliament Ali Larijani to ask his brother Ayatollah Amoli Larijani, chief justice of IRI to kindly free the arrested activists. On the scene of parliament, he stated:

We are very grateful to your brother because, during his visit to Urmia, he gave a special order to release all the prisoners of Lake Urmia; we thank him as the people of Azerbaijan. A number of others

were arrested in Tehran on this issue, and we ask that Ayatollah Amoli Larijani issues an order for their release (ISNA, 2014, para. 2).

The same reactionary attitude that seeks legitimacy for its discourse on the grounds of the hegemonic discourse exists in this speech. By putting its own demands in a weaker position and instead of criticizing the unlawful arrest of activists in peaceful gatherings, Ghazipour expresses his gratitude towards the head of the parliament and chief judiciary for releasing some of the activists. One may claim that the members of a minority group who are legally pursuing the rights of Azerbaijanis in parliament do not have any alternative rather than using the Islamic Republic terminology in order to avoid elimination from the political system. In addition, this kind of approach to put forward a political discourse may be considered as a strategy to remain in politics. However, it should be noted that both Ghazipour and Pezeshkian got disqualified by Guardian Council, and their candidacy was removed from parliament elections and presidential elections, respectively (Rasaneh, 2021; see also Radio Farda, 2020).

Being elected with the majority of the votes in the 2016 Iranian legislative elections from Urmia, Ghazipour explains his goals and campaigns in a gathering in the same city with these words:

We did not establish the country easily so that we sent every child and foal there [parliament]. Parliament is not a place for a foal. Parliament is not a place for children, it is not a place for women. It is the place of men. You send them [Women] there [Parliament] then when some bad things happen to them, you will lose your honor. Send real men to parliament so that they can get your rights ... On the day

when I was just elected to parliament, I was asked why you became a parliament member candidate? I replied that I had come to take the rights of the Azerbaijani people from the throat of Tehran... (VOA Farsi, 2016, 3:26 – 9:35).

The level of resentment is clearly noticeable in this speech. Hatred, anger, and insult towards the central government and the dominant group in the country turn to a reaction that reproduces the same terms that were used to insult the dominated once. The ethnic tension has always been high because of the existing everyday racism against Azerbaijani Turks in Iran being called “*Tork-e Khar*” (The donkey Turk), mostly by the dominant Persian groups in everyday literature and sometimes as a joke (Konkar, 2006). The reproduction of the same term being directed to the dominant group by Ghazipour is an indicator of this resentment that uses the existing discriminatory discourse to present its own discourse.

After being asked about his plans regarding the establishment of the Fraction of Turkic Regions by a Journalist, Ghazipour had an argument regarding a historical, ethnic issue in the Parliament of Iran. After the tension had increased Ghazipour, hit the journalist in the face and tried to break his recording device. Later he told the press that he was joking, and he always had respect for journalists (International Press Institute, 2016). In the recorded file of the interview, Ghazipour states:

Go to [ask these questions from] those who could not defend your *namus* [honor]. We [Azerbaijanis] defended your *namus*. Go see the wars in the history, in eight years of Holy Defense [Iran-Iraq war] what we did and what we did not (Mohammad Retweet, 2016, 00:03 – 00:34) ... You are against Islam; you are against Governance of

Jurist [Islamic Republic's sharia system] because the origin of Islam is Azerbaijan. Shia is Azerbaijan, and Safavids were Azerbaijanis (Mohammad Retweet, 2016, 00:51 – 01:16).

Ghazipour justified his approach by claiming that the journalist raised his questions “badly” (International Press Institute, 2016), however even by accepting the fact that the questions from the journalist may target the ethnicity of the former parliament member, the use of violence by him cannot be justified. Justifying his positions and discourse with the historical events of Azerbaijan and referring to a masculine and glorious past is another indicator of resentment and reactionary approach that we can observe in this particular issue.

