

**AZERBAIJANI WOMEN IN IRAN:
OPPRESSION, EMPOWERMENT, AGENCY**

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Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Women's Studies

by
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Azerbaijani Women in Iran: Oppression, Empowerment, Agency



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DEDICATION

To the memory of my grandmother, the first feminist in my life.

To women of my Homeland whom I witnessed their suffering, resistance, resilience,
empowerment and agency.

Qızıldan olsa da qəfəsim, azadlığa var həvəsim.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Azerbaijani Women in Iran: Oppression, Empowerment, Agency

by

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Azerbaijani women in Iran have been invisible citizens because of their ethnicity and gender. They have faced racism and sexism from Persian women and men, as well as sexism within their own community. Azerbaijani women faced racism, colonialism, and sexism from their culture and from the dominant Persian system, which is perpetuated by cultural and linguistic differences. With all their experiences, Azerbaijani women never received enough attention in Iranian women's movement; additionally, challenges in the Azerbaijani community, as a semi-colonized community, have faced Azerbaijani local activists with various obstacles.

In this research through using Azerbaijani women's experiences, I explore how feminist movements cannot divorce themselves from the hegemonic socio-political system they operate within, as observed in the case of Iran. Thus, the Iranian mainstream feminist movement reflects the power hierarchies in Iran and is complicit in marginalizing minority groups and women. By focusing on how transnational women's movements are unable to capture fully the voices of local communities and therefore further that marginalization, I explore the dilemma of identity in Azerbaijani Turk as semi-colonized community has also carried over to feminist debates, while these debates have faced Azerbaijani local activists with challenge to create a bridge to their local community as well as global world.

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INTRODUCTION

Growing up in Iran, I realized how Turks¹ are frequent objects of ridicule in Iranian society because of their accents in Farsi and stereotypes of being simple-minded. Surprisingly, many Azerbaijani Turks even tolerate jokes directed towards Turks in Iranian society. As a woman I have personally faced racism on a daily basis from many Persian people and even from some Turks as a consequence of assimilation within Iran. I witnessed how women from different ethnicities around me faced racism as well as the added hardships of being victims of domestic violence, different forms of abuse, and physical and sexual assaults. Thus, not only did I have to fight against racism and sexism in Iranian society, but I also had to stand up against overbearing patriarchal norms and traditions because of my gender within my own Azerbaijani Turk community. Later, living in the United States and majoring in Women's Studies led to the exploration of the factors behind the invisibility of my community's experiences through a gendered lens. I came to the conclusion that despite their Iranian nationality, Azerbaijani² women in Iran have been invisible citizens because of their ethnicity and gender. They have faced racism and sexism from Persian women and men, as well as sexism within their own community. Azerbaijani women faced racism,

¹ There are different groups of Turks in Iran: Azerbaijani Turks, Qashqai Turks, Khorasan Turks, Khalaji Turks, etc. When I use Turk or Turks, I refer to general stereotypes that exist toward Turks. However, When I only use Azerbaijani Turks, I specifically discuss the situations that apply to Azerbaijani Turks, not all Turks in Iran. Moreover, this project focuses on Azerbaijani Turk women, but some issues are common among all Turks, and it is not limited to certain groups of Turks.

² Azerbaijan is the name of a geographical region in which predominantly Turks live. I am aware that using Azerbaijani in terms of ethnic identity leaves out the other ethnic groups that live there and see themselves as Azerbaijani such as Kurds, Armenians, Gilaks, and Talishs, etc. However, I will explain in later sections the complexity of identity among Azerbaijani community and dilemma with the phrase "Azerbaijani Turks".

colonialism, and sexism from their culture and from the dominant Persian system, which is perpetuated by cultural and linguistic differences.

In recent years, despite challenges with numerous cultural, linguistic and rights-oriented movements within the Azerbaijani community, many opportunities for women's active participation in the society have been created. Agency of women in each region and community in Iran is different; in Iranian Azerbaijani movements, some people call an ethnic, linguistic and cultural rights movements, (discussed in a later chapter), Azerbaijani women have become more visible both within the movements as well as in society. While many Iranian media outlets and activists question the motive of the movements accusing them of having racist and nationalist discourses, they fail to recognize the local women's roles and active participation in these movements. Some illiterate women who have mainly spent their lives as housewives joined the Azerbaijani movements to support their husbands and/or children, besides many women who are activists in cultural and linguistic rights' in these movements. Through their involvement these women have begun to negotiate their position and power, both in their families and in their social and public lives. Azerbaijani women's issues vary from other regions of Iran because of cultural, linguistic, geographic, and the political nuances within the community. In this thesis, I will address both the failure of mainstream feminist movements in Iran to address Azerbaijani women's issues as well as conduct an exploration of the potential for local Azerbaijani feminist movements.

When I decided to accept my Azerbaijani feminist friend's suggestion to create a local feminist group to focus on Azerbaijani women's issues, a central motivator for me was giving voice to the local Azerbaijani population and to create a feminist group based on the specific needs of the community. As an Azerbaijani feminist living in the United States, it was an opportunity for me to apply my academic training in Women's Studies to a local feminist movement and see how transnational feminism could help these activists. Soon I realized that minority women faced multiple challenges in their local communities as well as on a national and international level. After working on these issues for two long years and without many concrete achievements I was confronted with the question: Do Azerbaijani women need their own women's movement? How can we frame our demands in feminist/women's movements of Iran? Seeking answers for these questions pushed me to

dedicate my thesis towards exploring the complexity of Azerbaijani women's issues and the dilemmas of local women's movements in Iran.

This thesis explores the complexity of Azerbaijani women's experiences as a minority within Iranian society as well as challenges the process of silencing their dilemmas globally. To challenge the prevailing conceptions within Iranian society of Turk women as being passive and obedient, I specifically focus on the empowerment and visibility of women in Azerbaijani movements and their resistance to political, legal, and economic difficulties. Using Azerbaijani communities' experiences, this research brings attention to the missing narratives of locals regarding globalization. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating the narratives of local communities which are missing in academic literature and which are essential to Third World feminism as these communities are the best situated to lend voice to their own struggles. This is the primary reason why we need the incorporation of Third World feminism in the transnational feminist movement. To this end, I draw my methodology and theories from transnational and postcolonial, Third World, women of color, Middle Eastern, and Islamic feminisms.

In this research project, I explore double-tiered system of oppression which traps Azerbaijani women, and how they face discrimination particular to their own culture as well as an overlapping tier of social discrimination. I unpack the missing narratives of minority women in Azerbaijani women's case and how after nation-state building process in Iran non-Persian/non-Shia minorities have come to be perceived as the "other." Additionally, I explore how feminist movements cannot divorce themselves from hegemonic socio-political system they operate within, as observed in the case of Iran. Thus, the Iranian mainstream feminist movement reflects the power hierarchies in Iran and is complicit in marginalizing minority groups and women. By focus on how transnational women's movements are unable to capture fully the voices of local communities and further that marginalization, I explore the dilemma of identity in Azerbaijani Turk as semi-colonized community has also carried over to feminist debates while these debates have faced Azerbaijani local activists with challenge to create a bridge to their local community as well as global world.

CHAPTER 1

AZERBAIJAN'S DEMOGRAPHIC AND GEOGRAPHICAL IDENTITY

Before I begin to talk of women's issues in the Azerbaijani³ community, I want to clarify which specific community I am referring to. Azerbaijan throughout history has been a battle and conflict center among many empires, which formed Azerbaijani's collective identity. In recent history, major influences came from Iranian and Russian empires that separated the nation and territory of Azerbaijan. The split of Azerbaijan took place in the nineteenth century between Russian and Qajar empires (1789-1925); later the Republic of Azerbaijan was able to earn independence from the former Soviet Union (1991), but Iranian Azerbaijan still is part of Iran. The area of Azerbaijan in Iran is usually referred to as "Iranian Azerbaijan" or "South Azerbaijan," and both terms have geographical and political meanings for Azerbaijanis. Iranian Azerbaijan mainly refers to: East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Ardebil, and Zenjan provinces. The population of the Republic of Azerbaijan is approximately 8 million, which means 75 percent of Azerbaijanis live in Iran (Shaffer, 2002, p.221). Azerbaijanis are a Turkic speaking group and predominantly Shia Muslims.

Iran's ethnicities often are misrepresented inside and outside of the country, as predominantly writing on Iran focuses on its Persian identity leaving out the narratives of its varied ethnic communities. Therefore, many societies see Iran as a Persian country and are

³ Within this research project, I use the nation in the sense that Benedict Anderson defines. According to Anderson, the nation "is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" Anderson (2003, p. 6).

unaware of other ethnicities who live there such as Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Lurs, Baluchis, Turkmens, Armenians, Assyrians, and Georgians, etc. Approximately 50% of the Iranian population is non-Persian, and Azerbaijani Turks make up the biggest ethnic minority (Shaffer, 2002, p.1). The most accurate estimate for Iran is 27 million Azerbaijani people (p.1). The results of historical Iranian state policy for assimilation of ethnic minorities have been political underrepresentation and inaccurate estimates of the actual population size. The official numbers put out by the regime are in sharp contrast with figures provided by the Republic of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani media, which has consistently attempted to bring to light that the population is larger than the official estimates.

Many scholars of ethnic studies indicate that the knowledge about ethnic groups in Iran remains incomplete and requires further investigation, with a woeful lack of original investigation due to inhibitions placed on such efforts by the Iranian regime. Sekandar Amanolahi (2005), an Iranian ethnicity scholar, explains “there were no national censuses indicating the population types, geographical distribution, political, socioeconomic, and linguistic situations in various ethnic environments in Iran” (p.37). An uneven distribution of power, socioeconomic resources, and sociocultural statuses are issues that affect ethnic minorities on a large scale, though the nature and depth of that impact is not fully understood and inadequately addressed by the central government. In the words of John Bradly (2007), “Tehran’s highly centralized development strategy has resulted in a wide socioeconomic gap between the center and the peripheries” (p.181) in Iran.



Figure 1. South Azerbaijan, Iran. Created by Sevil Suleymani.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

I examine the reasons behind the needs for local feminist movements for Azerbaijani women focusing on core issues for these women. Also included in this chapter is the topic of the agency of Azerbaijani women through the Azerbaijani movements and the potentials of local feminism. Within the framework of postcolonial and transnational feminism, I will discuss the manifestation and expression of Azerbaijani feminism as a grassroots phenomenon and not merely a continuation of Western ideology, epistemology of knowledge, and the representation of Middle Eastern women's issues in Western society. I will continue the postcolonial and transnational feminism section with an exploration of how the nationalist movements in Third World countries brought about the formation of women's movements in these countries. Thus, I will explore ideas of women's agency as they apply to my thesis. My last section will focus on Iranian women's movements. All these sections are necessary to understand the oppression and agency of Azerbaijani women, and the complexity of their issue with colonial history and current identity challenges as minority women in Iranian society.

POSTCOLONIAL AND TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM

Within the history of colonialism, power structures and hierarchies have shaped the way non-Western women are portrayed. Postcolonial and transnational feminism have challenged and argued against the core Western views toward Third World women in their representation in the Western societies (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Mohanty, 2003a, 2003b; Narayan, 1997, 2013). Many scholars criticized the mainstream, Western-centric framework of feminism to analyze non-Western women's issues, especially the idea of agency and empowerment of women based on hegemonic Western feminist concepts (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Mahmood, 2005; Mohanty, 2003a, 2003b; Narayan, 1997, 2013).

I will briefly explain the challenges of focusing on Azerbaijani women in certain communities such as Azerbaijanis in the Middle East. Using examples of Western and non-Western women's relations within Middle Eastern society, many communities have been undermined in colonial relationships with the dominant group of the society. The Western portrayal of monolithic homogeneous Middle Eastern societies draw attention to certain groups (mainly the ruling group) at the cost of rather large minorities within these countries. Specific to my argument is the portrayal of Iran as being a homogenous Persian and Shia society despite being a diverse heterogeneous country. Thus, the large minority populations within the country who are either non-Persians and non-Shi'ite/non-Muslim groups, even ones as significant in size as the Azerbaijani Turks, are invisible communities both within and outside of Iran. This invisibility has extended into Azerbaijani women's issues that have never received sufficient attention in the mainstream Iranian women's movement.

FEMINISM: A LOCAL IDEA OR 'WESTERNIZED' IDEA?

Many non-Western societies still view feminism as a product of "Westernization" rather than parallel movements having indigenous roots. Many Middle Eastern traditionalist elites believe that feminism is not relevant to women in their respective countries, and that it is an imitative model of Western women's emancipation. Uma Narayan, in *Dislocating Cultures* (1997), challenges the understanding of feminism as a solely Western notion. In the book, Narayan tells her story of witnessing her mother's oppression in her formative years, which led later in life to her resistance against women's oppression. By failing to find a balance or harmony between advocating women's issues and respecting strongly held cultural values and norms, the participation of criticisms towards their own cultures serves to alienate and demonize what are extremely important gender issues. With focusing on Narayan's points, these sorts of cultural criticisms further cement the representation in Third World societies of feminism as an alien "Westernized" idea.

Nayerreh Tohidi (2010) examines the progress of the women's movement during a span of a hundred years in Iran. She explains that Iranian feminism has been perceived as an 'exogenous' idea, a "Western phenomenon associated with sexual licenses exported to penetrate the *dar ol-Islam* and the tradition of family" (p.377) and consequently destroying the moral principles in these societies. Therefore, women's rights' activists have adopted a

'defensive' position, which attempts to convince Iranian elites that feminism is a local idea and has roots in Iranian history (p.377). Historically, women's movements in Iran have been intertwined with nationalism to lend these movements societal 'authenticity' and to prove that these feminists are autonomous and not a part of a larger global movement dominated by the Western world. This intertwining of nationalism and feminism has created the unintended consequence of alienating minority women when state policies of assimilation are taken into account.

Afsaneh Najmabadi (2005) in, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards*, argues that when Iran was redesigned as a unified Persian/Shi'ite nation, "non-Persian and non-Shi'ite signified the subordinate minority," and that those who were both Persian and Shi'ite constituted a privileged class (p.104). Within this ideology, the core of "Iranian-ness," aside from being Shi'ite and Persian, became dependent on territorial integrity, and that "separatism' became a politically expedient concept with which to discipline dissidence among non-Persian Iranians" (p.104). Najmabadi's explanation brings the idea that with the dominance of these ideologies, Iranians intertwined feminism with nationalism in a reactionary manner fitting their desire to prove their "authenticity," and which fit into their construct of "Iranian-ness."

EPISTEMOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

The process of data collection and knowledge creation has been a concern of postcolonial feminists because of the imperialistic politics and colonial legacy left by Western states that have tried to use the image of Third World women as being oppressed for the justification of their politics. Some postcolonial feminists have seen as problematic the method and imagery used to portray Third World women as oppressed and subjugated and have begun the decolonization of theories and methods to avoid the production of uniform, monolithic Third-World representation. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003b), in "Under Western Eyes," is critical of such a Western research methodology and points out how Western feminists left out "the material complexity, reality, and agency of Third World women's bodies and lives" (p.541).

Uma Narayan (2013) critiques the knowledge production process in her article, "The Project of Feminist Epistemology," by pointing out the value of Western feminists as having

“epistemic privilege” and discusses how the power structure between Western and non-Western worlds has served to transfer the oppressive relationship between these two worlds into the realm of feminists (Narayan, 2013, p.374). She emphasizes the Western feminists' inability to fully understand the nature of Third World women's oppression referring to it as “likely to be incomplete or limited” (p.376). Mohanty even sees Third World women having “epistemic advantage” and “epistemic privilege” because of their lived realities (Mohanty, 2003a, 2003b). She also discusses the non-Western women's dilemma, who in postcolonial societies have to work within a Western framework and by extension the colonial norms and social structures within these frameworks in feminist movements. Therefore, feminist movements within Third World countries cannot work in a purely Western framework which is inadequate in helping non-Western women achieve agency within their own societies.

With the false dichotomy of North and South relations, many women's issues have become symbols of cultural backwardness. Uma Narayan (1997) describes how Third World women's issues have been portrayed internationally which has oftentimes neglected the pertinent geopolitical and socioeconomic factors affecting these issues. Therefore, the attention from women's issues has turned to more cultural issues, without the input from regional feminists in the communities. Narayan uses the example of ‘dowry deaths’ and how they raised concerns both among Indian feminists and internationally, to show how the ‘migration of issues’ decontextualized the complexity of gender issues across international boundaries. Narayan adds that mainstream Western feminism uses ‘cultural explanations’ thus “leaving Western women seemingly more immune to ‘death by culture’” (p.85).

Aside from Indian culture, Muslim societies with colonial histories have begun to receive publicity surrounding human rights matters especially in regards to women's rights. Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) describes the same dilemmas faced by Third World feminists using the example of honor crimes within Muslim societies. She states that honor crimes receive great media publicity as human rights concerns; however, this approach and manner of cultural stigmatization will not achieve the desired change and gender justice such media attention seeks to bring about (p.113). Honor crimes are labeled as a cultural practice instead of being classified as a specific form of violence against women. Abu-Lughod criticizes the manner in which honor killings are attributed as ethnic, cultural, or traditional phenomena

and by extension demonizing Muslim communities as backwards and prone to violence in the eyes of Western societies (p.114).

‘AGENCY AND LIBERATORY SUBJECT’

While postcolonial feminism emphasized the presence of Western hegemony in the epistemology of knowledge, the areas of agency and liberatory subjects have been issues of debate as well. Saba Mahmood (2005) in, “Feminist Theory, Agency and the Liberatory Subject,” argues that Western-centered feminist thought is insufficient and inadequate in explaining feminist ideology and women’s agency arising from religious movements, an area that is not normally interrelated in Western feminist thought. This touches on the dichotomy of grassroots feminist thought arising within a conservative Muslim women’s movement, a religion that in the West is commonly held as being a vehicle of oppression and brutality towards women. Mahmood, with using ethnographic studies of women’s mosque movements in Egypt, questions the idea that “individual empowerment” is the only means of conceptualizing agency. By Western academics’ strict definition of women’s agency as one’s “own interests and agendas,” this limited scope fails to take into account how agency has been promoted in these cultures due the assumption of Muslim women being suppressed and passive under male dominance (p.37). Therefore, Mahmood argues we should be “attentive to motivation, desire and goals” to fully take into account how agency is promoted in these cultures (p. 38). Mahmood also discusses the difficulty of defining agency without a cultural context, believing that agency is “the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)” (p.38).

NATIONALISM AND FEMINISM

The complexity of feminism and nationalism become more understandable in studying different cases in Third World countries, and how nationalism in many cases was able to empower women’s movements. Mrinalini Sinha (2013) emphasizes the importance of studying nation formation and nationalism in feminist studies due to the manner in which nationalism has affected women’s movements in the Western and non-Western societies. Sinha uses India’s nationalism as an example of how women’s emancipation movements

occurred in tandem with anti-colonialist nationalist struggles. She states that the dynamic of this relation can be seen in this slogan, “India cannot be free until its women are free and women cannot be free until India is free” (p.227). She explains that the main purpose of nationalism is the mobilization of women along with men to actively participate in the nationalist project (p.230). Sinha emphasizes the patriarchal discourse within nationalism and nationalist thought and the importance of women’s participation in this nationalist discourse being “biological reproducers of the members of ethnic collectives” (p.231).

Kumari Jayawardena (1986), in *Nationalism and Feminism in the Third World*, analyzes women’s movements which emerged from the nationalist struggle in Third World countries who were “achieving independence, asserting a national identity, and modernizing society” (p.3). She defines feminism as “embracing movements for equality within the current system and significant struggle that have attempted to change the system” (p.2). She goes on to state that these movements were not based on Western ideology but emerged during struggles against colonial powers and movements for education, suffrage, safety, and against poverty and inequality. The main themes of these movements were the creation of “national identity,” but they opened the ground for women’s empowerment and later for women to negotiate their position within their own communities. Similarly, the anti-colonial movement in Azerbaijani communities in Iran provide the ground for women’s movements. The women’s empowerment and agency through participation in the nationalist movements is still happening in regions such as Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, which are under the control of the dominant group in centralist governments. Their unity in the community to create cultural or national identity provide opportunities for women’s active participation in societies.