Different kinds of demands in reaction to the discrimination against Azerbaijanis can be seen in the discourse of the religious leaders in Azerbaijan (specifically Imams of Friday Prayers). Imams of Friday Prayers are politically very powerful in their own region as they are the representative of the supreme leader and have a particular social status. These religious leaders can even intervene in social, legal, political affairs of their regions and use their social status or Friday sermons to present their demands within the limits of Sharia law and *Velayat-e faqih* (Governance of the Jurist). After the Cockroach Cartoon Controversy in 2006 and the mass protests of Azerbaijanis in many provinces of Iran, Imam of Friday Prayers of Ardabil Ayatollah Hasan Ameli, in the Friday sermon, demanded the judiciary to act as soon as possible and show no mercy for those who draw and published the cartoon in the state newspaper. Azerbaijani Turks being drawn as a cockroach in the state newspaper Iran in 2006 had led to huge street protests in the Azerbaijani cities such as Urmia,

Tabriz, Naghadeh, Ardabil. Police and IRGC forces then cracked down on the protestors by killing, injuring, and detaining them (Konkar, 2006). According to Ameli:

About what happened on Saturday, apart from the few professional ethnocentrists, the rest of us young people came out to streets to satisfy their feelings and protest. But those young people did not realize that it was the enemy's bullet that targeted their pure emotions. According to some Western diplomats living in Tehran, this case was made to divert the focus from the nuclear issue ... We call on the authorities to pay attention to the non-political roots of this issue, which was not controlled from within the country. When I was talking to the security officials, I emphasized that they should differentiate the public protestors with pure intentions with the other professionals and free the public protesters from prisons (Darolershad, 2012, 23:10).

Ayatollah Ameli uses the same kind of rhetoric as other parliament members and officials while stating his demands. Firstly, he gives some examples from Hazrat Ali's life and claims what the newspaper did was a *Fitna* (sedition) which was done by enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and denied the systematic discrimination in Iran. He concludes that enemies created *Fitna* to make everyone think that it is the Islamic Republic that is discriminating against people, but however the real cause of *Fitna* reveals itself after the incident, and then everyone will realize who is the guilty one.

The third large-scale protest of the Azerbaijani Turks in previous years took place in November 2015. The broadcast of a television show entitled "Fitileh" on the state tv

channel of the Islamic Republic of Iran television caused a wave of protests in Azerbaijani cities. In the play, a father and a Turkish child were depicted with low and backward IQs that the Turkish child could not understand the difference between a toothbrush and a toilet brush. This humiliating image was reminiscent of the long-standing humiliation of the Turks in Iran, who had become the subject of various jokes. Protests against a comedy TV program that portrayed an Azerbaijani Turk family who cannot differentiate between the toilet brush and toothbrush once again swept through Azerbaijani cities in Iran, with the predominant slogans of the Azerbaijanis, focusing on Turkic identity, protesting against ethnic discrimination, and oppression challenged the centralist political discourse. Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) officials later announced that this program was an “unintentional mistake” and admitted that the program was insulting (Bezhan, 2015). Former Imam of the Friday Prayer in Tabriz Mohsen Mojtahed Shabestari (in office between 1997 – 2017) sent a letter to the supreme leader of IRI Ali Khamenei by expressing the demands of Azerbaijanis and condemning the insulting program that was broadcasted from the official state TV channel. In his letter Shabestari claims:

According to some quotes, a program has been broadcasted on the IRIB’s channel that allegedly insulted the Azeri dialect and the zealous people of Azerbaijan. Now condemning this misguided move, it is hoped that the esteemed officials will always take care of such cases, even if it was unintentional, to avoid it happening again. We are grateful that the IRIB has taken appropriate action to dismiss those involved (Islamic Republic News Agency, 2015, para.2).



What is interesting about the letter is the fact that although Shabestari accepts that there was an insult to the people of Azerbaijan, he prefers to use the term “Azeri dialect” as the target of the insult. The word zealous refers to the Iran-Iraq war, and Azerbaijanis being one of the most important groups defending Iran by participating in the war with high numbers and is used many times (Farsnews, 2020; see also Ale-Hashem 2021; Khamenei, 2020; Ahmadinejad, 2009) in the same context.

#### **4.1.2. Analysis of legal positivist discourse**

All the mentioned prominent parliament members and Imams of Friday Prayers undoubtedly believe that the emancipation of Azerbaijanis from ethnic and linguistic discrimination can easily be achieved within the framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Articulation of this discourse shows that Islam is believed to be the only element that can fight this discrimination and can resolve the ethnic issues by creating a broader concept of religion that would unite all the ethnic groups and be the bridge between them. This discourse explains all the current violations and discriminations within IRI in with foreign intervention does not provide any definition on how the mechanism of this foreign intervention is working.

There are several main problematic features regarding the articulation and effectiveness of this discourse according to this thesis’s theoretical framework. Firstly, the definition of Azerbaijani identity is not provided concretely. The subjectivity of this definition makes the Azerbaijani identity not to be self-defined, and as a result, instead of affirmation of the “self,” this discourse always tries to

negate the “other.” Thus, at some point, Azerbaijani identity becomes a masculine identity which takes the right of people from the throat of the centralist government, and its manly features antagonize women; at some other points, the othering process becomes ethnic and targets the dominant ethnic group, or sometimes foreign interventionists such as imperialist powers are considered as the antagonized other and the cause of all the problems—not having a self-defined identity definition results in using the same antagonizing and oppressing terms that are previously used to target the Azerbaijanis by the dominant hegemonic discourse. As explained in chapter two, the insulting and racist term “donkey” is often used by non-Turkic groups to refer to Turks (Shaffer, 2000). Borrowing the same kind of insulting terms and using them by Nader Ghazipour indicates that there is resentment within this discourse. Referring to the non-Turkic parliament members as “foals” is an indicator of the revenge of Ghazipour by moralizing the insulting terms that are previously used by others and reproducing them in a different format for his own use. Moreover, the words Azerbaijani, Turk, Azeri, Azerbaijani Turks, and Azeri Turks are used interchangeably without considering the historical and conceptual background of each one.

Secondly, the inclusivity of this discourse is very limited. As this discourse is only presented by those who gain their social status by being a Shia Muslim Azerbaijani, it either has an antagonistic relationship with the other identity, or it does not have any relationship with the rights and demands of other national groups. For instance, the patriarchal system of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its supporters would not allow this discourse to consider the rights and demands of the feminist movements

within Azerbaijan or other parts of Iran. This can easily be observed in Ghazipour's speech about the superiority and honor of an Azerbaijani man in comparison to Azerbaijani women.

Thirdly, this discourse only finds its value and emancipation within the Islamic Republic of Iran, which in itself is one of the causes of the systematic discrimination in Iran according to the human rights reports that are presented in this thesis. Therefore, considering Ameli or Ghazipour's requests from the head of the parliament and the chief judiciary to resolve some difficulties existing in Azerbaijan would not be effective to solve the core problem, but it may heal some minor wounds. Pezeshkian believes that the federalist system within the framework of IRI will be a complete solution to the discrimination problem. However, considering the securitized concept of Azerbaijani identity in Iran and systematic discrimination of IRI, this discourse would not provide any solutions, but it will just base itself on the already existing oppressive IRI discourse, which has the potential to antagonize and arrest any individual or organization by linking them to the foreign intervention. For example, Ameli's Friday sermon, which considers some of the protestors as the causes of Fitna and links them with foreign intervention, is in complete contrast with the human rights reports regarding the arrestment of Azerbaijani activists in Iran. Consequently, not only this discourse would not emancipate the discriminated Azerbaijanis, but it will reproduce the current oppressive structure of IRI.

Finally, taking into account resentment's definition of the ascetic ideal and its reflection on the priestly class, defined legal positivist discourse can be considered

as the politics that allows suffering to reach its goals. Ghazipour's claim about the Azerbaijani women who sold their jewelry to Russians to save Iran from foreign intervention or using the is a good example of enabling a type of politics in which sacrifice, martyrdom, and woundedness are always encouraged. According to the concept of ressentiment, the problematic part for these kinds of solutions is that what he calls "priestly class" may heal the suffering but not the cause of it because the solution that they offer is not bodily and is spiritual (referring to God and the promises of heaven). The exact same methodology is used in the IRI framework that promotes sacrifice and misery at any cost in order to reach the ascetic ideal by claiming that God is the only one that can provide a permanent solution. As a result, more sacrifice and misery can even mean a better reward from God. The use of the term "zealous" while referring to Azerbaijan in Shabestari's letter is also the indicator that promotes the sacrifices that Azerbaijan made for Iran. Ameli and Pezeshkian's speeches contain referrals to the golden age of Islam (prophet's era) and Ali's government as an ascetic ideal.