LOCAL FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

Local women’s movements and their ability to encourage women to work on their local communities with face challenges as well as using local potentials for empowerment with the need to balance these local themes with transnational alliances and linkages become one of the main themes of transnational feminism. In *Women's Movements in the Global Era* edited by Amrita Basu (2010), Basu provides an analysis of the diversity of feminist thought, movements and organizations from around the world. The authors of this text show the different movements and their particular challenges within their socio-geographic regions.

Specifically, the importance of factors such as the need for autonomy on a national level, the relationship between the woman's movements and the state, and the influence of transnational alliance between movements have on. It is important to note how local movements have balanced mainstream feminist thought with their need to address their unique cultural identity and meet the needs of their constituencies. These are key issues faced by "local" feminists who must balance their precarious relationship with the state as well as their potential for transnational linkages and assistance. In countries like Iran where the state suppresses minorities and women's movements, the balance is exceedingly challenging. However, minority women's issues are not only a matter of suppression by the state, but also an indication of the way mainstream women's movement have portrayed their minority constituents.

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN IRAN

In modern Iran in particular, two paradigms have been dominant and falsely regarded as two opposing forces. A specific brand of nationalism has tried to base itself on the European model of progress and to link it with the 'glorious' pre-Islamic Persian Empire. The other brand of nationalism aimed not to catch up with Europe but with Islam. (Khiabany, 2007, p. 183)

Nayereh Tohidi (2010) provides an overview of the history of the last few decades of women's movements in Iran, starting with the Constitutional Revolution. The first movement took place between the years 1905-1925 and marked the beginning of the women's movement in Iran and centered around anti-colonial and pro-constitutional arguments (p.384). The Constitutional Revolution was followed by the era of modern national building (1920s-1940), the era of nationalism (1940s-1960s) and the era of the modernization process (1960-1970s), all of which changed the political and social atmosphere in Iran (p.384). After the Constitutional Revolution era during the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi the Shah of Iran, women's emancipation was integrated as an aspect of modernization and led to the creation of many women's organizations and centers. Parvin Paidar (1995) explains that Reza Shah was influenced by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his view towards women's rights. Upon returning from Turkey on 12 May 1935, Shah invited the students of Tehran's women's teacher training college and other women's activists to a reception in a bid to form a government-backed organization modelled on Ataturk's Turkish model. The women that

were invited to this event were of a higher level of education, had experience in women's movements, and were politically affiliated with Reza Shah through their husbands or fathers (Paidar, 1995, p.104). In addition, to appeal to these women and the notion of modernization, Reza Shah had proposed the establishment of a "Ladies Centre" (*Kanun Banovan*), and nominated his daughter, Princess Shams Pahlavi, to be its leader (p.104-105).

Hamideh Sedghi (2014), in *Women and Politics in Iran*, focuses on the politics of veiling during three different regimes in Iran: the Qajars, the Pahlavis, and the Islamic Revolution. She discusses the politics of state and gender based issues during these eras. Her focus is mainly on the intersections of power, religious ideology and women's bodies. Sedghi describes Reza Shah's period of feminism as "state sponsored feminism" and argues that the demands and actions for the strong state had affected autonomous women's movements and led to the exploitation of women's movement efforts for Westernization and centralization policies. This was manifested in a new, "state-sponsored feminism" (p.76). Westernization, as it concerned "emulation of and identification with Europe," (p.65) became the center for the state's policy and had a profound impact on women's lives. However, she argues that in Reza Shah's period, women were able to come together and to talk openly about their issues. Sedghi opposes the claim that the politics and pressure of the Reza Shah regime pushed women to focus only on non-political issues, and argues instead that the demands of feminists focused on unveiling, education, reform of marital and divorce laws, and the right to vote and citizenship, all of which required reforms both within the polity and society (p.77). In conclusion, Sedghi states that in Iran, both "secular and religious states regulated women's lives and mobilized them in different ways for different ends" (p. 271), thereby showing the complexity of gender issues and women's movements during the Reza Shah era which challenges the idea of emancipation of women by a "state-sponsored" brand of feminism.

On the other hand, Parvin Paidar (1995) argues that, "On the whole, a combination of factors including Reza Shah's repressive measures which prevented oppositional feminist activity, his intolerance of spontaneous and independent political action, and his program of emancipation for women, proved a powerful incentive for women activists to become the propagators of the state policy on women" (p.105). With "state-sponsored feminism," independent women's organizations that were not directly or indirectly related to the state did

not flourish with the only recognized movements being those organized and led by the state. Most of the new organizations focused on Persian women and did not provide any space for non-Persian women, which until today has remained a characteristic of women's movements in Iran.

During the rule of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979), due to his desire to modernize the state, special attention was paid to gender issues with major policy changes occurring during this time, including the promotion of women's suffrage (Sedghi, 2014, p.153). Sedghi states that in "Attempting to consolidate his power, the Shah launched his major economic and political project, the top-down White Revolution" (p.155). In 1963 during the Shah's White Revolution, women received the right to vote. However, this policy change was opposed by the Shia clergy establishment who felt that women's suffrage was unconstitutional and harmful to Islam. Two weeks following Iran's implementation of women's suffrage, violent demonstrations were organized in Tehran's Bazaar by the religious organizations. In response to these demonstrations, women held a counter-demonstration going on strike and calling for constitutional reform to "challenge the 1906 constitutional mandate that had categorized them as aliens and criminals" (p.155). After the women's peaceful demonstration and the Shah's speech in Qom in response to the unrest, a referendum was held on the issue of women's suffrage which then passed without difficulty.

After the 1979 Revolution and replacement of the monarchy with the Islamic Republic, many social and political changes occurred, particularly in regards to women's status and rights within the country (Moghadam, 2002, p.1137). Direct policy changes were implemented which included making the wearing of the hijab compulsory, repealing the Family Protection Act of 1967 and 1973, that had restricted polygamy, raised the age of marriage for girls, and allowed women the right to divorce, and the passage of religiously inspired legislation restricting women's rights as well as human rights in general (Moghadam, 2002, p.1138). Aside from the direct effects of these oppressive legislative changes, which included banning political groups and wholesale political suppression, these policy changes indirectly impacted the dynamic within the family sphere by spreading the conservative regime's Islamic ideology on a society wide basis. Even though the Revolution was a result of the collation of many groups including leftists, nationalists and Islamists

(Moghadam, 2002, p.1137), the net effect is that the conservative Islamists hijacked the vision of Iran's future.

Valentine Moghadam (2002), in "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents" explores how the changes during the Islamic Revolution and its aftermath created changes in Iranian feminism with feminists' activism being predominantly centered on Islamic Feminism, attempting to bring changes within the Iranian state by focusing on women's empowerment within the context of Iranian society. Moghadam states that the major factors, which led to changes in women's politics in Iran, were the Iran-Iraq War, the economic difficulties and poverty in the post-war period and the death of Khomeini with a reversal of Khomeini's policy of uncontrolled population growth and his restrictions on the use of birth control (Moghadam, 2002, p.1139). Major reform movements emerged in the 1990s that called for "civil liberties, political freedoms, women's rights, and a relaxation of cultural and social controls" (p.1141). During the Mohammad Khatami presidency, calls for democracy from intellectuals, women's activists, and within academia, especially from university students, put pressure on the regime culminating in protests with violent clashes occurring between demonstrators and Islamist groups (p.1141). During the 1990s, reforms and the post-Khomeini period, the political climate softened allowing many organizations to form, the publication of two women's magazines and the increased political involvement of Islamic feminists (p.1143).

Moghadam focuses on three chief feminist social scientists educated in Iran and the West, among Islamic feminists to explain the debates on Islamic feminism in Iran: Afsaneh Najmabadi, Nayereh Tohidi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini. Moghadam argues that the debate of Islamic feminism within an Iranian context began with Afsaneh Najmabadi's talk in the University of London in February 1994 in which she described Islamic feminism as a bridge between religious and secular feminism. Najmabadi focused her speech on two women's magazines *Zanan* and *Farzaneh*, both published in Tehran, which were the voice of women's reforms. Najmabadi stated that Islamic feminists view gender discrimination as a socially based issue rather than one that is natural or divine. Najmabadi uses examples such as Shahla Sherket, the founder of *Zanan* magazine, who had "raised the issue of the right to *ijtihad* (independent reasoning, religious interpretation) and the right of women to reinterpret Islamic law" to show the importance of Islamic feminists' activism (Moghadam, 2002, p.1145).

Ziba Mir-Hosseini's works mainly focus on new discourses on gender among Islamic theologians and the challenging of Islamic family laws (Moghadam, 2002, p.1145). She mostly analyzes writings of *Zanan* (Women) with a focus on family law, divorce, and marriage. She argues that many Muslim women, who first believed that "under an Islamic state women's position would automatically improve became increasingly disillusioned by the new discriminatory and patriarchal discourses and policies"(p.1145). However, Mir-Hosseini sees Islamic feminism as a "an indigenous, locally produced, feminist consciousness" to challenge patriarchal norms of Iranian Islamic State. Nayereh Tohidi, as an early left activist, her writings in the 1980s tended to be critical of the Islamic Republic, especially the gender politics. However, later her works focusing on oppression shifted to the empowerment of Muslim women with the possibility of reform on the Islamic Republic.

After discussing different debates about Islamic feminism, Moghadam ends by asking if Islamic feminism is indeed feminism. Is feminism and Islam an oxymoron? Or is "Islamic feminism" part of global feminism movements? Moghadam acknowledges that Islamic feminists have been influenced and inspired by world feminist literature. Then Moghadam uses Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor's explanation that "a concentration solely on ideas ignores the fact that feminists are social movement actors situated in an organizational and movement context" (Moghadam, 2002, p.1164). Moghadam concludes that feminism's goal is to criticize social and gender inequalities with an emphasis on women's empowerment; therefore, a narrow definition of feminism would bring limitations to understanding and theorizing the diverse political strategies within the goals of feminism.

CONCLUSION

The provided knowledge and data about Azerbaijani women by Persian feminists could not be fully completed because of the position in knowledge production. Azerbaijani women's position within their own community as a second sex and minority women within Iranian society have never provided complex knowledge of their situations. Simultaneously, Persian feminists have to prove their 'authenticity' by expounding a nationalist brand of Iranian feminism, and an adoption of this ideology silences issues of ethnic minority women. All these factors create a necessity for the Azerbaijani communities to promote their own 'local' feminist movements that can have self-autonomy and can promote a healthy concept

of identity while at the same time addressing women's issues specific to this community. Such local Azerbaijani women's movements would provide voice to a minority group that also can bring attention to the gendered racism in Iran. Moreover, the Azerbaijani feminists' local movements need to have linkage and relationships with mainstream Iranian women's movements and international groups to receive help for resources and ideological evolution.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

With the history of Azerbaijan and its current geopolitical position as an Iranian province, a hierarchy of power and colonial-like relationship exists between the centralized state of Iran and Azerbaijan. Additionally, Iran itself has faced a semi-colonial history with the Western powers, falling into the category of the global South, a developing country marginalized and exploited by the Western powers. My theoretical framework is based mainly on postcolonial and transnational feminist theories. These theories provide the basis for my research to elaborate on the complexity of women's realities in Third World countries and their relations with their colonial pasts, as well as the challenge of hegemonic white Western feminists' approach to the struggles and agency of women in these countries. However, I focus on the specific patriarchal norms of the Azerbaijani community within the gendered and patriarchal norms of Iranian society. Thus, with the intersectional approach, I focus on Azerbaijani women's situations within their own culture.

To explore my research questions, I used interview methods to have a better understanding of Azerbaijani women's oppression as well as agency and empowerment at the local level. My interviews focused on a range of Azerbaijani Turk women to develop an in-depth understanding of their oppression and empowerment. I mainly conducted qualitative methods to gather deep and complex data to have more meaningful insight while providing a voice to an invisible population, Azerbaijani Turk women. Skype interviews was my primary method.

STANDPOINT THEORY

Standpoint theory is a positivist notion of integrating knowledge production and the relationship between knowledge and power (Harding, 1997, p. 382). The presented knowledge as "the truth" is often affected or reflected in the certain group's ideologies that

has access to the production of knowledge to justify their positions. Feminist standpoint theories have interests in exploring the hierarchies of knowledge production while providing space to oppressed groups. As Sandra Harding (1997) states:

Standpoint theory uses the ‘naturally occurring’ relations of class, gender, race, or imperialism in the world around us to observe how different ‘locations’ in such relations tend to generate distinctive accounts of nature and social relations. (p.384)

Therefore, women’s experiences developed in research can be used as a means to understand the way inequalities and injustices work in a society as a whole to have a map for social change (p.60). Abigail Brooks (2007) explores the importance of building knowledge through women's lived experiences, and she emphasizes the importance of the feminist standpoint theory and the requirement to center women’s experiences to build new knowledge (p. 56). Brooks argues:

Feminist standpoint is a unique philosophy of knowledge building that challenges us to (1) see and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women and (2) apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed women to social activism and social change. Feminist standpoint epistemology requires the fusion of knowledge and practice. It is both a theory of knowledge building and a method of doing research—an approach to knowledge construction and a call to political action. (p. 55)

As an Azerbaijani Turk working-class woman, my account of white Western feminism as well as Iranian mainstream feminism will be different. The provided knowledge from oppression and agency by white Western feminism and Iranian mainstream feminism have missed “the truth” of my experiences. Through the years as an Azerbaijani Turk activist, my research and activism focused on the ethnic and cultural rights of Azerbaijani Turks. My activism and research look at how suppression of political demands have affected Azerbaijani Turk women. Through many campaigns for Azerbaijani Turks such as linguistic and cultural rights, freedom of political prisoners, and women’s rights, I have met many activists. Through local activists, I have experienced a fuller view of the systems of oppression and the untold stories of their realities.

Many of the women I interviewed as well as myself are located at the intersection of the identities that my thesis focuses on: being Azerbaijani, Turk, and women in Iran. Thus, I explore the challenges of having all these identities together, being a Turkish, Azerbaijani, and Iranian. These women’s experiences provided an insight into their lived oppressions,

both at the hands of the patriarchal norms within their Azerbaijani Turk community, as well as the dominance of Persian culture in the society.

I am aware of the nature of my relationship to the women I interviewed, and the potential contrast my personal and feminist standpoints might have with the ideologies of these women, which could invariably affect my interview results and analyses. To the Azerbaijani community, I am both an “insider” and an “outsider.” I am an Azerbaijani Turk activist, an "insider," to the community, while at the same time a Western educated researcher currently residing in the United States and thus an "outsider" (Collins, 1986). Therefore, my research incorporates my personal voice and experiences as a part of the testimonials as we shared conversations based on shared experiences.

INTERVIEWS

My sample consisted of six women who have been directly and/or indirectly affected by their Azerbaijani (Turkish) identity. By conducting interviews via Skype, I used a digital voice recorder to record them. I transcribed and translated the recorded interviews shortly after. For ethical reasons and their security, I used pseudonyms instead of using their actual names and excluded any information that they did not wish to include on the record. In the words of Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (2007), interviews allow feminist researchers to collect "the subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated" (p.113).

In the first section of my research, which focuses on the main issues that Azerbaijani Turk women face (gender, ethnic, class, language discriminations) I used Rahele Zamani's life story. Focusing on her life story and centering her ethnicity and class helped me frame the issues that Azerbaijani women faced in Iran. I used information from HARANA, Radio Zamaneh, Radio Farda, BBC Persian to gather information regarding her life story. However, media has mostly focused on her sentences for intentional murder and has not provided detailed stories of her life. Therefore, I interviewed a woman's advocate who worked on her cases. Exploring details in her life story helped me use an intersectional approach in my analysis of Azerbaijani women's issues.

The second part of my research focuses on Azerbaijani women's experiences in Azerbaijani national movements as well as in Iranian society. To that end, I conducted

interviews and collected data on Azerbaijani women who have become involved in Azerbaijani movements personally or entered the political realm after being interviewed by local and national media outlets after the arrest of their husbands or sons due to political reasons. I expounded briefly on the journeys of how and why they got involved in the movements, their backgrounds in terms of education, occupation, etc., with the focus of the interview being on the challenges and obstacles they faced after their male family members' imprisonment. The purpose of this emphasis was to gather information on the gendered issues that after the imprisonment of the male family members, these women have faced, and how these women negotiated their power/position within their family and community. I focused specifically on two women who received public attention; one of them who got publicity during her son's hunger strike, and the other one for supporting her husband during his long-term imprisonment. I also included an interview with Pinar, a woman who is a cultural right's activist who was imprisoned for four months due to her political activism. I included Pinar to examine how Azerbaijani movements directly affect her, also to examine how in a male dominant political sphere, she was able to negotiate her own identity as an Azerbaijani woman and activist.

The third part of my research engaged in an understanding of current feminist movements in Azerbaijani communities and the obstacles and challenges they face; I interviewed a feminist who has been involved in women's movements in the Azerbaijani community as well as Iranian mainstream feminism. I focused on the interview on her experiences with the Iranian mainstream feminist movements as well as exploring her experiences on issues that she is currently addressing so I could have a better sense of Turkish women's issues both in Iranian society and in Azerbaijani local communities. This interview helped me to explain the current women's movements in Azerbaijani communities, which, with more information about the current condition, I was able to focus more on the potential of local feminist movements.

OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

I was always faced with the challenge of self-identity having been born in Iran into an Azerbaijani Turk family. My ethnic community is invisible within my country of origin, and overshadowed by the predominantly Persian ethnic group. This situation is a challenge I

would continue to face upon immigrating to the United States in my interactions within American society at large and the Iranian expatriate community in particular. Not long after arriving and settling in the United States, I encountered the Western notion that Middle Eastern women all suffer from oppression as a consequence of Islam. This notion is further reinforced by the US stereotypical perception of Iranian women due to the Iranian regime's adoption of Islam as the ideology of the state. In trying to elucidate the exact nature of the experiences shared by women of minority descent in an Islamic regime of Iran, it must be understood that religion is not the only axis of discrimination faced by women in Iran. Living in California with the presence of a large Iranian community allowed me to meet people who identify as Persian versus Iranian who also see the Pahlavi period (1925-1979) as a time of empowerment for women. As an Azerbaijani woman who faced marginalization and oppression because of my ethnicity in Iran, I was surprised by this identity marker by many Iranians, and could clearly see the absence and exclusion of my community's experiences in the stories that were told.

The main questions in my research have originated from my own experiences as an Azerbaijani Turk woman. My separation from my community did not allow me to have a full understanding of the current Azerbaijani society. Thus, my first concern was learning about the community that I had left ten years ago. When I first began to search for a subject for my project, I read widely regarding the history and the current affairs of Azerbaijani society, not just from sources specific to feminist scholarship and history. As long as I could immerse myself the topic of Azerbaijani culture and vicariously familiarize myself with my homeland, I was willing to read the source. This exploration, more than strictly academic research, began my personal journey of the discovery of my identity and served as a path for understanding of the silent plight, which is too often faced by women of my culture. Exploring my own community from the lens of news and social media and some local political and feminist activists was the first step down this path.

Soon I realized during recent decades the Turkish question has become one of the hottest topic of Iranian media inside of Iran as well as diasporic media. However, the coverage of Turks in media has mostly been from political and journalistic perspective mainly focusing on their political participations or lack of participations in Iranian politics. The academic studies of Turks in Iran has predominantly been neglected, and Turkish

women's issues have not been discussed at all. The political issues in Iran have prevented conducting any research among women in general, and in the case of Turkish women, research becomes more complicated due to political approaches and the way national identity of Iran defined based on being Shia and Persian.

I had initially intended my research to deal with the systems of oppression that Azerbaijani women have faced. I was aware that this would not be easy because of the stereotypes about Turks in Iran, especially Azerbaijani Turks, and the limited number of studies available to question these stereotypes. Some of the stereotypes are: "Iranian *Bazar* is in hands of Turks" (referring to Turks who are in business and are economically privileged), or "there is no discrimination against Turks; all the main political figures of Iran are Turks, or the rulers of Iran are Turks" (referring to politicians such as Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, or Mir-Hossein Mousavi, a reformist politician and Green Movement's leader, and many other high ranked people in governmental jobs). With these stereotypes how could I talk about discrimination and marginalization? How could I question classism in Turkish community, when all the stereotypes created wealthy Turks? These stereotypes are even common among Turks, which makes it challenging to question them or speak to them about racism and classism, since they do not see themselves as one of the group that has experienced any kind of the discrimination⁴. The situation is comparable to telling a woman that she is oppressed when she does not feel that this is the case despite the clear symptoms of domestic violence and the suppression of her voice in society.

To explore some of the issues of the Azerbaijani community, I began to contact some Azerbaijani cultural and linguistic activists. For the purpose of my thesis, I asked the activists to introduce me to women whom I could interview. Among activists, one of the Azerbaijani feminists was my main resource in networking with other women getting their contact

⁴ I do not make the assumption that all Turks have experienced racism and classism; however, in a later chapter I will discuss how in case of Rahele Zamani these stereotypes create issues in understanding the effects of racism and classism in her issues.

information. I used the snowball method, asking each interviewer to introduce me to other women. Despite my assumption that they would be easy to reach, during my networking I realized just how difficult it was reaching many of them. My main way to contact the women was messaging them on Facebook or calling them through a cell phone. If they had been introduced by a friend or another woman whom I had interviewed, I usually messaged them through the phone. Among the fifteen women whom I tried to contact, including my feminist friend, only seven of them responded. Two of the women because of security reasons did not agree to have any conversations, especially one whose husband was still in the process of the appeal court for his five-year imprisonment. Some other issues such as the internet also limited my access to these women. Internet access is an issue in Iran, and some women had only limited access to the internet that impeded being interviewed through Skype.

In the beginning of each dialogue, I provided background information about myself and my research. This part was very crucial to opening a dialogue and establishing trust with these women. The fact that I am a woman, am fluent in the Azerbaijani Turkish language and have an in-depth understanding of the culture helped in establishing a relationship with the women. However, I still faced many questions from the women whom I contacted such as why was I interested in speaking with them, and what my topic was about. One of the main concerns they had was what I was going to write about them, and more importantly, if my research could help their family or harm their husbands'/sons' political careers. Some women were suspicious of what I was going to write about them. While I tried to clarify my research interests with their experiences as Azerbaijani Turk women, many of them were not comfortable in sharing their life stories. On the other hand, I had some women who were very supportive of my focus on women's issues in Azerbaijani communities.

Simultaneously, my research and reading continued my exploration of the history and current political climate of Iran and Azerbaijan. I decided to request help from women who have ties to Azerbaijani movements, women who do not identify themselves as cultural or linguistic rights activists, but who participated in these movements. I thought these women would be able to give me a better understanding of gendered discrimination faced by the Azerbaijani community because of the activism in which they were involved. For my first interview, I tried to reach the wife of one of the well-known Azerbaijani activists who has spent more than five years in prison. I had difficulties reaching her on social media, so with

the assistance of another activist I was able to get her phone number. The day I called her, her husband answered the phone. He already knew about my research and had many questions about my work. After asking many questions he offered to be interviewed himself if I was interested in political matters, but when I emphasized that my desire was to interview women due to their specific life experiences, he felt offended, told me that she did not know anything regarding politics and that she was not able to do the interview because she was ill.

Through the media and with the help of activists, I was able to draw up a list of women whom I was able to contact. I had some women who volunteered to help. However, I had to change my language in approaching them. Instead of using terms such as ‘oppression’ or ‘discrimination,’ I told them that I was interested in their experiences as women. The use of generic terminology helped me learn about the different aspects of oppression and empowerment that in the beginning, was not part of the research. Mentioning my interest in their experiences allowed these women to engage in more in-depth conversations without having any assumptions about being oppressed.

During the interviews, one of the most frequently asked questions was if I am going to continue my research on Azerbaijani women after finishing this project. After responding, “of course I will, why do you think I would stop?” their responses surprised me greatly. Their assumptions were, that because I am a young woman living in California within a large Persian community, that I would assimilate into the Persian community and I would not be able to talk openly about the Turks in Iran. As a woman, I might be interested in receiving a degree to have better opportunity for marriage, therefore, this is a short term project for a requirement of my degree. These questions regarding my desire to pursue this subject further in many ways showed me the deep insecurity within the community, and the preconceptions held by women within my community.

It is important to clarify that my research only focuses on a specific group of women, Azerbaijani Turk women. To explore their experiences, I mainly focus on the interviews that I had with six women. Because of the lack of academic resources and materials on Azerbaijani women in Iran, I had to personally perform independent interviews, and I supplemented my information on the subject by gathering information through media sources. The lack of resources and materials pushed me to be as narrow and specific as possible. My research did not focus on the experiences of many minorities that are currently

living in Azerbaijan such as Sunni, Guran (Ahl-e Haqq), and Baha'i women in the predominant religious Shia Azerbaijan. Likewise, I did not focus on the queer and LGBT communities. This research is mainly based on Azerbaijani Turk Shia women's experiences and perceptions of being a woman within the Azerbaijani community and a Turk in Iranian society. Additionally, I exclusively focused on the experiences of Azerbaijani Turk women that also leaves out the experiences of other Turks who are living in other parts of Iran.

CHAPTER 4

NEGOTIATING FEMINISM

BY AZERBAIJANI ACTIVISTS

Many postcolonial feminists explain that the colonial relationship still plays a role in the process of knowledge production. In the case of Azerbaijani Turkish women, Persian feminists do not have a full understanding of the history of Azerbaijan and the layers of oppression within the Azerbaijani community. Many Persian feminists' approach carries the stereotypical prejudices towards Turks in Iran when they bring women's issues to the forum. The issues of Turkish minority women, similar to other minorities, are not included in the feminist movements of Iran, so it is clear that Azerbaijani women have been the victims of ethnic and cultural suppression and experience significant problems with their cultural sense of identity similar to other non-Persian women in Iran. Additionally, they face gender issues on a broader scale. These differences have been the impetus for many Azerbaijani feminists to begin their independent local activism.

Three years ago, my friends invited me to a Facebook group newly created to form a feminist group for Azerbaijani women. It was a new opportunity for me to see the main debates around women's rights and to understand feminism in Azerbaijani community. The initial purpose of the group was to create Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages, as well as a website to raise awareness of Azerbaijani issues and to produce feminist literature in the Azerbaijani (Turkish) language in an effort to make it accessible to Azerbaijani women. On the first day of my acceptance into the group, I saw that the group included approximately 30 women living inside and outside of Iran with a diversity in educational backgrounds and age groups. The group's administrator led a discussion on the goals of the groups to have mission statement for the group. For clarification of the main debates among Azerbaijani feminists, I will briefly focus on them.

One of the main debates of the group was choosing the name for the pages and the website. Some of the feminists believed that because of the negative stigma toward “feminism” we should avoid using the term in our titles, even though our writings and activism centered around the idea of feminism. These feminists claimed that Azerbaijani communities have had their perceptions toward feminism shaped as an inherently “Western idea” and do not see “feminism” as an indigenous autonomous grassroots concept. Thus, the perception of regional feminism as a “colonial discourse” imposed by the West, despite autonomous development, will discourage many women from accepting our ideas and activism. To avoid such a conflict, we should choose a local name that shows our activism under the category of women’s rights in the Azerbaijani community.

Another main debate was centered on whether we should use words “Turk” and “Azerbaijan” in the title of the group to bring emphasis to the ethnic demands of Turks as well as challenge the colonized idea of “Azeri.” This approach also brought the debates among feminists that our focus from gender based issues shifted to national identity struggles. On the other hand, it raised the question of what our position is going to be toward the women who live in Azerbaijani communities and do not see themselves as Turks or Azerbaijanis, or they refer to themselves as Azeri. Are we going to avoid these women’s issues because we do not agree with the way they identify themselves? We had feminists in the group that believed accepting Azeri and not emphasizing on our Turkish identity, is accepting colonization. They saw this approach as very problematic because they believed, as a feminist group, decolonization should be our priority. Different answers to these debates created the categories that also were the reality of the Azerbaijani community with the identity crisis. The importance of the identity crisis was so crucial for feminists that even their feminist standpoints were based on their identity definitions.

Another debated issue was choosing the main language and the alphabet that the pages were going to use. The argument was that if many women never learned to read and write in Turkish, then how are we going to explain feminism and women's issues in Turkish. Then, how should we expect women to fully understand new topics such as feminism in Turkish? Our neighboring countries, Turkey and Azerbaijan, are our main Turkish sources, are using Latin scripture; however, in Iran, the main alphabet is Arabic. So which one should we adopt? These debates were related to the decolonization approach and the way we should

stay centered on our activism. We, as feminists, should begin shifting to Turkish with Latin alphabet.

After almost a week of having open discussions and arguments around the issue of the name and goals of the group, many people gave apologies for being busy and left the group. However, the remaining feminists agreed to use the word feminism in the title instead of having Turk or Azerbaijan to bring focus on more gender-based issues. Based on offered names, “*BizFeministler*” [We Feminists] was chosen. In terms of used language, the group came to the conclusion the best way will be having Farsi and Turkish (both alphabets) in social media, and for the website, we should have a section for them and let the authors choose the language.

The group’s main goal was to bring attention to women’s issues with an intersectional approach and focus on intersections of gender, race, and class issues. The plan was to use the theories and works produced in other countries as foundational work to build on, works from those that had been through similar experiences of oppression and marginalization such as the writing of women of color from the United States, and using small examples from everyday life through the lens of feminism. Another goal was emphasizing local activists’ work to inspire other women to join social justice movements. For over a year, the group actively kept up their activism, but later due to the personal issues of some feminists, the group could not keep the level of activism similar to the beginning.

During the time that *Bizfeministler* was active, I used to receive question about why Azerbaijani feminists try to separate themselves. The origin of this accusation was that Azerbaijani feminists want to prioritize our ethnic demands or that they are functioning as nationalists rather than being feminists to separate ourselves from mainstream Iranian feminism. When some members of the group decided to seek help from feminist organizations in Europe and neighboring countries, our identities were challenged: Are we Turks? Then why do we work within the Iranian framework? If we are Iranian, then we should not contact Iranian organizations. If we are Azerbaijanis, why do not we focus on the Republic of Azerbaijan. It was a frustrating process to be subjected to these ongoing debates around our respective identities and we could see at the end they did not understand who we were and what we needed for our work.

I used *Bizfeministler* as an example to bring the challenges that Azerbaijani feminists face when they want to create a feminist group, website, or even a page in social media. The issues such as name, language, alphabet that mainly originate from identity crisis of Azerbaijani community. My example was from a feminist group that was independent without having any associations to Iranian mainstream feminism as well as Azerbaijani movements. Azerbaijani feminists usually face criticism from association with nationalist movements when they include racial justice discourses in their feminist activism. I used *Bizfeministler* to show that this is not always the case. Many women, whom in the beginning were part of the establishment group, might have personal associations with the Azerbaijani movements, but this does not make all feminist gatherings and groups nationalist. The main goal of the feminist gathering became gender issues. Having a group of feminists with different ideologies and backgrounds created an opportunity for open discussions.

In recent years, many feminist sites and pages have emerged that were not able to keep their activism for long. The main challenge is difficulties of activists managing their time to focus on their volunteer work with their jobs and lives. Inside of Iran challenges with creating organizations made the open gatherings challenging for Azerbaijani women too. With all challenges aside, *AzFemena* is another Azerbaijani feminist website that uses intersectionality as a main approach of their activism. *AzFemena* actively have focused on gender-based issues in Azerbaijani communities as well as other parts of Iran for over a year.

It is important to mention that women in Azerbaijani communities were able to become more active in decision making-positions. Their visibility in the society is not limited to women's movements. In 2010, when South Azerbaijan Pen in Exile (Iran) was established, an Azerbaijani feminist, Sedige Adaleti was elected for the head of the Pen. Having a woman at the head of the first established Pen among Azerbaijanis already shows the position that women are taking in Azerbaijani society. Ruqeye Kabiri is a well-known Azerbaijani novelist who writes in Turkish and mainly centers on women's issues as the main themes of her writings. Among young generations, many women writers and poets are becoming more noticeable. Many political parties have women in their central parts. A good example is the way Azerbaijani movements approach women's issues during International Women's Days by having multiple events. My feminist friends sometimes are critical of Azerbaijani movements approach and bring up the question that why only for one week in a year, the

movement focus on women's issue. I always say if there is an opportunity for us in a year even a day, we should take advantage of it to talk about women's issues in our community.

Azerbaijani feminists' main goal is creating space for Azerbaijani women to include their ethnic and gender struggles as well as other issues. As Collins states, "Black women's ideas have been honed at the juncture between movements for racial and sexual equality, and contends that Afro-American women have been pushed by 'their marginalization in both arenas' to create Black feminism" (Collins, 1986, p. S15). Through the way black women were able to bring their racial and sexual equalities into their gender justice movement, they were able to motivate other groups around the world. Azerbaijani women have attempted to have their own local women's movement, which, besides their gender issues, could give space to them to talk about ethnic issues as well. Azerbaijani movements have created space for women to become politically and socially more engaged citizens. These engagements mobilize women more in social justice movements and make women's movements stronger.

CHAPTER 5

A QUEST FOR IDENTITY AMONG AZERBAIJANIS

Question: What is your nationality (*Millet*)?

Answer: I am a Muslim and a Turk.

Question: Are you an Ottoman?

Answer: No, I am *baijanli* (a play on words in Azerbaijani meaning “soulless”).

Question: Where is the land of the *baijanlis*?

Answer: As far as I can tell, on the other side of the Araz live the Azeris-- on this side the *baijanlis*. Together, it makes Azerbaijani. But separately we are *baijanlis*.

Question: Your language is Turkic so you are a Turk?

Answer: There is not a word to describe my position. I am a Turk, but *baijanli*.

Question: Instead of being a *baijanli* Turk, why don't you solve your dilemma by calling yourself an Azerbaijani Turk?⁵

Kashkul was one of the earliest newspapers in the Azerbaijani Turkish language that introduced the terminology of Azerbaijani Turk in 1891. This imaginary dialogue in *kashkul* shows the ongoing debate of identity among Azerbaijanis that has been ongoing from the late 1800s until today. Still, there is no clear answer among Azerbaijanis for the question of identity; there is no single answer for the question of what is your nationality (*Millet*) for many Azerbaijanis. Are we only Azerbaijanis? Turks? Azeris? Azerbaijani Turks? The

⁵ *Kashkul*, NO.22 (1981) quoted in *Borders and Brethren* by Branda Shaffer (2002, p. 30).

answer to the question of nationality (*Millet*) varies depending on the beliefs and social class of whomever answers these questions.

The country of Azerbaijan adopted “Azerbaijani” as their national identity, which includes Azeri Turks and other minorities to resolve the issues of national identity. However, for Azerbaijanis living in the region known as South Azerbaijan in modern day Iran, there continues to be ongoing discussions regarding the issues of identity and self-identification. Many Azerbaijanis in Iran who have higher social class and high-ranking government jobs prefer to identify themselves as Iranian or skew their identity towards an Iranian identity rather than an Azerbaijani, some even going as far as hiding their Azerbaijani/Turkish identity.

The formation of the Azerbaijani identity is embedded with the land and geography of the region throughout history. The geography of Azerbaijan changed during many historical periods because of invasions and occupations by different empires, and the split of Azerbaijan took place in the nineteenth century between the Russian and Qajar empires (1789-1925). Later, the Republic of Azerbaijan was able to earn independence from the former Soviet Union (1991). The area of Azerbaijan in Iran is usually referred to as “Iranian Azerbaijan” or “South Azerbaijan.” Both words have geographical and political meanings for Azerbaijanis; however, the use of “Iranian Azerbaijan” is preferred by some Persian researchers because using the term “South Azerbaijan,” besides having political implications, can be misconstrued as being either a geographic region of the country of Azerbaijan or a separate nation rather than a geographic region belonging to the nation of Iran.

AZERI OR TURK?

Focusing on the ethnic, cultural and political identity of Azerbaijan as a political, cultural area has a long history. However, in general the discussions of Azerbaijanis’ identities are associated with the new global power of the nineteenth century and Azerbaijan as a focused geography by Britain, Russia, the United States, Ottomans and Iran. This attention has led to the formation of different literature and research, which usually involved certain ideologies that make it difficult to rely on sources. As Mohammad Taqi Zehtabi in *The Ancient History of Iranian Turks* states:

Unlike the historiography of other places and peoples, in our country, Iran, historiography has developed in a quite catastrophic and for the most part dishonest manner. . . . Just as today's Iran is home to a variety of nations, so too had the ancient Iran been home for diverse nations. It is for this reason that the obliteration and misrepresentation of Iran's ancient history is tantamount to concealment, suppression, and misrepresentation of the history of Iran's contemporary nations. (cited in Asgharzadeh, 2007, p. 47)

One of the main debates of identity among Azerbaijanis is that of being Turk or Azeri. Aside from being a historical debate, this debate over identity has turned into a political discourse with far ranging political implications. The origin of both terms comes from the debate of the ethnolinguistic composition of Azerbaijanis in both sides of the Araz River. Many Azerbaijani sources claim that before the major waves of Turkic migration in the tenth and eleventh century, the majority of the population was Turkic; however, Persian sources claim that prior to the tenth century, the people in Azerbaijan were predominantly Persian (Shaffer, 2002, pp.16-18). As Anthony Smith explains, nations need a golden age to create nationhood and tell their members where their borders were in that glorious past to create their national ends (Smith, 1997, p.64). The main stories told about Azerbaijanis origin had used to create nation for Iran. Therefore, because of the colonial history of Azerbaijanis under the Persian Empires, it is difficult to rely on the provided history and theories of their origin by both Iranian and Azerbaijani scholars with political biases involved in the advocating of these historical theories.

Most ethnic groups that make up modern day Azerbaijani people are a result of historical interactions between local ethnic groups and nomadic Turkic groups that immigrated to the region over the course of thousands of years. In essence, the roots of language and ethnicity are the consequence of the interaction of peoples of Iranian and Turkic origins as has been suggested by two major theories. First, the Median/Atropatenian theory; and secondly, the Caucasian Albanian theory (Geukjian, 2012, p.25). The Median theory proposes that the origins of the Azerbaijanis in Iran (Southern Azerbaijan) were that the Medians, an Indo-European people, had settled in the eastern parts of present-day Iran around Hamadan and Isfahan in the ninth century BC, and subsequently formed a state (pp. 25-26). The formation of another state, Atropatene (which also meant land of fire), in 320 BC by a Persian (Achaemenid) satrap during the time of Alexander the Great in the territory of southern Azerbaijan is another significant formative event in Azerbaijanis history (p. 26).

This theory claims that “Turkicization” occurred in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries (p.26). With the Caucasian Albanian theory, scholars assert that Azerbaijanis are descendants of Caucasian Albanians. Caucasian Albania had a territory and state in the contemporary Azerbaijanis lands (p.27). Caucasian Albania was a Christian kingdom, but its influence started to wane in the seventh century AD when Caucasian Albania fell to the Arab Caliphate, paving the way to Islamization of the region (p. 28). As a consequence, the majority of the population converted to Islam and were influenced by Islamic culture. Those who kept their Christian faith became Armenianized (p.28). The process of Turkification intensified in the eleventh and twelfth centuries AD as the Oguz Turkish tribes invaded Azerbaijan and intermingled with local people (p.29).