#### **4.2. Independence seeking discourse**

The Independence seeking discourse is one of the main and maybe the most popular discourse among the emancipatory discourses of Azerbaijanis. This particular discourse is unique in the sense that it states that the emancipation of Azerbaijanis in Iran can only be possible within their own independent state, and unlike the other two discourses, it does not consider any future for Azerbaijanis within Iran. SANAM (Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement) is the political organization

that is considered as one of the main and oldest representatives of this discourse. Published interviews, official organizational documents of this movement, and speeches of its prominent founding members are the basis of this thesis's analysis of independence discourse. Mentioned in the legal positivist discourse, Mahmudali Chehregani shifted his legal positivist discourse after being forced out of the parliamentary elections in Iran to an independence discourse that demands the emancipation of Azerbaijanis by going beyond the framework of existing legislation in Iran. Looking from the Azerbaijan region in Iran, the Republic of Azerbaijan is geographically located in the northern position. That is why this discourse names the Azerbaijan region in Iran as Southern Azerbaijan and the Republic of Azerbaijan as Northern Azerbaijan.

#### **4.2.1. Content of independence-seeking discourse**

An important part of the independence-seeking discourse is the definition that it provides for a nation. Nation in this discourse is defined by ethnic origins. Therefore, the Nation of Turk (*Türk Milləti*) is used to define the people who are ethnically Turk regardless of where they are living, and Turks are considered as a united whole in this discourse. Geographic locations are used to avoid confusion when referring to different Turkic groups. For instance, SANAM mentions the Turkic people in Iran as such:

A large part of the Turkic nations, which has given great geniuses to world culture and left a rich legacy of statehood to mankind, is still

groaning in Iran, which is a prison of nations deprived of even the most basic rights (SANAM, 2013, para.2).

The right to independence of Southern Azerbaijan from Iran is defined as referring to the framework of the United Nations resolutions regarding granting independence to colonial people (SANAM, 2013, para.3). SANAM believes that Southern Azerbaijan is in danger because of the exploitation of its resources and being oppressed by a racist system in the current geography of Iran. The emancipation of Turkic people in Iran from this exploitation cannot be achieved by asking for help from the oppressor itself, and the method of emancipation should be put into international rules and regulations. According to SANAM:

The maintenance of colonialism and racism is not only an international crime but also a threat to public peace. Conflicts over the struggle to eliminate colonialism and racism cannot be achieved by the governing state's internal policies but can be resolved by international demands (SANAM, 2013, para.3).

This discourse considers the independence of non-Persian oppressed nations as emancipation, and on the basis of this idea, they don't officially recognize the legitimation of any government in IRI (SANAM, 2013). Consequently, SANAM refers to the resolutions of the United Nations and demands for the emancipation of Southern Azerbaijan by stating that there is racial discrimination and exploitation in Iran. Thus, the right to self-determination for this discourse is the establishing an independent state to have control over its resources and gain their social, cultural, and political autonomy. Three main principles of SANAM are Turkism (*Türkçülük*),

modernity (*Çağdaşlık*), and freedom of belief (*İnanç Özgürlüğü*). SANAM defines Turkism by the principles of Ziya Gökalp and states:

...Turkism is not a political party. It is a scientific, philosophical, aesthetic school. In other words, it is a way of working and innovating in terms of culture. Prominent public figure and poet Alibey Huseynzadeh also emphasizes that Turkism has no political nature. At the same time, Turkism is not completely indifferent to political ideologies. Because Turkish culture, along with other ideologies, has political ideologies. For example, Turkism can never come to an agreement with the oppressive regime of clericalism and theocracy. Turkism is a modern trend and can only be reconciled with ideologies of a modern nature ... For us, the goal of Turkism is to create a Turkic national culture and national identity. This ideology is complemented by freedom of belief and Western culture. (SANAM, 2013, para.9).

By this principle, this discourse puts Turkic culture at its origin and isolates itself from the Islamic Republic of Iran and its theocratic government. The second principle, which is modernity, is believed to be originated from ancient Turkic roots. SANAM claims that the Turkic culture has always been a pioneer in different topics of modernity. The second principle of SANAM's charter states:

Studies show that in the early days (during the primitive community), there was a Mediterranean culture that was common among the peoples living on the shores of the Mediterranean. This culture was created with the help of the Egyptians, Sumerians, Hittites, Assyrians, Phoenicians, and others. From the Mediterranean culture, the ancient Greek culture, and the Roman culture were born, and from this, the eastern and western cultures were born ... The old Turks were freed from religious extremism and torture, and their liberation from

fanaticism and religious monopoly made the Turks very merciful to both women and other peoples. The ancient Turks are both democrats and ancient feminists who respect women's rights. Another reason why Turks are feminists is that Shamanism is based on the sacred power of women. Thus, no other nation has given women the same rights and respect as the ancient Turks. (SANAM, 2013, para.13 & para.15).

The third principle of SANAM's charter is the principle of freedom of belief. By equating ideological freedom with the general concept of freedom, SANAM's charter concludes that:

SANAM puts freedom of belief as one of its main requirements. And it believes in the right of every person to self-determination. Freedom of belief is considered one of the fundamental "natural rights" that no state can deny. The nature of the human mind is such that no external force can force it to do anything. Man must be free from any violence and coercion. The National Awakening Movement of Southern Azerbaijan respects the religious minorities' beliefs and ideologies of the population of South Azerbaijan. Taking all this into account, the national ideology of the South Azerbaijani Turks in the National Awakening Movement of South Azerbaijan should be expressed as follows: I am a Turk, I am modern, I am free (SANAM, 2013, para.17).

It is indicated in both charters of SANAM that religious minorities are going to be respected; however, nothing has been clearly mentioned about other national groups and their relations with Azerbaijani Turks. The reason for this is the ethnic structure of this discourse which puts only Turks and Turkism at its core and sees other groups as sub-cultures or at some points as immigrants that are living in South Azerbaijan.



In his interview with *WarTv*, Mahmudali Chehregani expresses the population structure of South Azerbaijan in this way:

These 33 million [Azerbaijani Turks] are not like North Azerbaijan. South Azerbaijan is Turk purely and one hundred percent. There is no ethnic group inside it [South Azerbaijan]. If there was any, then they would have a special place in our minds and sight [*Başımızın ve gözümüzün üstünde yerleri olurdu*]. In North Azerbaijan about ninety two percent are ethnically Oguz Turks the rest eight percent are Lezgins, Avars, Jewish and Talysh but this is not the case in our region (Irfan Sapmaz, 2020, 18:00 – 18:40).

This kind of discourse articulation which puts a single ethnic identity at its core and denies the other identity is very similar to the policies that are explained in chapter three's Pahlavi era section. The hegemonic discourse in the Pahlavi era was also using historical elements to define the national identity and create a unified nation-state. By putting the Turks in the core of the discourse as the only ethnic group and historicizing modern issues such as feminism, independence-seeking discourse is negating the former hegemonic discourse and fails to provide a novel discourse with a new way of thinking.

Regarding the 2021 local and presidential elections, Cehregani published a message to Azerbaijanis in Iran from his official Instagram account. In this message, he writes:

My ideas regarding the elections: 1- Presidential elections: answer: we must not participate in the elections by boycotting it. 2- parliament and city council elections: answer: Only and only participate in those

cities that immigrant Kurds are located. In a city like Urmia, by participating in the elections with all our facilities, we must not allow immigrant Kurds to elect any Kurdish parliament member or city council member (Chehregani, 2021, April 10).

Previous brutal wars between Turkish and Kurdish groups (specifically Kurdistan Democratic Party) in West Azerbaijan (Yeghaneh, 2015) have been one of the reasons that created conflict between these two ethnic groups, and as a result, two groups most of the time distrusted each other. Although the conflict naturally brings up the fear of another tension in the region, but as seen in the message of Chehregani, this tension is used to politically motivate people to vote against a certain ethnic group in the IRI political structure that is not even accepted by the SANAM organization. The resentment in this message is seen in the denial of the political rights of Kurdish people and their existence as a citizen in the Azerbaijan region of Iran and being labeled as immigrants. There is nothing in the message regarding the violence by organizations such as Kurdistan Democratic Party but instead, the anger towards this group and its historical conflict with Azerbaijanis are defined in a generalization of the conflict between Turkish people with all Kurdish people living in Azerbaijan. Considering after a possible separation of Southern Azerbaijan, the conflictual minority/majority relationship can reproduce itself in a different shape. The existence of this kind of resentment against all Kurdish people in Azerbaijani cities may cause new forms of conflicts and ethnic discrimination.