Rahim Raisnia, an Azerbaijani historian, believes that Azerbaijani identity is the result of historical processes, which have shaped modern Azerbaijanis’ identity due to various historical events and with the participation of various ethnic and religious groups (Raisnia, 1991). For Raisnia, Azerbaijani identity is not only based on an ethnic identity, it is also the result of geographical identity. He takes most of the provided theories of origins into account and believes each one had a role in forming contemporary Azerbaijanis’ identities (Raisnia, 1991).

These debates have been confounded by supporters of Iranian nationalism, Turkism, and Azerbaijani nationalism, all of whom have attempted to manipulate the historical narrative to justify or deny Azerbaijanis’ rights and to include or exclude certain identities to claim that Azerbaijanis on both sides of the Araz river are or are not the same people. One of the main proponents of the claim of separate identities was Ahmad Kasravi who believed that the people of the Republic of Azerbaijan were Caucasian Albanian descendants and believed that Aran (the term referring to the other side of the Araz River) had a separate identity from Iranian Azerbaijan. Kasravi’s geopolitical arguments were the foundation for future Iranian nationalists who would refer to Azerbaijani Turks as “Azeri,” placing an emphasis on the Persian ancestry of south Azerbaijanis rather than any of their Turkic roots. Ahmad Kasravi was one of the main Iranian nationalist figures whose writings had massive ideological impact and helped create a politically inspired narrative with blatant manipulation of historical facts (Shaffer, 2002, p. 17). These debates have become truly problematic as they have been used to deny Azerbaijanis their cultural and linguistic rights. Azerbaijani Turkish

activists' resistance to self-identify as "Azeri" is in many ways a form of protest and resistance towards a colonial interpretation of Azerbaijani history.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are Azerbaijanis such as Alireza Asgharzadeh who believes in reclaiming the term "Azeri" from a term that was appropriated for the purpose of nationalism to its historical roots as a term identifying Turkic groups (Radio Odlar Yurdu, 2011). Asgharzadeh's argument points to the fact that the term has been used throughout Azerbaijani history to refer to Azerbaijani Turkic groups before the term was hijacked by Iranian nationalists for political purposes. Therefore, the term ought to be reclaimed and be used in its correct historical sense rather than continue to be used as a political ideological tool and to further colonial identification and subordination to the Persian identity. Asgharzadeh's writings identifies Azerbaijani Turks as Azeri Turks, and he advocates the use of this terminology to create a sense of an "Azeri nation." The main critique for the usage of this term is from other Azerbaijani nationalists groups who argue that the Turkic cultural identity is of great importance and should take precedence and center-stage in self-identification. To this end, these nationalists prefer to self-identify as Azerbaijani Turks rather than Azeri to stress the Turkic cultural identity as a quintessential component of Azerbaijani national identity. The usage of the terminology of Azeri or Turk in today's Azerbaijanis communities in Iran has in many ways become less of a historical debate than a political debate that has profound political implications on the identity and cultural allegiance of the people.

NATIONALISM IN IRAN

One of the major changes in Iranian society originates through nation-state building and emergence of nationalism. Iranian nationalism changed as well as shaped minority politics. Modernization was the beginning of the emergence of nationalism. Reza Shah (reigning from 1925-1944), the first Pahlavi monarch, introduced the modernization process in Iran. The marginalization and alienation of Turks by Reza Shah's modernization project was the first step towards systematically attacking Azerbaijani identities. However, in women's cases, this alienation and marginalization was the result of a combination of two dimensions of Reza Shah's project: the dismantling of Azerbaijani (Turkish) ethnic identity and the emancipation of Persian women by Reza Shah through the creation of women's

organizations. Azerbaijani women did not fit into the new national identity of the country and were marginalized primarily because of their ethnicity, culture, and language differences.

For his modernization process, Reza Shah adopted new policies in the country with the purpose of assimilating all ethnic groups, forcing them to adopt Persian identity, culture, and language. His assimilation project had three main components: centralizing power, rewriting history, and banning non-Persian languages. During the Pahlavi regime, with the modernization project of Reza Shah, the marginalization of Azerbaijani women severely deepened as their ethnic identity was dismantled. Because of the modernization project, which was reform-oriented and focused on the improvement of the civil and political status of women in Iran, many Persian women benefited. Azerbaijani women, on the contrary, were negatively impacted in terms of the loss of their ethnicity and language. Fundamentally, this was the beginning of divisions between Persian and Azerbaijani women in terms of the interwoven dismantling of Azerbaijani ethnic identity within the emancipation of Persian women.

In the beginning of the modernization project, Reza Shah made assimilation a requirement in order to successfully create a nation-state rooted in Aryanist racist ideology. Asgarzaeh, in *Iran and the Challenge of Diversity*, argues Reza Shah was able to suppress numerous socialist, nationalist, and ethnic movements all over Iran; he centralized power and authority in Tehran, banned the usage of all non-Persian languages, introduced Farsi, the official language of Iran, as the only legitimate Iranian language, and placed a ban on the languages of other ethnic groups (Asgarzadeh, 2007, p. 87). Asgarzadeh adds “the non-Persian communities were thus forced to witness the eradication of their native culture, language, history, and heritage on a daily basis” (p.87). Asgarzadeh critiques and rewrites history with explanations of how non-Persian ethnic groups were assigned new histories to improve Aryanist ideology. The ethnic minorities were not encouraged to be proud of who they were because, according to the dominant ideology, their heritage and culture was nothing of which to be proud. They were required to assimilate to “the superior Aryan/Persian race and culture,” and if they did not acknowledge the “superiority of Aryan/Persian race,” they would then become subjected to humiliation, marginalization, and exclusion (p. 88). However, this process was harsh on Azerbaijanis as Nikki Keddie in *Modern Iran* states, as in the Northern province in which Azerbaijanis were concentrated,

they paid more taxes than in any other Iranian province, without receiving commensurate benefits. The Azerbaijani Turkish language was not taught or permitted for official business, and there was resentment against forced Persianization (p. 111).

With the project of Reza Shah to create a homogenous nation-state based on Persian identity, Azerbaijani women's identity was under attack. This attack was not limited to Turks in Iran and included all other ethnic minorities; however, Turks constituted the largest ethnic minority and, in comparison to other ethnic minorities, were targeted more due to their large population and non-Persian language. This included strict assimilation projects imposed on them. Various anticolonial and anti-oppression movements were emerging throughout Azerbaijan that threatened Reza Shah's ideology, so he put restrictions on Azerbaijan and repressed women's movements. One of the movements that was hijacked was the liberation movement that took place in Iranian Azerbaijan in 1919–1920, led by Sheikh Mohammed Khiabani, a progressive Azerbaijani nationalist (Asgarzadeh, 2007, p. 86). Even though these movements happened before Pahlavi, they had a clear impact on society and were perceived as potential threats to the future regimes. Thus, the Pahlavi regime had pursued aggressive assimilationist politics toward Azerbaijani Turkish minorities.

Besides Aryanist ideas, religio-nationalist groups were other groups which affected Persian and non-Persian women in Iran. Religio-nationalists' ideas about women come from Shia views about women, and the views of Iranian Religio-nationalists brought Sharia based laws, which in turn marginalized Persian and non-Persian women in Iran. However, Shia identity in Iran is more connected to the Persian identity that the nationalist regime not only advocated but enforced. Even though Sharia is an accepted rule for many Iranian Shia followers, many of their practices are linked with Persian culture and tradition, which separate Shia from other sects of Islam. Thus, the religio-nationalists and Persian nationalists share a common foundation of Persian identity. Richard Cottam, in his book *Nationalism in Iran*, argues the reason the Shia sect of Islam became dominant in Iran is connected to Iranian nationalism. He explains Iranian Shia ideology, which stresses that Hossein, the Son of Ali (first Calipha), married the daughter of Yazdgerd III, the Sassanid Monarch, and that Imams were descendants of them (Cottam, 1964, p.134), which was taken out of context and used to justify Persian nationalism. In other words, symbolically Imams Aryanized. Religio-nationalist groups were dynamic since the Safavid period (1502-1736) and arose during

Constitutional Revolution (1905–1907) with demands for, according to a few influential Shia clerics among them, a legitimate constitution. These groups were against westernized policy, and they were after a religiously legitimate constitution founded on Islamic rules, and rejected imitation of Western colonialism. Eventually, in 1979 with the Islamic Revolution of Iran, they were able to obtain political power. Additionally, the religio-nationalism in Iran was based on Shia Islam, and since the Safavid period when Shia Islam became the official religion of Iran, many elites integrated this into their identity. Even during the Constitution Revolution, *Mujteheds* (Shia leaders) were trying to constitutionalize Sharia law. Therefore, religio-nationalism, besides affecting all women in Iran, affected Azerbaijani women differently in terms of assimilation.

Assimilation of Azerbaijani women in Iran was, to some degree, complemented by having Shia Islam as a majority-practiced sect in Azerbaijan, so identifying as Shia provided tools to Religio-nationalists to accept Azerbaijanis more than other ethnic groups, and for Azerbaijani women to benefit. Nonetheless, Religio-nationalists did not want to focus on ethnic identity, and were using Azerbaijani culture and language, in this case – religion, to assimilate non-conforming groups to Iranian Islam and Persian identity. Moreover, the sharing of stories between Shia followers in Iran were used as tools to create a sense of patriotism to attract Azerbaijanis, given their religious orientation, and make them protect Iran. For example, during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), many Azerbaijanis participated in the war to protect Shia-Islam, which was perceived as an act of protecting Iran.

WOMEN’S MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AZERBAIJAN

Our history, by its testimony throughout the centuries, has been males’ history, especially before the Constitutional Revolution. That is the history which always ruled it: men, men’s adventures, oppression and justice, affairs, good and evils, affection and pleasure

Reza Baraheni, *Male History* (1984)

Baraheni calls Iranian history a “male history.” Baraheni is an Azerbaijani author who is aware of women’s roles in the Azerbaijani community as well as women’s absence in told stories of Iran as well as Azerbaijan. Baraheni’s critique includes the historiography of the most historical periods of Iran before the Constitution Revolution dominated based on the *Shah* and his surroundings. Therefore, most of the events of Shahs have been recorded, and

in these types of historiography, social, cultural events, and especially women's issues were rarely taken into consideration. Thus, to understand women's issues in the history of Iranian Azerbaijanis, we have to focus on individuals' lives based on oral histories and some published newspapers related to women's issues.

In examining the role of women throughout Iranian history, Zainab Pasha can be considered as one of the most significant and influential examples of women's movement in Azerbaijan. In a period of history when there were many restrictions on the presence of women in social-political activities, Zenab Pasha had become the symbol of resistance against colonization and liberation. Zeinab Pasha's name is associated with leading a group of women in an uprising, which ended in the closure of the market in Tabriz and abolishment of the Tobacco Concession to Britain (1891-1892).

Zeynab Pasha was born and grew up in Tabriz into a working class family. Zeynab Pasha, unlike many women of her period, did not use a burqa or anything to cover her face. She comfortably went out in public and interacted with men. During the drought, which made many merchants of Tabriz close their shops, Zeynab Pasha organized dozens of women and attacked the market with sticks and forced merchants to share their hoarding of food to divide food among people. Zeynab Pasha had 40 women during the attacks. Zeynab Pasha gave a speech to the people of Tabriz after that: "If you do not dare to punish tyrants if you fear from thieves and looters to protect your property and honor in your homeland, use our Chador [veil] and sit in the corner of the house and do not claim to be a man. We [women] will fight in your place against the wicked" (NahidiAzer, 2005, p. 41).

The actions of Zeynab Pasha were tolerated and respected by Haji Mirza Javad Agha, the influential *Mujtahid* of Tabriz, because of Zeynab Pasha's will for justice. During the Constitutional Revolution, Zeynab Pasha and her group joined the revolution. Since that time, Zeynab Pasha has been seen as a portrayal of a woman who stands against injustice. Janet Afary in her description of Constitutional Revolution in Azerbaijan states:

During the Tabriz civil war (1908-1909) urban and rural women fought in that region's newly formed army of resistance. Azerbaijan and the Western area adjoining the Caspian Sea were believed by the ancient Greeks to have been the home of the mythical tribe of Amazon women and, as if to maintain this legend, Tabriz women formed their own contingents of warriors or fought in male disguise for the resistance. (Afary, 1996, p. 207)

Among the struggles of Iranian women, the struggles of Azerbaijani women significantly differed. Azerbaijani women, in addition to political campaigns, also fought in militant groups against the government. After bombarding Majlis in 1908, Tabriz became the center of constitutionalism, and women became active members of the resistance, which fought for the restoration of constitutional order (Afary, 1996, p.194). During the ten-month siege of Tabriz, women joined men to fight in important positions to defend the city. Many women from different parts of Azerbaijan joined the resistance and that was the time many bodies of armed women dressed in men's clothing had been found (p.194).

The issue with the historiography of Iranian historians and scholars originates from their approach to Azerbaijan. Iranian scholars have tried to analyze Azerbaijani events in comparison with other parts of Iran. However, in reality, Azerbaijan is a separate entity with a different identity and has more ties with the Azerbaijan on the other side of the Araz River (that was under Russian control), and received many influences from the political changes of other Azerbaijan. Afary (1996) in her writings on the civil war in Azerbaijan states:

The revolutionary movement in Azerbaijan did not develop into an ethnic separatist movement. On several occasions, the Tabriz resisters threatened to secede from the government in Tehran, but their opposition was to the increasing domination of the anti-constitutional forces, the court, and the conservative clerics and not to the ethnic and cultural domination of the Persian population in Iran. If residents of Azerbaijan were interested in the creation of a pan-Azerbaijani movement that combined the Azeris of Transcaucasia with the Iranian Azerbaijanis, the year 1908-1909 would have been a perfect opportunity. This, however, was not the case. The resistance was clearly aimed at reestablishing the constitutional government for the whole Iran, a goal that ultimately was achieved with the support of the other provinces. (p.212)

Afary's approach to history with political ideology is apparent with her statement. First, her claim that Azerbaijanis were not against the domination of Persians in Iran brings the question of why Azerbaijanis were asking for *anjomanhaye iyaleti velayeti* (Provincial and Departmental Councils). According to ART. 90. of Constitutional Laws, throughout the whole empire, provincial and departmental councils (*anjumans*) shall be established in accordance with special regulations. Second, Azerbaijanis during the constitutional regime many times threatened to separate from Iran in their confrontation with the Shah's regime (Abrahamian, 1982, p.90). These threats show the awareness Azerbaijanis had of their distinct identity among Iranians and their political powers (Shaffer, 2002, p. 40).

Iranian Azerbaijanis' influence from the other side of the Araz River was not only limited to left-wing groups during the Constitutional Revolutions. On May 28, 1918, with the establishment of the new state, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (*Azerbaijan Khalq Jumhuriyeti*) the political and cultural influences of the Azerbaijani community became stronger for Azerbaijanis in both side of Araz River. The newly established republic granted, "equal rights for all citizens regardless of religion, ethnic origin, or gender, making Azerbaijan the first Muslim state to grant women the vote" (Shaffer, 2002, p. 38). This republic with the invasion of Soviet forces in 1920 ended; however, the idea that Azerbaijanis could have their own state never ended.

The idea of women being full citizens and having the same rights as men already was accepted among many groups of Azerbaijanis after the above-mentioned law in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Molla Nasreddin⁶ (1906-1930), a weekly published newspaper in Azerbaijani Turkish, pioneered such a secular approach toward women's issues with critiques of conservative interpretations of Islamic laws in Azerbaijani communities as well as many patriarchal norms and customs of Azerbaijanis. Molla Nasreddin became popular among Azerbaijanis in both sides of Araz so much that the cartoons and writings in Molla Nasreddin opened debates among many Azerbaijanis about women's schooling, veiling, child marriage, and many practiced laws under name of Islam. Hamida Javanshir, the wife of Jalil Mohammadguluzadeh founder of Molla Nasreddin, as early feminists of Azerbaijan besides creating women's organization left many writings about women's issues of her time. During her one year living in Iran (1917-1918) in her memoir, she explains that after the crossing border of Azerbaijan to go to Tabriz, they had to stay few days around Aher (Mammadguluzadeh, 1967, p.102). In a village around Aher Hamida was hosted by wife of Khan, Meleyke Khanum who in absence of her husband had the control of her

⁶ "Azerbaijani weekly magazine *Molla Nasreddin* was revolutionary for its time, bravely ridiculing clerics and criticizing the political elite as well as the Russian Tsar and the Shah of Persia." <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31640643>

husband's lands and villages. Hamida mentions that servants and workers of farms all were under the control of Meleyke Khanum. Hamida mentions that the life of the villagers' women was miserable because of their poverty (Mammadguluzadeh, 1967, pp. 102-103). They had to work in the farm and the house and that besides all these duties; they were under strict control of their husbands. Explanations of Hamida unpack how class played role in experiences of women in Azerbaijani community.

With all influences from other side of Araz, the idea of women's rights among South Azerbaijani activists and writers also had begun to become popular. The first reference to women's rights can be found in the works of Ali Mo'juz Shabestari (1873- 1934), an Azerbaijani poet, with his famous poem that stated, "If Tukaz's [his wife] ignorance is not removed, her son will not be inclined toward civilization" (Sultan Qurraie, 1997, p. 9). Mo'juz recognizes women's literacy as a key factor in social improvement (p.9). Mo'juz believed in women's education and he presented his argument with the claim that only educated women can bring up good sons. He was one of the pioneers of women's rights, in addition to literature and refers openly to the unfavorable position of women in society, and tried to create a school for women and he did it around 1933. Finally, because of political pressures he had to leave Azerbaijan.

Among male supporters of women's rights, Raffi-Khan Amin and Taghi Rafat (1887-1920) are among the first people who introduced "feminism" in their newspaper *Tajaddod* (Modernity). Their writings about women were published with pen names of "Feminist" and "Femina" in 1919. In the article "Mod (Fashion)" Taghi Rafat, under the nickname of Femina in April 1919, writes: "Feminists, in the modern term, claim that they are a pro-woman, people who advocate their [women] rights, try to satisfy their needs and reform the individual and social status. In the world, feminists are the followers of feminism" (p.4).

Rafat studied in Istanbul and later moved back to Tabriz to teach French literature. Rafat's knowledge in French could provide him an ability to access feminist literature in France. Raffi-khan Amin (Feminist), along with Rafat, wrote a series of articles in the *Tajadod* newspaper on women's Rights. In one of his articles "Our Girls' Education" Feminist (1919) states, "In Iran, there is no talk about the Iranian woman in any social case ... a woman is denied her legitimate rights because there is no individual to protect her and nor does the law, and she does not know her rights." Rafat criticizes the state for not

providing education for women as part of the duty of government, and he called citizens as part of reform to take women's education into consideration. After the crush of Tabriz in 1920 and ending short-lived state of *Azadistan* (land of liberty), *Tajadod*, the newspaper of the Democrat Part of Tabriz, was closed.

During World War II, the autonomy movements in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, protected by Soviet troops, with local supporters the leftist Democratic Party of Azerbaijan took control over Iranian Azerbaijan (Keddie, 2007, p. 108). Nikki Keddie states, "It had an active women's section, and the Azerbaijani Provisional Government had women vote in election for the first time" (p. 108). She explains that the new government established equal pay for equal work and paid maternity leave (p. 108). The Azerbaijani Provisional Government adopted gender-egalitarian programs for the empowerment of women as well as opening schools for educational and occupational purposes. With the entrance of central governments troops and the crush of the Azerbaijani Provisional Government, these programs were terminated.

The history of women's movement in Azerbaijan shows how Azerbaijani women have never been silent objects. They have actively resisted and negotiated their positions within their community. Additionally, focusing on the history of feminism in Azerbaijani community challenges the stereotypical portrayal of the aggressive Turkish men in Iranian society that have been highlighted as the main source of Turkish women's oppression. Similar to many communities, Azerbaijan had men and women that fought for social justice causes as well as women's rights. However, in the colonial position of Azerbaijanis in Iran as well as the dominant political ideology toward Turks silenced the history of women's movement in Azerbaijani community.