#### **4.2.2. Analysis of independence-seeking discourse**

This discourse rightfully brings up the systematic racial discrimination against Azerbaijani Turks within the geography of Iran. However, while doing this, it unites all the ethnic Turks in one category and ignores any plans for other social classes within the society. As emancipation is only seen in the independence of South Azerbaijan, and this region is considered as one hundred percent populated with Azerbaijani Turks, there seems to be no plan for any other ethnic minorities. Thus, the inclusivity of this discourse is only limited to the people who are ethnically Turk. By denying the existence of other ethnic groups living in South Azerbaijan, this discourse establishes its basis on the oppressive structure that denies the existence of different national groups in Iran. This is also because of the resentment that this discourse has against the antagonized minorities living in Azerbaijan. By introducing an essence and historicizing the human rights issues such as women's rights and feminist movements, this discourse claim that Turks are essentially feminist from the beginning. This kind of approach seems to block the possible paths to discuss the gender issues in emancipated South Azerbaijan. Assuming that Turks were feminists historically and are feminists essentially leads to an understanding that ethnic origin and the history of a national group can solve the human rights issues, which is not reasonable.

This discourse criticizes the theocratic political and ideological structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran and proposes a secular and modern South Azerbaijan. The wounds that Azerbaijani Turks have from the Pahlavi and IRI era make this discourse

completely negate the government forms in these two eras as a result of resentment and reactionary response. That is why, by establishing an emancipatory discourse only based on a single ethnic identity and relating the ancient historical elements to the current issues, this discourse reshapes already experienced governance systems that failed before.

### **4.3. Federalist discourse**

Another emancipatory discourse in Azerbaijan is a discourse that emphasizes federalism. The Federal-Democratic Movement of Azerbaijan (FDMA) is the political organization that represents this discourse and is selected to be analyzed. The platform of official documents and statements of the movement and the writings of the main theorists of the movement (*Açıq Söz*) are the basis of this thesis's analysis of this discourse.

#### **4.3.1. Content of the federalist discourse**

Nation, democracy, and federalism are among the most fundamental concepts of this discourse, and the concept of nation is its most central concept. The homepage of the *Açıq Söz* platform states:

Political sovereignty belongs to all those people and their undeniable rights. Without democracy and the acceptance of the right to self-determination of nations and their equal rights in a pluralistic country, the real sovereignty of the people will never be realized. Our goal for the establishment of democracy and the establishment of a federal

republic in Iran is the establishment of a federal government of the Turks of Iran (the federal government of the people of Azerbaijan and the organs of local government of the Turks of Iran) (Açiq Söz, n.d.).

This discourse considers language as the most important component of defining a nation. The second principle of the platform of the FDMA states that: “Turkish (Azerbaijani Turkish) language is the main nucleus and the cornerstone of the national identity of the Turks of Iran. Our national identity is inherent in our language” (Açiq söz, 2005, para.11). In this discourse, the concept of identity, which is the mental ability of human beings to differentiate themselves from others, is the first stimulus in human development, and language has been a major factor in this distinction between different groups of people. With this understanding of the concept of nation and language, they explain their conception of the right to self-determination and link it to the concept of democracy and federalism. In this discourse, the right to self-determination implies the democratic right of the nation to have control of the political institution of the state. Therefore, a nation with an independent state may not have the right to self-determination because it has no democratic control over the institution of government. Accordingly, they argue that in Iran, even the Persian nation does not have the right to self-determination. In this outlook, self-determination does not necessarily mean separation from Iran. The right to self-determination can only lead to independence when there is a genocide or any crime against humanity (Soltanzadeh, n.d.). Democracy is another central concept of this discourse, and FDMA considers the Islamic Republic of Iran as the totalitarian regime, which is the biggest obstacle for democracy that deprives

national groups of many rights, especially their right to self-determination. This concept is used in the discourse with a liberal meaning and stands for an equal legal system for all citizens and the existence of parliamentary political structures. According to FDMA in one of its main articles:

Democracy as an idea, on the one hand, means the sovereignty of the people. On the other hand, it expresses the legal and political equality of individuals and different social groups, which makes sense if realized. Democracy at the level of the political structure, the state, expresses the sovereignty of the people in political power. Its reflection can be clearly seen in the existence of elected institutions in the political organs of society such as parliament and the presidency, and so on. Democracy also means the legal equality of individuals regardless of their race, language, religion, nationality, and gender (Soltanzadeh, 2008, para.4).