CHAPTER 6

MULTIPLE MARGINS: GENDER, RACE/ETHNICITY, AND CLASS

RAHELE ZAMANI

“Go make it, my dear girl. He’s your husband, even if he beats you up [not big deal].”

This was the judge’s response to Rahele when she filed for divorce after her husband’s physical and mental abuses. Rahele Zamani, an Azerbaijani Turk woman, was executed at age 27 for killing her husband after the birth of her second child. Rahele, before the murder of her husband, had on many occasions talked to her family about her issues, but her father warned her that they did not want her to bring dishonor to the family with another divorce after her sister’s divorce. Rahele did not give up and filed for divorce, but the judge did not take her case seriously. The judge postponed Rahele’s request for four months, and after that her husband did not agree to divorce her. Rahele had no choice but to go back to her abusive husband.

Rahele grew up in the small village of Sarab, Idly, in the Ardebil province, where due to her family’s poverty, she never had an opportunity to attend school and did not learn Farsi until her imprisonment. Rahele, at the age of 14, was forcibly married to her husband that she described as:

I was 14. We lived in a village in Ardebil. The boys went to school in another village that had a school, but my father did not allow me to go. One day when I came back from working on our farm, my mother told me that I had a suitor, and my father had accepted. They had agreed to have the marriage ceremony the following week. I had no idea what a husband even was. They said if you get married, there would be one less mouth to feed; we were eight kids. Even if I did not agree, no one cared...

From the first day of Rahele’s marriage, her husband’s abuse began. Rahele’s abuse was not only limited to her husband, but his family was abusive as well. Once, because of her

mother-in-law's beating, she had a miscarriage. During the time they were living in the village, Rahele had three medical emergencies in the hospital in Sarab after sustaining physical injuries following domestic abuse. Once, when her husband struck her over the head, she spent three days unconscious in the hospital. That was the time she filed for divorce, and the judge did not take her case seriously.

Later, her husband decided to move to Tehran and after moving to Tehran, Rahele became more isolated. She never attended school and was not able to speak Farsi, so she was spending most of her days at home as a homemaker and was not able to adopt a big city lifestyle. She was living in Eslamabad, the region in the southern part of Tehran where mainly Turks live. However, her husband began adjusting to Tehran and city life and began meeting other women and having affairs. Around that time, he began watching porn and increasingly became more aggressive toward Rahele. He started comparing Rahele with women in porn and calling her "ugly," "unattractive," "useless," and telling her that "you had given birth to a child, and you are not in a good shape anymore." That was the time her husband began sexual assaults too. Rahele's husband's addiction made him more aggressive.

A few days after giving birth to her second child, her husband asked Rahele to go to his brother's house who lived a block away from them, and told her that he was going to have a male visitor and he did not want Rahele to be there. Rahele had taken her newborn with her, and the baby did not stop crying, so she returned home. After opening the door, Rahele saw a naked woman with her husband in the room. Rahele later describes this moment as horrifying, "I couldn't even yell." Her husband walked toward Rahele and kicked Rahele out. That same night, when Rahele went back home and asked him "why do you do this to me?" her husband became angry and said to her, "I am a man, I can do whatever I want," and beat her again.

At night, when her husband saw that Rahele was crying, he gave her pills telling her "this will help you sleep." The afternoon of the next day, when Rahele began to talk about what happened, they got into a fight. Her husband gave another pill to her saying, "It will calm you down." However, all day Rahele did not calm down. That afternoon when they fought again, Rahele saw a metal rod in the yard, the metal rod that her husband used to beat her. She grabbed it and held it against him while threatening that she would beat him. Suddenly, she attacked and hit him on the head. Rahele always stated, when she was in

prison, she never had a plan to kill her husband. That was her immediate reaction, and she just wanted to scare him. When Rahele found out that her husband had died, she was afraid and tried to hide the body. Because she could not carry him, she cut up the body to hide it in the empty tank in the yard. Neighbors who saw blood flow into the yard called the police. They were thinking Rahele's husband had killed her. After police arrived, Rahele was arrested. Rahele never remembered the full story, and she always stated that she had lost her memory after her husband's death. Rahele was never able to describe how she was able to cut her husband's body and carry it.

During her imprisonment, Rahele was able to learn Farsi in the three years that she spent in Evin prison. Rahele's limited Farsi played an important role in her case. In court when the judge asked for Rahele's defense, she did not know the meaning of the word "defense." She just kept repeating, "*koshtamesh* [I killed him]," the only Farsi sentence that she knew. Rahele spent three years in prison without being able to see her children. Rahele's family denied her after the crime and never contacted her again. Her husband's family took custody of her children and used the proceeds from the sale of Rahele and her husband's house to pay Rahele's *diya*⁷ to ask for Rahele's execution. Two days after Rahele's arrest, she was sent for medical examination to find out about the pills that were given to her by her husband. Her blood analysis did not show anything, so they never found out what the pills were, and the medical reports did not confirm Rahele's psychosis, or any sort of mental illness.

Rahele's case was able to receive public attention with the help of women's activists' "One Million Signatures Campaign." When Mehboubeh Hosseinzadeh and Nahid Keshavarz, two women's rights activists, were arrested because of collecting signatures in park in Tehran for the "One Million Signatures Campaign," they were sent to Evin prison. Then, these activists met Rahele in Evin prison. Initially, Rahele's story was written by these women who

⁷ In Arabic, the word means blood money. According to Iranian law, if you are asking for execution as a punishment for murder, you have to pay a sum in blood money.

met Rahele⁸ in Evin prison. After that, women's activists found a lawyer, and Zahra Arzeni accepted her case. Rahele was introduced to Khadije Moghadam, an activist, who could speak Turkish to find out more about the details of the case to which the court had not paid attention. The activists made a trip to Rahele's village to meet with her family and her husband's family to ask for a pardon. Fahime Eslami, a local social worker, agreed to help the activists to talk with both families as well as help with translation.

After visiting Rahele's husband's family, her parents-in-law agreed to forgiveness, but Rahele's brother-in-law did not accept. Her brother-in-law believed that forgiving a woman who killed his brother is a dishonor for the family, and when he saw a delay in the execution sentence because of new lawyer's actions, he stated "don't you have any man in Tehran to cut a woman's head?" The activists had limited time to persuade the families, and Rahele's sentence was in process. Rahele's new lawyer was able to receive an order to hold the execution for a month with the request of new investigations. Once, Rahele was returned from the execution site and that time Rahele called one of the activists saying, "It doesn't matter anymore if I will be executed. I am happy there are people out there who are fighting for our rights [women's rights]." Despite all the efforts, the activists were not able to stop the sentence, and Rahele was executed for the charge of intentional murder at the age of twenty-seven in 2008. The night of Rahele's execution, women's activists were outside of Evin prison with the last hope of persuading the family for forgiveness to stop the sentence, but they did not succeed. Rahele's concerns before execution were about her five-year-old

⁸ Some of the articles that was published online about Rahele
http://www.zamaaneh.com/zanan/2010/11/post_173.html
<http://www.dw.com/fa-ir/%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85/a-3036659>

daughter that she had not seen in three years, and she kept saying, “I know she will have my destiny.”

RAHELE IS THE “ONLY ONE...”

I learned about Rahele’s case through the media after her execution. The village that Rahele grew up in is almost a two-hour drive from my hometown. My familiarity with the region made me aware of the issues that Rahele had faced during her life, and they are common in the area where Rahele and I grew up. Rahele’s life story includes many issues that Turk women face in Iranian society; however, Rahele's unique circumstances in committing this crime made only certain issues in her case visible to the public. The issues left out of the general conversation were: child marriage, lack of schools and educational opportunities, poverty, domestic violence, addiction, immigration to big cities like Tehran, language barriers and many other issues that are barely visible in Turkish women's lives in Iran. The stereotypes toward Turks prevent the visibility of these issues among Turk women, and bring with them the assumptions that cases like Rahele are uncommon.

Another woman who has received much publicity was Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, a woman from the East Azerbaijan province, who faced the sentence of death by stoning for adultery in 2005. While many reports emphasized the effect of Sharia laws on Iranian women, none of them mention the role that Ashtiani’s ethnicity and language had played in her case. Sakineh is one of the Azerbaijani women who was affected by the Iranian government’s incorporation of Sharia law and by her language barrier among other factors. Sakineh’s barrier with language was illustrated in the conversation during the time that Sakineh returned to the prison after her court:

“So, what did they give you? How many months did you get?” “I didn’t get any time,” she replies with excitement. “They just gave me the Rajm⁹!” “Oh, my God! Oh my God!” the inmate starts crying and pulling her hair. “But they gave me the rajm,” yells Sakineh. “Why are you so upset?” “Don’t you understand?”

⁹ It is a Arabic word. In Iranian Sharia laws stands for “stoning,” which refers to the punishment in which individuals or a group throw stones until the person dies.

interrupted another woman prisoner. “Rajm means stoning to death! You are to be stoned! You are condemned to death by stoning!”¹⁰ (Mojtahedi, 2013)

During my search for people who had met Rahele Zamani and Sakineh Ashtiani, I contacted many feminists and activists who were imprisoned due to their activism. The question that some of these women asked me was why I only focus on these two women since their life stories had already been publicized. Yet, there are many women in prison with similar situations, and no one knows about them. One of these activists who has been in Tabriz prison for four months in *Bande Nasavan* explained that during four months in the prison, she only met one woman with a high school diploma. She added, she was the only one with a bachelor’s degree and that made her the only resource for these women for writing letters or any family and court requests. Listening to these women's life stories to be able to write their requests, she felt compelled to know more about their difficulties, especially the effects of financial issues on their lives. She even shared the long list of women who have been imprisoned for various crimes and shared with me their life stories to show how they have been victims of the situations like Rahele and Sakine.

My purpose in this research is not to claim that Persian women do not face the issue of language in terms of legal terminology, but rather that not having full access to resources that exist in the Iranian system because of the language barrier is more common among ethnic women. Islamization in terms of Sharia law and the belief system of the state after becoming an Islamic Republic have affected all women in Iran. However, Sakineh’s case, similar to Rahele’s, is not limited only to the language barrier and Sharia law; in addition, the gender, ethnic, and class issues in her case are key themes which need to be analyzed. Feminism in Iran usually emphasizes the issue of upper class women and abandons marginalized groups’ experiences such as Turks, Kurds, Baluchi, Lurs, etc. with intersections

¹⁰ This conversation has been collected by Leila Mojtahedi, an Azerbaijani activist, <http://www.pensouthazerbaijan.org/2013/03/LMojtahedi-The-case-of-sakine-ashtiani.html>

of gender, ethnic, class, religion and many other factors. I will try to focus on ethnic women's issues using Rahele's case as an example to explore Azerbaijani Turk women's issues.

THE DOUBLE OPPRESSION OF AZERBAIJANI TURK WOMEN

The multiple discrimination and inequalities that Azerbaijani Turk women face based on their gender and their ethnicity is identified as "structural intersectionality" similar to women of color experiences in the United States (Crenshaw, 1991). Azerbaijani Turk women encountered patriarchal customs, systematic economic inequalities, and misrepresentation in Iranian women's movements (discussed in a later chapter). Many Azerbaijani Turk women suffer from patriarchal customs similar to Persian women, however in some instances they do so more drastically than Persian women because of the language barriers and the issue of accessibility to resources. For example, domestic violence and child marriages are major issues in many regions of Azerbaijan, and approaches to these kinds of issues within Azerbaijani communities as well as mainstream Iranian society created the double oppression for Azerbaijani women.

Azerbaijan as a geographical identity includes four provinces, which have many rural and urban areas. The variety of social classes and the differential status of women brings complexity to women's issues and makes it difficult to generalize the issues. Although it is clearly evident in Rahele's case, many other areas have been subjected to the systematic inequalities experienced by Turk women which are a result of a lack of access to education, legal services, health services, language barriers, as well as low levels of employment outside of their homes. Turk women like Rahele face triple oppression: sexism, racism, and classism. Acknowledging the difficulty of generalizing issues among Turk women, I will focus on the issues I see as predominant in Rahele's case.

The double oppression of Azerbaijani Turk women emerged during the Pahlavi Regime. It is important to note that the ideology of the State in both regimes in Iran have affected Persian and non-Persian women's lives. The politics of the former regime of Iran, the Pahlavi monarchy, were based on the Aryanism ideology that viewed Iran in its entirety as a Persian country and attempted the assimilation of other ethnicities in Iran toward a

Persian identity (Asgharzadeh, 2007). After the Iranian Revolution, the regime changed from a monarchy to a conservative Islamic Republic; the politics of the state went from enforcing an Aryanist ideology and shifted towards a Shia Islamic identity. The politics of exclusion, of denying ethnicities -- mostly non-Persians -- stayed the same. Therefore, Azerbaijani (Turkish) language was never allowed to be used in schools, universities, and media; even though the Iranian constitutional laws¹¹ provided the opportunity to have school, media, books, etc. in other languages (Asgharzadeh, 2007; Shaffer, 2002). This permission, however, was not given to non-Persian ethnicities.

The absence of Turkish language in Iranian schools has created many issues in women's education. Most children grow up with parents who do not speak Persian. Their first language was and has been Turkish, but when they start using Persian in school; they face various types of discrimination. People are discriminated in employment opportunities for having an accent and it limits their upward social mobility. Not having access to media and legal systems because of language issues makes these women unaware of their own rights. In the case of Azerbaijani women like Rahele Zamani, language has been the main problem that leads to failures to understanding the court proceedings, an inability to articulate a defense in a non-native tongue as well as the inability to advocate for their legal rights. In Iran, where the official language is Farsi, media and schools, and the legal system use Farsi. How can we expect women, who have never had an opportunity to attend school, to learn the Farsi language or be literate in Farsi and thereby do not know the resources of their country?

Many Turk women live in their communities without having any relations outside of their families. The kind of patriarchy they suffer is very different from that of the dominant feminist interpretation of patriarchy. Besides Iranian imposition of their interpretation of

¹¹ According to Article 15 of Iranian Legal Code, "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." Qanuni Assasi Jumuhurii Islamai Iran [The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran] 1358 [1980], ch. 2, art.15.

Sharia laws that discriminate against all women in Iran, minority women experience barriers of language, resources, and class issues as well. Even cultural and linguistic diversity and in some cases religious diversity among minority women differentiate their individual experiences of oppression. An example of this is the city of Urmia, which has a population consisting of Turks, Kurds, Assyrians, and Armenians and women's situations in cases such as marriage in each community, is based on their culture and class background causing a disparate spectrum of experiences within a single city.

Poverty and class issues are common realities of small cities in which Turks live. These issues prevent many women from getting an education. The intersections of these factors push families to force their girls to early marriages to have fewer responsibilities to protect honor that has been defined through women's sexuality and also into have less mouths to feed. According to the report of Justice for Iran (JFI), Ardebil, the province that Rahele was from, has the highest rate of marriages for girls below the age of ten, with 1,411 cases in 2011 ("NGO reveals", 2013). This number was 67 times more than the next province that has the second highest number. In the report of JFI, three provinces of Azerbaijan, including Ardebil, East and West Azerbaijan, are among the highest rates of child marriage (under the age of 18).

The issue of double oppression of Azerbaijani Turk women is noticeable when analyzing the patriarchal customs and traditions as well as the legitimization of these patriarchal norms among Azerbaijani communities. In my interview with the woman's right activist who visited Rahele's family and Rahele's husband's family regarding domestic violence, I asked her if Rahele's family and her husband's family were aware of Rahele's husband's abuses. She responded, "domestic violence is not a taboo there [referring to Rahele's village]. It is not something to be ashamed of." Therefore, everyone, in both families, was aware of Rahele's issues and her husband's aggression, but Rahele was expected to accept the condition and be an obedient wife.

Through the intersectionality lens, women's scholars have proposed that domestic violence is one the forms of oppression and a form of social control (Bograd, 1999, p.276), and that there is a need for analyzing domestic violence alongside other social factors. Social factors that affect domestic violence are "intersections of systems of power (e.g., race, class, gender, and sexual orientation) and oppression (prejudice, class stratification, gender

inequality, and heterosexist bias)” (Bograd, 1999, p.276). Thus, domestic violence is not a monolithic phenomenon, it is a phenomenon influenced by the intersections of personal and social consequences, how it is experienced and how it presents in individual cases, and whether victims can be escaped safely among many other factors (p. 276). Many studies suggest that domestic violence happens in all social classes (p. 278), but the relative resources available to respond to domestic violence varies. In Iranian society, the experiences of poor, non-Persian speaking women remain absent, and it is difficult to discuss the factors that promote domestic violence in non-Persian areas. In communities similar to the area Rahele grew up, the lack of resources and knowledge affect the way community perceive women and violence.

LITERATURE, WOMEN AND HONOR

Sarvan and Gozel was living in Mugan where Gozel gave birth to a daughter named Sara. But Gozel died when she gave birth to Sara. Sara was raised by her stepmother and her father. Sara used to play by the banks of Arpachayi River like her mother. Thus, the river became dependent on Sara. Whenever Sara was not there, Arpachayi was raging but it was calm when she was around. Sara became betrothed with her beloved shepherd in Mugan, Khan-Choban. In summer, Khan-Choban had to take the flock up north to the mountains. Sara would get lonely and went back to her old friend Arpachayi. Khan, a village chieftain, saw Sara and became enamored with her. Khan fall in love with Sara and sent people from his village to ask Sara to marry him. Sara did not agree to the marriage, but when the villagers from her village were beaten by Khan’s guards, Sara decided to go with Khan’s men. When they had to pass over Arpachayi, Sara to protect her *namus* (honor), jumped into Arpachayi and Arpachayi, with his sensual gaze and wild flooding currents, took Sara away with him.

This is the story that my grandmother used to tell us. She used to end her story with singing *Apardi seller Sarani* (The floods took Sara), an Azerbaijani folk song. This was my grandmother’s favorite story and song she would recite to us often. This story gave her the opportunity to talk to us about honor and gender expectation in our family and community. She used to explain that we needed to protect our *namus* (honor) the way Sara did. She usually ended her story staying “Sara preferred death instead of going with Khan”. For my grandmother, Sara symbolized a real woman who performed her duties honorably and was a paradigm of womanhood, the “perfect woman” who controlled her sexuality and defended her *namus* to the end. Water, which in Azerbaijani culture is a symbol of purity, in the form

of the Arpachayi river, helped Sara protect her virginity. This is one of the symbolic hikaye¹² of Azerbaijani folklore that expresses the expectations of women to control their *namus*.

The idea that women must safeguard their sexuality is deeply rooted and a core tenet to the understanding of women as the property of men. Rose Weitz (2010) in “A History of Women’s Bodies” explores the women’s status as property of men through the historical process from the earliest recorded legal system, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, until recent family laws in the Western societies. Weitz explains that during the Babylonian times, even free women (not just slaves that had owners) belonged to their father before marriage and their husbands after. Therefore, actions such as rape were considered property damage (p.4). As a punishment, the rapist had to pay a fine to the husband or the father of the raped woman for "damaged goods," not the raped woman (p.4). In “Status, Property, and the Value on Virginity,” Alice Schlegel (1991) argues, “one way to assess a woman's autonomy is to ask whether she controls her own sexuality” (p. 719). Schlegel explains that controlling women’s sexuality and virginity is a measure of men's control over women's lives and female subordination (p.719).

Women’s subordination and lack of control over their sexuality is not only characteristic of the ancient Middle East but was widespread in ancient societies and analysis of crimes of passion or honor killing in different communities shows the status of women in different societies throughout time. Honor killings became lawful in ancient Rome, as Marcus Cato, the statesman, stated ‘if you catch your wife in adultery, you can kill her with impunity; she, however, cannot dare to lay a finger on you if you commit adultery, for it is

¹² Ilhan Basgöz, a scholar of folklore, spent some time in Iranian Azerbaijan, making recordings in Tabriz, Urmia, and Khoy in 1967. He defined hikaye as “a Turkish folk narrative form which cannot properly be included in any of the folk narrative classification systems presently used by Western scholars. Such prose narrative names as tale, legend, and anecdote or poetical genres like epic and ballad do not adequately describe the hikaye form” (Basgoz, 1970, 391). Ilhan Basgöz, indicated that the Hikaye is still one of the favorite folk narratives in these cities (Basgoz, 1970, 392). He goes in detail and explains how these hikayes are popular among Azerbaijanis and they spend hours in coffeeshouse listening to Ashiks (people who narrate these hikayes and usually play the Saz instrument).

the law' (Goldstein, 2002, p.29). Historically, honor killings did not belong to a particular region and were practiced in most countries around the world.

Controlling women's sexuality and their subordination is not an issue of a certain society, and through historical processes, patriarchy has deepened in the culture and customs of societies. As an Azerbaijani woman, I grew up with stories that emphasized the importance of honor in Azerbaijani families. The main part of the system of honor is having control of women's sexuality. Shahrzad Mojab describes similar situations for Kurdish women where she focuses on honor killing in Iraqi Kurdistan. Mojab (2004) states, "a woman, married or unmarried, must be chaste, loyal, pure, obedient, and subordinate" (p. 113). These are the same expectations placed on Azerbaijani women. The way honor in Azerbaijani society has been viewed is mainly in connection to the old tradition and structures of society. Azerbaijan as a society that was colonized by Persian and the Russian Empires, has developed many Azerbaijani folk stories and music whose main themes are justice and the protection of the homeland. While women have brave and warrior-like roles in many of these stories, the quintessential expectation from the women in these stories of being the bearer of their honor of the family and community does not change. Many of the older traditions and hikayes which have more in common with other Turkic speaking groups are less gendered, but with modernization in stories like Sara, womanhood become more centered in the stories.

Azerbaijani literature has been influenced by Islamic culture, Iranian culture (mainly Persian), and Western civilizations due to its geographic location. Because of having linguistic bonds with Turkic speaking people, it shares many of the common stories and folklore common to Turkic people. Heroic epics in Turkic hikays often revolve around a male protagonist. These heroes, with a horse and weapons, typically are good swordsmen. It is difficult to say if women held the same positions as men in the ancient Azerbaijani Turkish folk stories. Many of these stories were produced in periods when men's physical prowess were praised, so the protagonists in these epics tended to be men. One of the popular stories from Azerbaijani folklore is the hikaye of Koroglu. Koroglu (the blind man's son), is the most well-known story among Azerbaijanis, which is sung by children and adults alike. In the Koroglu hikaye there is no picture of the mother of Koroglu; he only has a father who was made blind by Hasan Khan (feudal lord who owned many lands). Koroglu grew up with

his father's interest in fighting against the brutal system, and he is a Robin Hood figure for Azerbaijanis. Later, Nigar, a daughter of one of the Khans, fell in love with Koroglu and left her comfortable life and went to Chenlibel (a mountain in the Koroglu tale) to be with and marry Koroglu. In the story, Nigar is described as a smart and pretty woman who always supported her husband. Her character portrays the expectations placed on women in Azerbaijani culture, but she participated in many of the decisions that Koroglu makes. She has a leadership role in Chenlibel (the place that Koroglu used to live in along with other fighters). Nigar fought beside her husband, for her husband's values and to protect him. In the Koroglu hikaye, womanhood definition is not clear and the portrayal of women is varied. Though the Koroglu hikaye is generally more popular, Sara's hikaye is more popular when defining womanhood in contemporary Azerbaijani culture.

In Azerbaijani hikayes, women appear in two forms: independent women who are brave, intelligent, sometimes have leadership roles, or as a woman who has the role of supporting her husband as the main character or their family. Many older hikayes of Azerbaijani that originates from Turkic roots are not gendered. Nikki Keddie (2007) states, "In the epic of epic stories of these [Safavid dynasty] Turkish tribes the 'women have great freedom and ... do not sit passively in their tents. Moreover... they control their own finances'" (p. 49). As epics became older, females in ruling families have enjoyed more privilege. My research on the timing of Sara's hikaye was not able to have clear stands, and the given time by the Azerbaijani poets and folklorists was sometime between 17th-19th century. However, it is clear that the hikaye was formed at the time honor and sexuality of women became important part of culture.

In oral traditions, discrimination against females became more visible with themes of control over women especially sexuality. One of the traditions among Azerbaijanis is the *bel baglama* on a wedding day. In the day of wedding, a boy from the groom's family will put a red belt over the bride's dress and say:

Anam bacim qiz gelin ---- my mother, my sister: bride
 El ayagi duz gelin ---- who has hands and legs
 Yeddi ogul isterem ---- I want seven boys
 Birce dene qiz gelin ---- a single girl

The red belt in this tradition is a symbol of the virginity of the bride. Stating these words expresses ableism and the wish for seven boys and a single girl as part of time-honored tradition. Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) describes societies with classical patriarchy that girls are given away in marriage at young ages, and they become subordinated not only to all men also to the more senior women, especially their mother-in-law (p. 273). Kandiyoti sees this tactic as bargaining for patriarchy that women for having personal powers participate in imposing patriarchal norms. In Rahele's case not only Rahele was beaten by her husband, her mother-in-law was her main abuser too.

PERCEPTIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES WITHIN IRAN

At the 2008 conference “Women in Three Neighboring Countries: Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan” held in Istanbul that I attended, an Arab activist from Khuzestan gave a presentation on Arab women's issues in the Iranian legal systems which arise from language barriers in the province of Khuzestan. During the introductory part of the Arab activists' presentation, an Iranian feminist lawyer who was sitting next to me yelled out, “Tell your Arab men to stop honor killing, then placing the blame on the legal system. Now, with the domination of Islam, Arabs have taken over.” The moment she said that giggles as well as objections erupted from the room. An Azerbaijani (from the Republic of Azerbaijan) feminist who was sitting next to me asked for a translation. When I translated what the Iranian lawyer had said, the Azerbaijani feminist looked surprised and said, “How could she say that? Her own speech is about women's issues in legal system of Iran.” That day, Persian feminists during the presentations of ethnic minority groups in Iran left the conference claiming that the climate of the conference had become too political for their taste.

This is an example from the feminist community, and it is my belief that it is representative of many problematic perceptions held by society at large. Our perceptions from certain communities, especially people on the margins of society, are based on how they are portrayed by the dominant groups. It must be understood that, "domination always involves the objectification of the dominated; all forms of oppression imply the devaluation of the subjectivity of the oppressed." (Collins, 1986, p. S18).

Attributing women's issues to a specific culture is not only limited to Western societies; it is common in Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, where a dominant group has power over other groups, and power hierarchies among various communities exists. Besides women, men are also targets of these stereotypes. The common stereotype of Turks as "*Turk-e Khar*" (Turkish donkey), promotes a portrayal of Turkish men as being stubborn and mulish. This epithet is used towards non-Turks to mean a stubborn person who does not accept any reasons and wants to achieve everything by force. The use of these stereotypes and epithets is akin to the way the Jewish people have been portrayed in Western societies as avaricious and serves to cement harmful stereotypes across generations.

Brenda Shaffer (2002) explains that "*Turk-e Khar*" fell into common usage during the latter years of the Pahlavi regime entering Iranian mainstream (p. 178). Shafer explains that many Azerbaijanis tolerated jokes about Turks, especially Azerbaijanis who self-identified as Iranian, going so far as to justify the use of racial epithets and the portrayal of Turks as emotionally volatile and stubborn (p. 178). The portrayals of Turkish men as very conservative and controlling are common themes in Iranian movies and TV shows. Many movies and shows portray Turkish men as traditional, controlling, and masculine. Thus, it is no surprise that the phrase "marry Turkish girls, but not Turkish men" is a commonly used among Persians. These stereotypes toward Turkish Iranians create an image of Turkish men as being violent and Turkish women as very obedient and without autonomy and willpower. Because violence against women is seen as part of the culture, these stereotypes toward Turks in Iran make it very difficult to discuss women's issues without using intersectional approaches. Many Turk women's issues are directly attributed to their own ethnic or cultural communities rather than the patriarchal norms of society.

Patricia Hill Collins (1986) stated that "racist and sexist ideologies both share the common feature of treating dominated groups—the "others"—as objects lacking full human subjectivity" (p. S18). She uses the examples of the way Black people and White women historically were both seen in different of manners of dehumanization (p. S18). Attributing gender-based issues in Azerbaijani communities to Turkish culture not only places an emphasis on aggressive and violent Turkish men, also places many Turk women as well as Turkish feminist/activists with the challenge of talking about specific issues in the Azerbaijani Turk communities. Turk activists and feminists are faced with the challenge of

racism toward their community when speaking about issues faced by their community as well as negative backlash from their own patriarchal judgmental community.

CONCLUSION

The double oppression of Azerbaijani Turk women originates from patriarchal customs and norms of Azerbaijani community as well as the suppression of the Iranian system toward ethnic minorities. Rahele Zamani was one of the Turk women who has been a victim of the issues faced by Azerbaijani women, which created the circumstances and precipitated the events leading up to the committing of her crime. The issues within the legal system in Iran, from the judge who did not take her domestic violence case seriously when she had filed for divorce, to the language barrier which did not allow her to find resources to take any legal actions, created the framework for a miscarriage of justice and an unnecessary tragic event. The patriarchal system that is rooted in the family social structures led to Rahele's family as seeing her divorce as bringing dishonor to the family. Even the lack of school in Rahele's village and her family's poverty and consequent inability to send her to school elsewhere, were all factors that created multiple oppressive systems and were critical in her tragic outcome.

Rahele's case is an example that challenges the mainstream Persian stereotype that Turk women do not have different issues than Persian women. Rahele's case received publicity based on luck, but the amount of women similar to Rahele in Iranian society who have been victims of systematic discrimination is unknown. Maybe the issues that women have faced is not specific to a certain culture or ethnic groups; however, the way patriarchy shape women's experiences in each community is very specific. Azerbaijani Turk community also has adopted many patriarchal customs and norms throughout history that has shaped the way they perceive womanhood.

CHAPTER 7

AZERBAIJANI WOMEN'S DILEMMA IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS

In today's political climate, the representations of Muslim and Middle Eastern women are limited to stereotypes that perpetuate narratives rooted in colonialism: oppressed and passive objects with no agency. However, acknowledging diversity in Muslim nations and focusing on different groups' experiences within Muslim countries and the diversity within these countries helps elucidate a complexity of gender-based issues, and simultaneously assists in questioning these stereotypes. This is felt acutely within the Azerbaijani women's movements that have to combat both international stereotypes, marginalization as minorities in other countries, and oppressive patriarchal norms within Azerbaijani culture itself.

Oftentimes Iranian mainstream feminism has silenced Azerbaijani women's experiences, and furthermore Western feminism's representations of Iranian society contribute to this marginalization process on an international level. This chapter examines how between these two prevailing dialogues, Azerbaijani women are silenced globally and locally. For the purpose of the research, I will examine global and local approaches to transnational advocacy groups. The second part will focus on Iranian mainstream feminism and their approach to minority women's issues, and representations of Iranian feminism outside of Iran. My last section will discuss global sisterhood in the case of Azerbaijani women and Iranian mainstream feminism.

GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL FEMINISM

With the increase in globalization and its effects on gender regimes, local women's movements cannot be studied and understood without taking global influences into account (Tohidi, 2002; p. 852). Globalization in many respects has created a new hegemonic world order, especially for feminists. In the words of Mohanty (2003b) "globalization has always

been a part of capitalism, and capitalism is not a new phenomenon” (p. 510). Globalization mainly favors the global economy with the exploitation of Third World countries and people of color. Many global cities now require and depend on the services and domestic labor of immigrant and migrant women (Parreñas, 2008). The search for cheap labor using the World Trade Organization led to exploitation of women in countries such as Bangladesh, Mexico, etc (Ahmed, 2004; Berik, 2017; Tuttle, 2012). The global privatization of indigenous knowledge and industrialization of local knowledge has created even more grounds to critique globalization (Mies, Shiva, & Salleh, 2014). Many of the programs that have been implemented for the development of Third World countries have in essence favored the capitalist system far more than having provided the purported economic benefits on developing economies. However, many local activists critical of globalization participate in and promote the creation of transnational networks because of their specific needs. As Mohanty states, one of the main goals of transnational feminism is to “demystify capitalism as a system of debilitating sexism and racism and envision anticapitalist resistance” (Mohanty, 2003b, p. 514).

Thus, one of the important aspects of globalization is its influence in creating transnational advocacy networks that many local activists participate in despite their awareness of the detrimental Western policies and influence towards their respective nations. For more clarification of what a transnational advocacy network encompasses, it is useful to employ the definition of a set of “relevant actors working internationally on an issue who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse and dense exchanges of information and services” (Sperling, Ferree, & Risman, 2001, p. 1156). The creation of these networks is not always based on shared values and norms. For instance, many Western organizations deliberately choose human rights issues to pressure Third World countries’ governments despite the organizations’ home countries having extensive record of human rights abuses and systematic discrimination of people of color. Yet, many local activists are aware of the hypocritical politics involved and still find themselves with the need to rely on these networks to spread their message.

After years of working with Azerbaijani local activists, both women’s rights and human rights activists and advocates, I found them supportive of transnational advocacy networks because of the situation that they have faced in their local communities. Their main

explanation was, using international organizations and media was necessary in order to tell the world what is happening in their local communities. When Azerbaijani activists were arrested by the Iranian regime, friends and families of the political prisoners as well as other activists' main focus began contacting human rights organizations to work bring international attention to their cases by using media and organizations in the United States and Europe. Azerbaijani activists are more interested in Western media and organizations because of the lack of interest by Iranian mainstream media in minority affairs and active censorship by the Iranian regime. Thus, local activists see this relationship as a useful tool to pressure their local government, especially considering that the Iranian government does not tolerate any human rights and women's rights organizations inside Iran. Despite many local activists being acutely aware of the underlying politics behind Western organizations' assistance under the guise of 'human rights' they nonetheless find themselves with no other option but to accept these sources of assistance and funding to further their political aims.

ETHNIC WOMEN IN IRANIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

In analyzing the failure of Iranian feminists in addressing ethnic women's issues states, the status of women known as "ethnic minorities" in Iran till now has been given little attention from feminist scholars and women's rights activists. Part of the reason is due to Persian women's rights approach to prioritize their own public demands (leaving out other demands of minority women) such as the fight against forced veiling, the demand to control their bodies and sexuality, women's rights in family base, the labor market and education, an end to violence against women in the family and society, as well as dismantling legal and structural gender discrimination. Despite the inclusiveness of these demands, it does not necessarily reflect the oppressed characteristic and the situation of minority women because they focus on general issues of Persian women. Even though, sometimes the point of departure embraced most situations, the experience and aspirations of the modern middle class, heterosexual women in Iran, are central to the experience of women. For example, the experience of women who do not face ethnic discrimination do not necessarily reflect on the experience of women who are oppressed by at least two factors: ethnicity and gender.

The diversity of feminist groups and ideologies makes Iranian women's movement broad and more abstract. Pointing any specific issues with criticism to women's movement in

Iran would face you with the question that which feminist or feminist group are you referring to. You might face a challenge that the feminist group you are referring does not represent Iranian women's movement. To avoid this generalization, for the purpose of this research I use some examples from different groups from inside of Iran as well as diasporic feminism to explore how focusing on minority women in the minds of many Iranian feminists is equivalent to supporting secessionist ideas that risks Iranian *tamimyete erzi* (territorial integrity). Also, the idea that providing space to ethnic minority women will bring political dissension to feminist movements is another reason that the experiences of marginalized women is silenced. To explore these ideas, I will focus on some mainstream feminist activists and writers with various feminist backgrounds.

Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, a well-known Iranian feminist, in her 2013 article "Ethnic Movements and Women's Demands," argues that minority women can be defended as long as they are within the framework of *tamimyete erzi* (territorial integrity). In fact, for Khorasani, the national question becomes the priority of gender. The question arises, why for a feminist like Khorasani, one of the most important representatives of Iranian mainstream feminism, the national and territorial integrity is of such crucial importance that it supersedes and overrides political identity, gender and sexual identity, and ethnicity. For a feminist like Khorasani what is the priority? Solidarity and sisterhood with minority women or Iranian nationalism? Khorasani creates the boundary of "us" versus "them", and even in the women's struggle for equality she draws a line for minority women. She clearly draws limitations that disallows minority women to bring certain parts of their identity and experiences to Iranian mainstream feminism. Khorasani also claims that those ethnic minority women whose demands go beyond the equality and discrimination in the law "cannot find a common ground with the women's equality movement."

Women of ethnic or religious minorities have multiple layers of identity, identities that are at odds with a nationalistic vision of the Iranian woman as being ethnically Persian and religiously Shia. Why then, do hegemonic Iranian feminists see as illegitimate and unacceptable women of ethnic or religious minorities' questioning of their national identity in Iran? The current national identity does not represent their identities. How could a feminist movement generalize women's oppression with different sociocultural backgrounds in different locations, and ignore minority women's oppression? This essentializing is still

happening in mainstream feminism in Iran. This is a power structure and erasure similar to that which white feminism has had toward women in Third World countries and women of color within the United States during second wave feminism.

Khorasani goes further and defines the democratic and equitable movements of minority women using concepts such as "Iranian ethnicities" and the "multicultural society of Iran", depriving them of the burden of political subjectivity and trying to give her writing a cultural and non-political style. The main drawbacks of this view is that the hierarchy between women in the *merkez* (center) and the margins especially minority women and the social relations of power between them, ignores the use of political terminology and historical realities. As a result, mainstream feminist hegemony, not only takes a nationalist approach toward minority women, it also does not take the minority women's account of discrimination and incorporates the discriminatory views of sovereignty of Iranian nationalists. This is part of the reason that mainstream Iranian feminism avoids giving a voice to minority women in order to keep themselves out of a political discourse which would present a challenge when accounting for the secular and nationalists groups in the Iranian regime and diasporic communities. The way Khorasani present her arguments, is more "patronizing" and giving advice for good intentionality. Then how does she get the feeling that she can draw the lines for the minority women? Do feminists like Khorasani see themselves as more Iranian than minority women? The feeling of superiority, that comes through hegemonic national identity of the Persian feminists, allow Persian feminists to draw lines and make selections to prioritize women's movements' demands. Therefore, mainstream feminism leaves out the living reality of minority women within the women's movement.

Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani is one of the feminists who takes the risk of talking about this taboo issue in Iranian society. Many feminists totally ignore or erase the issue of ethnicity and ethnic women in Iran. The most cited book about women and the political climate's influence on women's lives is Parvin Paidar's (1995) book, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*. Paidar examines women's citizenship rights in the mid-1960s because of their formal participation in political system. Paidar focuses on 'modernization' and nation-state effects on women in the twentieth century. While Paidar explains all the major political events in Iran that affected women, in the category of

minorities she only recognizes religious minorities, mainly Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sunni women, as women of minority groups. Paidar (1995) in her explanation about minorities states,

Social factors such as history, religion, ethnicity and language were some of the main sources of differential treatment for women. The Muslim population of Iran was divided into many branches and ethnicities. The majority religion was Shiism. The minority Sunni Muslims were mainly composed of tribal, nomadic and ethnic minorities such as the Kurds, Torkamans, Arabs and Baluchis....The non-Muslim population of Iran consisted of adherents of Zoroastrianism, Armenian and Assyrian Christians, and a Jewish community. The official language was Farsi (Persian), but many other languages were spoken. (pp. 30-31)

After this statement, Paidar dedicates a section to minority communities, which for her comprises mainly religious minorities without mentioning any ethnic minorities' experiences. Paidar's approach becomes more problematic when she notes the clothing of the women in Northern side of Iran, the rice growing regions of Gilan and Mazandaran around the Caspian Sea in the north, as a kind of cultural diversity in Iran (Paidar, 1995, pp. 37-38) rather than as the ethnic groups that they truly are, and not acknowledging these large minority groups. These groups comprise the ethnic minority women such as Turk, Kurd, Lor, Arab, Baluch, etc, and Paidar does not mention them. While ethnic minorities are linguistically and culturally distinct groups from Persians, their differences in clothing and lifestyle is more noticeable.