This discourse, on a theoretical level, looks at different classes and clusters of people and society. The movement's discourse points to fundamental gaps that have shattered this whole. The gender-based division, the class-based division, and the national-based division in this discourse are the three major identified blocs of Iranian society. Working-class of society is one of the most important parts of the society in FDMA's discourse. According to this discourse, as the majority of people in every nation are a part of the working class, then it is very important to have a strong connection with them in order to establish social equality and democracy (Açiq Söz, n.d.).

The issue of gender discrimination is also an important matter in the discourse of FDMA. One of the main members of the FDMA, Hedayat Soltanzadeh, explains this matter as follows:

In all societies, women are a key factor in the reproduction of the economic structure because the entire reproduction of the labor force depends on them. At the same time, women, as part of the dominant economic structure, reproduce class and national relations. In this way, different levels of gender discrimination are reproduced through the dominant economic, class, and national structure. Gender discrimination cannot be eliminated through party declarations but requires women to be independent of men. This requires gender discrimination issues going beyond the class nature in the society and therefore requires recognizing their independent movement on the one hand and its inseparable connection with the class and national question in society (Soltanzadeh, 2008, para.11).

The discourse of the FDMA is formulated in such a way that its continuation and growth inevitably require close and friendly relations with other national groups in Iran. This is because the establishment of a federal system of government will necessarily be possible with the voluntary cooperation of different national groups. The emergence of any tension and opposition between these nations will make the cooperation difficult and will produce serious problems in the existence and continuation of this discourse. However, FDMA states that this cooperation will only be with those national groups that respect the historical territories of Azerbaijan and recognize them officially (Açığı Söz, n.d.).

#### **4.3.2. Analysis of the federalist discourse**

Reading all the important cornerstones of this discourse from the mentioned declarations, articles, and principles of it can be concluded that it is more inclusive than the previous discourses. In this discourse, Iran is considered a diverse country consisted of different national groups. Diversity is not only considered in the level of ethnicity, but it recognizes the national groups as independent nations by highlighting the element of language. FDMA emphasizes the cooperation of these national groups together to establish a political system that promotes social equality by decreasing the level of antagonization that exists in comparison to the other discourses. Azerbaijani identity is explained, and it has a certain definition. Thus, instead of negating the hegemonic discourse and choosing a reactionary method, a structured plan is provided for the emancipation of the Azerbaijani Turks. Although this discourse wants to unite all the class, national, and gender blocs, the discrimination towards each bloc is analyzed differently and does not align different classes of different groups in the same row, and a specific plan is provided for each bloc. Therefore, othering and resentment cannot be found at a level that it exists in the other two discourses. But it should be mentioned that this discourse sees those who do not recognize the sovereignty and existence of Iranian Azerbaijanis as others. The socio-political structure of the current establishment in IRI is criticized and seen as a barrier against the emancipation of the national groups. Thus, this discourse does not establish its foundation on an already existing oppressive structure and is unique in that way. Proposing a secular, democratic, and federal political change in the



system, this discourse isolates itself from the current oppressive ideological and political system. However, the problematic part of this discourse is that it does not isolate itself from the economic structure of the current system. Gender discrimination and national oppression may be solved by the proposed changes, but the criticized class oppression in the existing economic system of Iran cannot be resolved only by changing the ideological or political system as the class oppression is completely related to the economic structure and mode of production. Overall, the continuation of the current economic structure or not providing any changes regarding the economic status within this discourse means that there are no strong plans to fight class oppression, which is one of the main issues of this discourse.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The geography of Iran has shown us that in the last hundred years, it was full of supremacy that was based on the well-being of certain dominant people with a hegemonic discourse. Intense centralism, allocation of billions of Iranian Rials for the development of Persian culture and language, neglect of the non-Persian language and cultures, repression of any political discourse that tries to end minority discrimination is just a small example that shows the mismanagement and existence of huge national cleavages between people in Iran. These cleavages have led to many protests, political movements, and the articulation of discourses that asks for change in Iran. By introducing the demands of Azerbaijanis in Iran as a minority, this thesis analyzed three existing main discourses for the emancipation of this minority group. Historical ruptures and shifts in hegemonic discourses are explained, and the resentment politics discourses are criticized.