The exclusion of Azerbaijani women's experiences is not only limited to the current women's movements. The social issue goes deeper to the degree that the exclusion is institutionalized in the Iranian system. The system of institutionalization therefore becomes more problematic by silencing and erasing the history of minorities. This history of upper and middle class urban Shia Persian groups is presented in the educational system as the history of the whole of Iran. An example of this can be observed in how women's veiling and unveiling has been written about historically. During the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi, the unveiling of women was a state-sponsored project. This period has been widely focused on by Persian feminists as well as the state-sanctioned history textbooks, both presenting opposing views on the subject and both excluding minorities in the telling of this part of history. The provided history besides being elite history excludes many other minorities and

many villagers' experiences. Princess Taj al-Saltanah, Naser al-din Shah's daughter, in her memoirs explains her observation from the lives of the villages around Tabriz. She states:

I saw men and unveiled women working together. No idle person can be found in the villages. I sought a maid from among them. Not one of these peasants agreed to give up free life in the fields. All these peasants and farmers are decent and honorable people; not one woman prostitute lives in the village, since no man and woman would marry unless they are compatible with each other. Moreover, since the women are unveiled, the couple can choose one another. After marriage, they till the land together day and night. (cited in Afary, 1996, p.197)

Taj al-Saltaneh's memories, one of the earliest feminists of Iran, from her trip to Tabriz is a good example of lives in villages including my own family. In my high school years, like many other students in Iran I was learning about the project of unveiling in my history class. For the school project, I decided to interview my great grandmother who was in her 90's to find out how the unveiling had affected her life. Surprisingly, my great grandmother denied having to unveil for this social reformation project by Reza Shah. I assumed at that time that it might be a lapse in her memory, but when I asked my grandmother (her daughter-in-law), I was shocked by her answer, "in the rural areas we never veiled. What were they going to take off? We never veiled to unveil."

This version of the experiences of Reza Shah's unveiling is in direct opposition to the narrative presented by Hamideh Sedghi (2014) in her work *Women and Politics in Iran*, which claims to present a holistic narrative of the projects of veiling and unveiling. Her book excludes the experiences of rural women and Turkish women's veiling traditions as well as their reactions and observance of this law. Sedghi in the introductory portion of her work states that: "urban Iran is more homogeneous in culture and language (for example, in large cities the majority of people speak Persian while some smaller towns communicate in Turkish and Azari, and a few rural hinterlands converse in Arabic, Luri, or Kurdish)." This illustrates that Sedghi is aware of minority women and their cultural and linguistic differences with Tehran and other major Persian and non-Persian cities, but she still goes on to classify them as "homogeneous" regions. Major cities such as Tabriz, or Urmia are not Persian speaking, and cities such as Urmia have diverse populations such as Turks, Kurds, Assyrians, and Armenians. It is clear that cultural and linguistic differences of these cities would bring various political implications and interpretations from major sociopolitics of Iran.

While it is acceptable that she avoids writing about marginalized women's experiences in rural areas, Sedghi may have refrained from specifically covering minority women's experiences due to not feeling confident about being able to adequately represent their experiences. However, in her work she does not elaborate if her omission is intentional or unintentional and as such it is difficult to understand why she would present what in essence is a diverse range of experiences in these ethnic areas as a single homogenous experience. Thus, stories of women such as my great grandmother and grandmother are never included in the narratives and histories of veiling projects, despite the fact that a woman such as my great grandmother belonged to the upper class in a small town, had a comfortable life with housekeepers, and differed from other Persians only in her ethnic identity.

The historical narratives from Iran usually have not included minorities/local histories of non-Persian communities. Following the end of the World War II, the *Firqah-i Dimokrat* or Azerbaijani Democratic Party (ADP), publicly announced its formation in Tabriz in 1945. Later, at its first congress, the Azerbaijani Democratic Party authorized the formation of a peasant's militia which formed the "Azerbaijan People's Government" and took power from the central government later and became an autonomous republic. During "Azerbaijan People's Government" Azerbaijani Turkish became the official language in Azerbaijan as well as the taught language in universities, schools, and adult education centers, replacing Farsi. For the first time in Iran, women gained the right to vote, as well as be elected to public office in 1945; and many democratic laws in favor of gender equality were passed. During the "Azerbaijan People's Government" many economic reforms were carried out. The first provincial university in Iran was also built in Tabriz, with thousands of schools built in small towns and villages where compulsory education for children began at age six. The political concerns and biases of Iranian feminists have prevented Iranian feminists to write and explore the women's situations during "Azerbaijan People's Government".

REPRESENTATION OF THE IRANIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE WEST

The way Iranian feminist/women's movements outside of Iran have been represented is based on the writings of the diasporic Iranian feminists who are mainly Western educated

feminists. Their concerns are more rooted in the political issues that they have had with the Iranian regime after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Their ideological battle with the Iranian regime pushed these feminists to ally themselves with secular and nationalist groups who are critical of the Iranian regime and their Islamic ideology as well as marginalized minority groups because of their Persian based Iranian nationalist ideology. These approaches of the diasporic community toward women's issues in Iran as well as some scholars who are obsessed with critiquing Western orientalist approaches created a problematic and difficult situation to present minority women's issues outside of Iran. To explore these concepts and misrepresentations, I will focus on the approaches of some feminists from the diasporic communities as well as some other scholars outside of Iran.

Tohidi states that “the current feminist movement in Iran is for the most part eclectic and pragmatic, and many of the leading players recognize the intersectionality of gender, race, class, nationality, and other bases of the ‘matrices of domination’” (Tohidi, 2010, p. 381). Then Tohidi continues that many of the actions in feminist movement are organized around the shared goals and intersectional concerns rather than their ideological inclinations (Tohidi, 2010, p. 381). Tohidi uses minority women's writings in mainstream Iranian feminism as an example to show the intersectionality of the Iranian feminist movement. If Iranian women's/feminist movement is an intersectional movement, what is intersectionality? Just a bunch of theories to be used in the writings to highlight diversity in the society, or just a claim that Iranian feminists make because their writings use the works of women of color and include their experience/theories in the United States therefore these theories put Iranian feminism in the category of an intersectional movement?

The Iranian mainstream feminist movement does not leave any room to focus on intersections of oppression. In recent years, the writings and activism of minority women including Turk feminists pushed Iranian society to discuss the issue of minority women. However, the question of what limits can the Iranian mainstream feminism tolerate -- their demand is an open-ended question, which needs to be discussed. As Ipek mentioned in her interview, till the accusation of *qomgarayi* (ethnocentrism) operates as a main tool to be used against minority activists to silence them, any critique from ethnic minority activists by *makrzagara* activists have been presented as a threat to the national security of the country to silence their experiences. The accusation against minority women's activists of having

separatist's nationalistic ideas and being far from 'feminist goals,' allows mainstream feminists to use nationalist discourse to silence minority women. The power dynamics within women's movement is a shadow that divides Persian and non-Persian women's activists.

The representation of Iranian women's movement and women's lives in the Western society is embodied in the politics of more than the actual lived realities inside of Iran. Scholars such as Anouar Majid who are obsessed with ideological battle with the West, see the Iranian Islamic Revolution as an anti-colonization and anti-Western movement (Majid, 1998, pp. 336, 339), and analyze women's liberation in the context of pro-Western Shah regime and anti-Western Islamic regime. These categories leave out the experiences of minority women such as Azerbaijanis. Moreover, this sort of approach is not limited to scholars such as Majid who wants to question the approach of the West toward Islam. Kumari Jayawardena's (1986) exploration of the emergence of feminism in Third world countries uses problematic representation of Iran. Jayawardena ties roots of women's movement in Iranian society to Ancient Zoroastrian Iran (Persia), while this historical narrative is questioned by many locals. Again, it is about power relations and access to knowledge production, which determines whose stories would be told or used in academia.

Jayawardena's contemporary women's movements narrations that she uses to strengthen her arguments belong to the Turks dominated areas (Jayawardena, 1986, pp. 205-206). While Jayawardena keeps referring to those regions, such as the Northern part of Iran as a center of the Constitution Revolution, she is not aware that Tabriz, the city of Azerbaijanis was the leading city for the Constitutional Revolution. Jayawardena wants to provide a local root for the feminist movement in Iran to reject the Westernized idea behind feminism, but she is not aware of the problematic sides of the provided history for non-Persian locals within Iran as well as the diversity of Iran. The focus on certain part of Iranian history just to question stereotypes in the Western society and deliberate sensor of minorities experiences from history and contemporary Iran by many Persian scholars have silenced minority women such as Azerbaijani Turk women locally and globally. It is clear that women's lives and status in each society has close ties to the geopolitical situation of the region as well as colonial power relationship which Azerbaijan women have been affected through these hierarchies.

WHAT A LOCAL FEMINIST SAYS...

Ipek, a poet and women's rights activist, is an Azerbaijani feminist who has spent approximately forty years in the women's movement, and has been writing on women's issues in many local and national newspapers and magazines. She is the author of two poetry collections, books and short stories, and has published many articles and literature about women's issues especially on Turk women in Iran. She is also a translator of many feminist works from the US. Ipek is one of the founding members of the One Million Signature Campaign and has participated in numerous conferences and seminars both inside and outside of Iran. Currently, she is one of the active members of a campaign on the prevention of domestic violence. Ipek identifies herself as feminist, and while she mentions that she always tried to bring attention to Turk women's issues in Iran, in recent years she has dedicated her works to creating a dialogue with mainstream feminism in Iran. I decided to interview Ipek because of her position as an "insider" and "outsider" within both the Azerbaijani community and Iranian mainstream feminism.

We began our conversation with if she sees Iranian women's movement as intersectional. She explained, "women's movements are meant to be intersectional, and Iranian women's movement is not exempt from that. The way women's movements are designed; they are forced to adopt intersectionality." She gives an example from other women's activists experiences when they were working for the One Million Signature Campaign, activists had to go to small cities or villages and knock on people's door to ask for signatures. Ipek talks about her experience in the One Million Signature Campaign, and states that in this campaign feminists agreed on the one main priority--discriminatory laws--which Ipek sees as the basic and minimum request of women for change, but it turned into a big campaign. She explains that during this campaign, women's activists were forced to come to terms with the realities and adversities faced in small towns and rural areas. Many of the women's activists, who have lived and worked in Tehran, were forced to confront the importance of ethnic and class issues in marginalized groups. That was enough for women's rights activists to face the reality that gender-based issues are not the only priority of marginalized women while many of the women in rural areas see poverty as a source of many of their issues. Therefore, Ipek concludes that working as a woman's rights activist, the climate you are working in makes you aware of the various experiences and issues. She states

that in spite of theory it is not easy to bring intersectionality to practice, while many activists groups are unaware of power hierarchy and discrimination in the society.

Ipek's approach to the women's movement character for me sounds more essentializing the nature of movements based on female character; however, it is the same way that all women are not against patriarchy, gender based issues do not make elite women to understand race and class issues. I do not claim we do not have chance to have Persian women allies to be aware of Turkish women's issues, but it does not mean activism around women's movement would make all the activists aware of the margins issues. Ipek's claim about the One Million Signature Campaign as a beginning point to create a bridge among women's activists and women in the margin is right. However, we barely see focusing on women of margin and their participating in Iranian women's movement. Iranian women's movement because of being elite center mainly have focused in Tehran and major cities.

Another point that Ipek brings up is that the nature of most social and political movements in Iran is totalitarian and patriarchal. These qualities are not limited to left or right wing political groups. She believes these qualities limit the groups from realizing the issues of marginalized groups. Ipek claims that the only group she still has hope for is the women's movement in Iran which she sees as having the capacity to provide voice to different groups. The intersectional character of women's movements allows them to bring different voices forward. For women as a marginalized group, it is easier to understand other marginalized groups such as ethnic and religious minorities because of a shared experience of oppression.

Ipek agrees that Iranian feminism still is *merkezgera* (centralized) feminism, and because of that the issues of minority women do not receive enough attention. However, Ipek does not see mainstream feminists as the only source of the issue. She explains that minority women do not have the capacity to represent their issues among Persian feminists, and this lack of dialogue among women of *markaz* and margins have created a gap. She mentions that the issue of representation and stereotypes about minorities in Iran especially Turk women still plays an important role in the way Turk women approach their issues. Ipek explains that having strong beliefs that Turkish men are more masculine (mainly referring to aggressive and violent behavior), goes as far as to cause Turkish men and women to believe in these

stereotypes, without having any credible study to prove these representations. These stereotypes in local communities present women's issues as more cultural issues.

Ipek's critiques of minority women could be correct in certain conditions; however, criticizing minorities for the absence of their experiences in mainstream movement is to abandon the power hierarchies in the society. We have similar claims in the United States that do not take the systematic discrimination of African American into account and blames individuals for not working hard. My own difficulties as an activist and the amount of the criticism that I receive because of not focusing on main issues of Iran and just talking about experiences of one certain group have left me with many challenges. The main challenge is that our issues, as Turks in Iran, have not seen as mainstream issues of Iran. These kinds of approaches already push us to the margins.

It is important to acknowledge that in addition to being marginalized as ethnic minorities, minority women face challenges to address their issues among mainstream feminists as well as ethnic movements. Based on my personal experiences and observations, many minority women are concerned that the focus on women's issues by ethnic women rather than ethnicity can increase ethnic prejudices against them and affect the ethnic or national demands. We as ethnic women always have a fear that our culture would be judged if we share our experiences as women. We do not want to confirm the stereotypes towards Turkish men in Iran such as being violent and aggressive. The judgments we receive from both nationalists group push us to hide our gender issues within our community. Therefore, many ethnic women do not want to give any justification to Persian nationalists to justify their colonization idea of saving women. Many of these women think if they will talk about patriarchy in their culture, they will give Persian nationalists reason to attack their ethnicity, so they prioritize their ethnic demands before their gender demands.

With all the problems in mainstream feminism, Ipek believes that in recent years many positive changes are happening in women's movements. She states:

When two year ago [2016], in international women's day in Tehran University I talked about Turk women's issue, many of the feminists in Tehran saw my speech as being *qomgerayi* [ethnocentric]. Now, when I talk to them, they acknowledge that my speech originated from the local realities faced by these women.

She thinks these changes are the results of the minority women's activists and their struggle to create a dialogue with mainstream feminists. Ipek states as a young activist when she

began her activism at age 17, Marxism introduced them to class issues alongside with gender based issues as well as imperialism. During this time, she (also other activists, but she refers to her personal experiences) was introduced to an intersectional approach without even learning about the terminology of intersectionality.

When I asked Ipek about the lack of literature in Iran about minority women and their matrix of oppression, she agreed that this is the main issue that the current women's movement in Iran deals with. Ipek stated that one of her main goals in her activism, along with many other feminist activists, is translating feminist writings from other parts of the world to create a theoretical background for the women's movement. She states:

When I read black women's writings, I feel them deep in my heart. Our experiences are very similar. I know it is difficult to explain my feeling in Iran because mainly people think we do not have race issues here. The explanation of race for Iranian is being black and white (only skin color), it is not based on discrimination.

Ipek's approach toward Azerbaijani movement is critical. She sees Azerbaijani movements like many other movements in Iran mainly dominated by patriarchal discourses. She argues that many Azerbaijani activists believe in focusing on ethnic discrimination rather than gender issues. Ipek explains that many Azerbaijani activists quote ancient Turkish legends to illustrate how free Turk women used to be historically; therefore, these activists blame non-Turk groups for the women's issues in their communities today, and claim that if they could create their own Turkish rule, women would be free. When I asked her if she sees any empowerment for women within Azerbaijani movements, she stated that she was optimistic and that participation of women in Azerbaijani movements is increasing, but she also thinks that many of the women who participate in Azerbaijani movements are adopting dominant patriarchal discourse of the movement. She added,

I only see hope in the long term for these women, not in a short term. After long term activism, they will realize the patriarchal discourse around them and by that time they will have the power to challenge these discourses, and they can play a bigger role in decision making as women.

CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on globalization and how Azerbaijani activists by participating in transnational networks try to be the voice of their community as well as the challenge that

they face globally. While many Persian feminists are able to bring the complexity of their issues from their own perspectives, this privilege is not extended to minority women in Iran. The politics of silencing the experiences of minority women is enacted not just on the national level and but also continues on the global level. I mentioned in an earlier chapter the challenges that Azerbaijani feminists had faced in creating *bizfeministler*, how we faced issues in identifying ourselves as well as receiving help. After all the challenges faced by *bizfeministler*, the interview with Ipek brought forefront the issue that the Iranian women's movement is not inclusive of the minority women and is unwilling to provide space for these groups to fully express themselves. After interviewing Ipek, I came away with the realization that if a feminist like Ipek can face the accusation of *qomgerayi*, there was no room for radical or dissenting voices such as mine. For minority women to have their voices heard, we have to frame our concerns and our struggles in language palatable to the broader Iranian movement. Critiquing the shortcomings of the Persian feminist movement or their silences concerning issues of minority women are not welcomed.

CHAPTER 8

AGENCY AND VISIBILITY OF WOMEN IN AZERBAIJANI MOVEMENTS IN IRAN

INTRODUCTION

In this section of my thesis, I focus on Azerbaijani Turk women who are directly and indirectly involved in Azerbaijani movements and the challenges and obstacles they have faced following their male family members' imprisonment. I argue that Azerbaijani movements not only challenge many ethnic and linguistic discrimination against Turk minority groups in Iranian society, but that they also empower women to negotiate their gender roles within the Azerbaijani communities. For the purpose of the research, I focus on Azerbaijani women's empowerment and how, as individuals, their indirect and direct involvement in the movements create space and publicity for Azerbaijani Turk women to challenge the patriarchal norms in their communities. In doing so, they begin to frame their issues with the use of human rights language. To understand this process, I will explore the origin and dominant discourses in Azerbaijani movements to bring to light the challenges that women have faced within the movement and the empowerment they have gained from facing these adversities. For the purpose of the research, I will focus on the lives of three different women to explore how local social structures affect their lives differently.

THE WAY I CAME ACROSS AZERBAIJANI MOVEMENTS...

As an Azerbaijani Turk, my relation to Azerbaijani movements began through my own father's political activism and more specifically, with his imprisonment in 2004 when I was a teenager. Even though at that time I was not aware of the political climate around me, I could see the changes that were happening in our family. The day my father was arrested, my mother was not home. When she returned home, I told her that our father had been taken

away. First, she cried for a few minutes, but afterwards she asked us to stay home because she needed to see some friends to find a lawyer. Within a week, my mother was able to take over the management of my father's business, which was a small shop, while still taking care of her three children. As the eldest child, I was the only support that she had, but I was a young girl too; in a small town, it was not easy to manage the family and business for a woman in her early 30s without having any male family member at home. However, my mother was able to manage all these challenges for almost a year. After my father's release, my mother's role never turned back the way it was before my father's imprisonment. She became more self-confident, and started actively participating in decision-making roles at home in such areas as financial management, which before my father's imprisonment was exceedingly rare. She began to participate in some community gatherings with the help of the people she met when she was searching for resources for my father's case. Many of these community gatherings were organized by women for activities such as crafts and preparations for holiday celebrations and traditions. All of these incidents provided my mother with the ability to discover the public and social life that had been previously unknown to her. However, in my father's second imprisonment, we had to leave Iran and later settle in the United States.

After years living in the United States, I tried to keep my connection with the Azerbaijani community in Iran by following the news and helping Azerbaijani activists in women's rights as well as Iranian human rights issues in general. My activism, however, is not the same as that of my family anymore; I have focused more on ethnic minority issues, especially on minority women's issues in Iran. With my involvement in campaigns and my relationships with activists, I have begun to observe changes with more activism in Azerbaijani communities in terms of women's visibility in the community. I also noticed that women's involvement in the Azerbaijani movement has common features across different groups with various ideologies. Members of these groups are very diverse in terms of class, education, occupation, ideologies, etc. It is common to see that when a member of a family faces imprisonment, women have to come into the public sphere to defend their children and/or husbands. One of the examples in which I was able to see the progression of this phenomenon was that of a mother who had two activist sons, and her participation and her increasing activism during her son's hunger strikes. When Morteza, an Azerbaijani Turk

cultural and rights activist, went on a hunger strike, his mother, Masume, got much publicity with her interviews and videos on the news and social media.