Research around this topic either ignored the question of minorities and their rights with a reductionist approach that denies the existence of any discrimination against national minorities, or, on the other hand, they analyzed the discrimination issue by bringing up the emancipatory discourses of national groups without providing any critics. Unlike other scholarly works, my research brought up the existing minority discrimination in Iran. At the same time, this thesis criticized the problematic parts of the selected emancipation discourses and analyzed if it articulates itself around

politics of resentment or not. Also, in contrast with many research that ignores the Pahlavi era and presents the Islamic Republic of Iran as the main problem in this issue and offers a political change, my research discusses that this systematic discrimination existed in the previous periods of Iranian history and is not only limited to the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a large minority group, Azerbaijanis were the main focus of this thesis as a case study. To analyze their discourses from a critical perspective, I decided to theoretically build my thesis around the resentment theory, which is considered a destructive element that may exist in minority and identity movements. This thesis is exploring if the same exists in the articulation of the discourses of Iranian Azerbaijani movements. By reading this theory, we can easily understand why there is such a sense of hatred in human society and how this hatred leads to the articulation of discourses that not only bring a positive change but reproduce the same existing discourses. It is observed that there is oppression towards Azerbaijanis in Iran, and they are deprived of their fundamental minority rights. However, it is very important that they come up with a discourse that is not originated from resentment and the future that it promises does not have any roots in the destructive and oppressive structure; therefore, politics that are established around equal respect and recognition turning into politics of supremacy and dominance are seen as problematic.

By looking at the important historical epochs for Azerbaijanis, this research found that the shift of hegemonic discourses had led to antagonization and marginalization of certain major groups. Each change in the position of the dominant and dominated, powerful and powerless, or master and slave, also changed places and meanings of

the bad and good in different periods. By using the theoretical framework's terms, we can mention that values for each of the societies mentioned in chapter three were different, and all had some kind of value delusions. Oppression of the dominant on the marginalized had led to the feeling of revenge, envy, hatred, and overall, a sense of resentment. Once the marginalized becomes dominant, then this resentment reproduces itself in the form of othering and efforts to erase what is called master previously. The resentment of different groups who considered Turkic identity as a barbaric identity which was imposed on the Persian Iranian identity had led to what can be considered as attempts to linguicide Turkic languages and culture after the fall of Qajar's (last Turkic dynasty) and rise of Pahlavi. The failure of Pahlavi's secularism in the second Pahlavi period led to a revolution that the world's political literature referred to as the Islamic Revolution of Iran. After the revolution, clerics who had kept alive the resentful experience of being marginalized during the constitutional revolution monopolized the sources of power and wealth under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini after 1979. Resentment in this period had also led to an oppressive hegemonic discourse that considered any attempts for democratization and modernization as a crime against national security. Both *Shah* and *Sheikh* politics did not bring what was promised as a solution and antagonized the Azerbaijani Turks as much as possible.

My research demonstrated a critical analysis of the three main emancipatory discourses of Azerbaijanis in the post-revolutionary era of Iran. Although the federalist discourse is more comprehensive, inclusive, and has the least amount of antagonism to the different groups of the society in comparison to the other

discourses, all these discourses ignore certain important groups while providing a plan or demanding for a change. The similarities between these discourses and certain oppressive elements of the failed hegemonic discourses in Iran are concerning. Except for the legal positivist discourse, which insists on the prevailing political, ideological, and economic structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the other two discourses leave the door open to criticism and improvement as they are both offering a fundamental change at least in the political and ideological structures. Considering the theoretical framework of this thesis, it can be stated that perceived desired emancipation for each of these discourses can only be achieved if they reconsider some of their proposed plans. The independence-seeking discourse will not be desired if they do not propose any definition for the other non-Turkic national groups. Moreover, the defined Turkic identity for this discourse is more antagonizing than being inclusive regarding the other ethnic groups. Linking the ethnic origins and history with the modern human rights issues is also another problem of this discourse that promotes an essentialist ideology of Turkism. Federalist discourse and its ambiguity in relation to the current economic structure is what makes this discourse incomplete. Overall, both federalist and independence discourses still fail to offer a completely novel structure that does not have any roots in the prevailing problematic structures.

Finally, the literature of the theoretical framework of this research mentions the existence of a resentment and reactionary nature in the minority groups that are seeking mutual respect and recognition in the society. Referring to this framework, this research examined if the same issue exists in the Iranian Azerbaijanis as a

minority group in Iran and case study of this thesis. Findings of this thesis indicate that although the resentment is not very clear in the federalist discourse, the other two discourses use politics of resentment as described in the theoretical framework. Different forms of reactionary nature exist in the manifestation of all selected discourses.

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