One of the women, that for the purpose of my research, I have focused on is Masume, mother of Morteza and Fardin, two Azerbaijani activists. Masume is one of the Azerbaijani women who has been involved in Azerbaijani movements because of her sons' activism and their imprisonment. Masume's sons initially were arrested at a rally in Tabriz on May 22, 2009, for peacefully advocating for Azerbaijani ethnic and environmental demands, including protecting Urmia Lake and maintaining Azerbaijani Turkish language rights in Iran. During that protest, because of his resistance to police, Fardin was shot and hospitalized. While Masume was not able to receive any news regarding her son's health situation, she did not give up and daily reached out to different organizations to find out about Fardin. During that time, Masume was taken by Iranian intelligence service (*Ettelat*), and spent 10 days in a detention center. At the beginning, in Tabriz court, Masume's younger son, Fardin, was sentenced to six years in prison. Three days after Fardin's arrest, Morteza was taken from the dorm of the University of Tabriz where he was majoring in accounting. Morteza was sentenced to one year in prison for "propaganda against the state" and two years for "assembly and collusion against national security" which made a total of three years.

My acquaintance with Masume's family goes back to the time Morteza went on hunger strike for 65 days in 2016. With his hunger strike, Morteza was asking to apply Article 134 of Iran's Islamic Penal Code to his sentence, which allows for only the longest prison sentence to be served in cases involving multiple convictions. Morteza believed he already had spent more than two years in prison, so he was eligible for Article 134; however, his request was denied by the Iranian court. Morteza believed legally he was eligible for Article 134, and the courts, in order to pressure him and deny him rights, were not commuting his sentence. To protest this violation of his civil rights, Morteza went on a hunger strike. At that time, although I was following the case through the news media, I had not been personally involved until a friend introduced me to Fardin who needed assistance with his brother's campaign. The family needed help from people overseas to assist with emails, social media posts, and to make contacts with human rights organizations. This was mostly because of internet issues in Iran and a ban on social media by the Iranian regime. Due to my background within the movement, and the fact I was known within the movement,

I volunteered my services to help them with their campaign. During the campaign, my interaction with them was on an almost daily basis for two months. During this period, I had an opportunity to know more about their mother's actions and the details of what was happening to her during her interaction with the Iranian court and penal system. While Fardin was on parole, their mother was the only one who was in direct contact with the court and the prison system. Masume, with the help of Fardin and other activists, was the main contact with the media to publicize her son's situation during the hunger strike.

Masume is in her late 40s, and she works in a hospital in Tabriz. During our interview, in the first section, we talked about Fardin and Morteza's imprisonment and what happened to her during the time of detention, trial, and imprisonment. Her emphasis was on the insults and humiliations that she faced during these years. She added that when she went to talk with the judge about Morteza's critical situation during the hunger strike, the judge told her "you should be ashamed of yourself to raise sons who are acting against the Islamic state." Another time when she went to the prison to see Morteza, one of the prison guards asked her why she, as a Muslim woman, was interviewing with the *Namehrem*s (allowable escorts) in the news.

Toward the end of the interview, when Masume was more comfortable with me, we began to talk about ourselves. She asked questions about my major and what women's studies actually focuses on. Then she told me "there are many women who need help," and she began to tell me the life story of her co-worker who has been a domestic violence victim; Masume explained, "I told her 'I can help you to find a lawyer and go to court. Why do you take all these pains?'" She added, "I tell all women around me, the world now is different, you can live better." Masume is obviously a dedicated mother who prioritized her son's activism; however, she believes that her son's activism helped her to explore the issues around those that she did not have enough knowledge and language to fully understand before.

Fatemeh is one of the women who was introduced by another interviewee woman. She agreed to have an interview with me to share her experiences after her husband's imprisonment, and despite many other women who were suspicious of my research, Fatemeh was happy that I cared about her problems more than her husband's political ideas. Fatemeh's husband had received nine years in prison due to his political activities and attempted to

establish a political party for Azerbaijanis with some other activists. Now, her husband is in the fourth year of his imprisonment, and Fatemeh and her seven-year-old son are able to visit her husband on visiting days at the prison, or the time her husband is in the conditional daily release.

Fatemeh is in her early 30s and she married after high school and never worked before her husband's imprisonment. She explains the challenges that she has faced during the four years, mainly with focusing on her financial difficulties. Fatemeh's husband owned a small construction company, which was their income source for years. After her husband's imprisonment, Fatemeh had to take over the business. Soon she realized it would not be possible for a woman to manage the construction business in Iran. Fatemeh states, "Construction workers did not believe that I could manage to pay their wages on time, and they knew what happened to my husband. They asked me to pay everything right away. Even though they knew we were just contractors, they need to finish projects so we all could get paid." Fatemeh realized that she had to close the business because she was not able to manage it without having any male supporter to deal with workers. She says that was the time their financial difficulties actually had begun.

Another problem that Fatemeh has faced was renting an apartment. She explains that a few months after her husband's arrest, the lease of the apartment was over, and it was not easy for her to afford the rent of their apartment. Fatemeh explains that when she started searching for an apartment, she found out nobody was willing to rent the apartment to a single woman. "Everyone was asking where is my husband, when he is coming back. I did not want to tell them he is in prison." Finally, she rented an apartment temporarily, but she told her landlord that her husband works in *junub* (Persian Gulf area). Fatemeh said that her landlord lady was checking on a daily basis to find out when her husband was coming back. When she found out that financially and mentally it was not possible for her to deal with the situation, she decided to move to her mother's place in her hometown. Fatemeh explained that during those four years, she tried many jobs and places, but when they found out about her husband's situation, they did not want to keep her. Fatemeh talked about a good part of her experiences in creating a network with other women who were in same situation with her, and their husbands had long-term prison sentences. She explained that meeting these women

and making programs to visit other activists' families whom their husbands were in prisons too, created a good network in which they could know and help each other in times of need.

Toward the end of our conversation, I asked Fatemeh after all these challenges she faced what mainly changed in her life. She said all these issues and obstacles that she has faced brought her to live as an independent woman. However, she explained when her husband came back home, it was challenging for her to limit her participation in many things, "I taught myself to be independent, but when my husband is home, balancing this situation is more challenging. I should keep reminding myself, now he is home, he can do it."

Another woman that was introduced to me was Pinar who is in her early 30s. Pinar is an Azerbaijani activist who has spent 6 months in Tabriz prison due to "charges of acting against national security and propaganda against the regime." Pinar was one of the co-founders of the newly established Azerbaijanis political party to focus on Azerbaijanis' political demands whose activity was banned similarly to other political parties in Iran. Pinar, alongside other members, was detained and later received charges by Tabriz's Revolutionary Court due to her activism. My interview with Pinar, rather than delve into her political ideology and activism, focused on her experiences as a woman in a male-dominated political climate as well as her family and friends' reactions to her political activism. The conversations with Pinar was a good beginning to talk about the challenges as well as support that Pinar had received on her journey as an activist. Pinar and her sister both graduated from University of Tehran, and both of them began their activism during their student years, "when we heard about Turkish language classes and the small cultural center that Turks created for themselves in the university, we joined there." Pinar's activism began with demands for Azerbaijani cultural and linguistic rights, and later with her sister's marriage to another Azerbaijani activist, which brings political discussion openly to their house.

When I shared the reasons why I was interested in interviewing her, she responded, "I am not a good case for you to focus on. My family always supports my decisions. I am not a good example for oppression of women in Azerbaijani community." When I asked for more of an explanation about why she thought that I was looking for oppression narratives, she explained that the stereotypes about Turkish women as passive agents, coupled with conservative Turkish family stereotypes, push people to think that it is not easy for Turk women to be politically active and supported by family.

Pinar's initial position when asked to be interviewed is not unfounded. In many ways, Pinar's case is an exception to the more commonplace patriarchal barriers and resistance an Azerbaijani woman would face when attempting to be politically active. Under most circumstances, a woman in Pinar's case would have had either an unsupportive family, or one antagonistic to the idea of their daughter engaging in political and social activism. This would have been further compounded by social resistance from other Iranian activists, and perhaps even false accusations of secessionists ideology as a way to undermine and delegitimize a Turk women's political activism. That Pinar felt that she would be a bad case sample due to her not experiencing oppression on a familial basis while true helped isolate the social aspects of oppression towards Azerbaijani activists in the way Azerbaijani women have been perceived. Having her brother-in-law in the same activism was a big support for her; she acknowledges that made it easy for her to go to meetings and gatherings. She adds that, "activist women always are at a high-risk of being accused of an illicit sexual relationship." These kinds of accusations always put pressure on women activists and limits their activism.

I asked Pinar about Azerbaijani political parties' and groups' approaches toward the issues of women's rights and feminism. Pinar claims having women's rights and feminism among Azerbaijani groups has turned to a fashionable fabric rather than actual beliefs and support to show themselves more democratic and human rights supporters than actual beliefs. Pinar is not the only one who is critical of this situation; many other Azerbaijani activists openly, on their Facebook and Twitter pages, write about these issues and how many activists who talk about women's rights themselves, in their personal lives, openly committed domestic violence. In our conversation with Pinar, I asked her if she saw any changes in recent years, she answered with more women's participation and presence in decision making-positions many women are able to negotiate their own identities as an Azerbaijani Turk women. These women's presence pushes other activists to bring women's issues to the table alongside other issues in Azerbaijani communities. She used her own experience as an example that her presence always would bring the discussion of women's issues to the table in their political meetings.

AZERBAIJANI MOVEMENTS

In choosing this topic as the emphasis of my thesis, I received a great deal of criticism and disapproval from my Persian friends. The general disapproval stemmed from them seeing a discourse of Azerbaijani women's issues as nationalistic/secessionists or a Pan-Turkist movement. I mentioned my hesitancy of pursuing this subject as an emphasis of my research project to an activist friend with over 20 years' worth of experience in Azerbaijani movements, and his reply adequately portrays the reality of Azerbaijani movements in Iran. He told me that the range of the people who associate themselves with Azerbaijani movements is diverse. Azerbaijani movements include different ranges of groups and people, such as members of Parliament who established *fraksione manateqe torkneshin* (Faction of Turkish regions¹³), Azerbaijani political parties¹⁴ who openly call for the independence of South Azerbaijan, or federalist groups, and there are many individuals who are simply linguistic and cultural rights activists.

This is worthy of mentioning, because in studying the systems of oppression and adversity faced by Azerbaijani women, merely attempting to address the issues is seen as an act of fomenting divisions within society, rather than attempts to assist an underserved community. Putting all the people and groups within Azerbaijani movements into a single category and labelling them nationalist or Pan-Turkist is an oversimplification of the myriad of political opinions and civic issues of Azerbaijanis in Iran and is useful only in stifling

¹³ "Faction of Turkish regions" is a cross-factional parliamentary group in the Iranian Parliament, established in October 2016 by Iranian Turkish representatives. Approximately 100 members of Iran's 290-member parliament are Turks from different political backgrounds and were present in the faction's first meeting. Many news outlets covered the establishment of the Faction of Turkish regions, some with support for minority rights and while others were critical; <https://en.trend.az/other/commentary/2679141.html>; <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f7-tork-related-fraction-in-parliament/28083811.html>

¹⁴ I refer to many parties with different ideologies such as Azerbaijan National Resistance Organization [DIRENIS], Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement (GAMOH), the Federal-Democratic Movement of Azerbaijan, etc. The only common theme among these parties is their focus on South Azerbaijan.

groups who wish to address the concerns and needs of underserved communities in Iran. This suppression and labeling originates from the fear of challenging predominant Persian-Shia nationalism as well as the linguistic and cultural domination of Persian groups over minorities in Iran.

By focusing on the variety of political groups and ideologies held by Azerbaijanis, one can reject the oversimplification of the diversity of these groups and challenge the perception of a single nationalistic movement. Simply put, the accusation of being a nationalist group and avoiding the differences and ideologies that exist within the Azerbaijani movements has created a lack of dialogue between these movements and other movements in Iran which share similar goals, such as women's movements as well as different political groups within Iran.

To understand the Azerbaijani social movements, the systems of oppression, and the difficulties faced by Azerbaijani women's movements, one first has to understand Azerbaijani movements, their history, and their concepts of identity. Azerbaijani activists predominantly refer to themselves as *milletchi* and to Azerbaijani movements as *milli hereket*. However, in the Azerbaijani community, referring to Azerbaijani clothes, music, and dances as *milli* is very common, and it does not necessarily have political implications. However, the literal meaning of the term *Milletchi* is nation-lover, and the term is used in a matter analogous to the term "patriot" in the English language. *Milli hereket* (national movement) is a common term among Azerbaijani activists; however, the use of the word "national" has been controversial for many Persians. In Iranian society, being a Turk has been seen as belonging to a minority, and minorities' identities have not been defined as being part of the national identity of the country; therefore, this usage of the term "national" by Azerbaijanis in their movement has been interpreted as being a separatist in nature and representing secessionist sentiments.

Many Turk activists join to the movement because of the feeling of being unrepresented in Iranian society and facing with new identity through Azerbaijani movement. In the words of Francesca Polletta and James Jasper (2001), "people begin to see their identities as sufficiently represented in conventional political or nonpolitical arenas" (p. 92). Many activists that I know do not see themselves having many political connections with Azerbaijani movements, but they see them as movements that culturally represent their

identity or help them to redefine their identity as a Turk in Iran. Many young Turk activists “protesters have been less likely to seek a redistribution of political power than to seek to change dominant normative and cultural codes by gaining recognition for new identities” (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 286). This is not applicable to political parties that have clear political requests; I am referring to some cultural activists that have been labeled PanTurkists or nationalists.

There are many controversial debates among Azerbaijani activists regarding the approaches to the demands of Azerbaijanis. Many activists have emphasized Turkism as the main component of their identity, so their main focus is on cultural Turk identity. Other groups believe focusing mainly on language and cultural rights will not end systematic discrimination against Turks in Iran; therefore, they argue that the main focus in political demands ought to be political self-determination such as having local councils, a federalist system, or independence. This group’s emphasis is more on Azerbaijani geographic identity rather than their ethnic identity. Some groups believe there is no way to achieve equal rights among Persian and non-Persian ethnic groups with their long history of discrimination under a dominant power and that self-determination would be the only way to liberate Turks and other non-Persian ethnic groups from the Iranian colonial system. These divisions of ideologies bring different dynamics and approaches to the approach to activism by these groups.

In recent years, environmental justice due to drying Lake Urmia¹⁵, has become part of Azerbaijani movements. Azerbaijanis see Lake Urmia as a symbol of Azerbaijanis identity with referring to the lake as “the turquoise solitaire of Azerbaijan.” In 2010, many Azerbaijani activists held large demonstration near Lake Urmia criticizing governmental policies and what they perceived as racist environmental policies relating to environmental issues in Azerbaijan. The demonstration ended with the arrest of organizers and activists,

¹⁵ Lake Urmia is the world biggest salt-water lake. Many international organizations has emphasized on the ecological issues that drying lake would cause in the region. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2015/jan/23/iran-lake-urmia-drying-up-new-research-scientists-urge-action>

many of who were given lengthy prison sentences. The campaigns to end environmental racism in Azerbaijan did not end and become one of main topic of the discourse on discrimination against Azerbaijanis in Iran. The water crisis and drying Lake Urmia still is one the main dynamic component of Azerbaijani movements.

The questions that many Iranians ask are, “How did the Azerbaijani movements emerge, and what are the main ideologies of these movements?” Answering these questions is equivalent to attempting to answer the question about when women began demanding equal rights. To begin to answer this question one would have to understand the contemporary history of Azerbaijan and understand the main ideologies, which are centered on ending discrimination against Turks in Iran. Since the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), there has been the demand for political rights from Iranian Turks in the form of *anjomanhaye iyaleti velayeti* (Provincial and Departmental Councils) of Constitutional law. The Azerbaijani’s demands for political and cultural rights have been a dynamic process first crystallized in 1920 with the ethnic revolt led by Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani who took the city of Tabriz and the surrounding areas, creating the short-lived independent state Azadistan (land of liberty). This movement was followed by the Azerbaijan People’s Government (1945-46) founded by Seyed Jafar Pishvari, another short-lived independent state. Azerbaijanis were also a very active section of Iranian society during the 1979 Revolution, protesting against the systemic discrimination during Pahlavi regime. Azerbaijani activists during that time believed that the Revolution would bring about greater democratization and would lift the suppression they faced under the Pahlavis (Shaffer, 2002, p.113).

The failure of Islamic Revolution to end the ban on ethnic languages and the violent suppression of Tabriz due to their support of Ayatollah Kazim Shariatmadaris, crushed the aspirations of Azerbaijanis to receive their desired cultural and linguistic rights (Shaffer, 2002, p.113). After The Revolution of 1979, many events played important roles in shaping a strong Azerbaijani identity. For instance, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) affected the development of the Azerbaijani/Turk identity when Azerbaijani armed services were sent to train in Persian cities. At that time, Azerbaijanis’ interactions with Persians and the manner in which they were treated by their Persian counterparts as a minority within Iran caused them to come to terms with their lesser status in Iran (Shaffer, 2002, p.142). Later, the

independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1991) further influenced the development of identity of the Iranian Azerbaijanis.

Since the 1990s, demonstrations by Azerbaijanis have been held in many universities with an emphasis on the demands that Turkish (Azerbaijani) be taught in schools and universities and that the end of discrimination within the Iranian media among other issues (Asgharzadeh, 2007; Shaffer, 2002). The two major demonstrations by Azerbaijanis in recent years were due to the “Iran newspaper cockroach cartoon” controversy (2006) and in response to the airing of the “Fitilieh programme” (2015). In the former case, the Iran cockroach cartoon controversy, Mana Neyestani an Iranian well-known cartoonist published an article with accompanying cartoons titled “How to Stop the Cockroaches from Making Us into Cockroaches?” The satirical cartoons described nine methods of dealing with cockroaches by a Persian-speaking child and a Turkish (Azerbaijani) speaking cockroach that included dialogue, oppression, extermination and population control. The article states:

The problem is that a cockroach cannot understand human language. Cockroach grammar is so difficult, so nobody has yet discovered it and even 80% of the cockroaches themselves do not know the language [grammar] and prefer to speak in other languages. When even the cockroaches do not understand their own language, how could you possibly understand it¹⁶?!

The publication of this cartoon led to major demonstrations by Turks leading to a violent crackdown by the government resulting in nineteen deaths and hundreds of arrests (Bezhan, 2015). These open demonstrations of Azerbaijanis were attributed to foreign meddling by nations such as Israel, the United States, and the Republic of Azerbaijan by government officials as well as Iranian scholars and journalists¹⁷.

¹⁶ *Iran-e-jomee* on 12 May 2006.

¹⁷ Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to foreign countries as the main source of the uprisings. Abbas Maleki, a senior research fellow at Harvard University stated: "Mr [Mahmudali] Chehregani, one of the Pan-Turkist leaders [agitating for a separatist Azeri agenda], was in Washington last year by invitation of the Defense Department." Maleki not only used the label of Pan-Turkist, but also blamed foreign sources as the main issue.

The second major demonstration by Azerbaijanis was in response to an episode on the popular children's television show *Fitileh*, which depicted a father and his son speaking Persian with Turkish accents saying that they were going to leave the hotel early due to a bad smell that was emanating from their hotel room (Bezhan, 2015). After checking out, the father finds out that the child had been using the toilet brush to brush his teeth rather than a toothbrush and that foul smell they had been smelling was coming from the child's mouth. This was a demeaning portrayal of Turks that meant to capitalize on the stereotypes of Azerbaijanis as being stupid and dimwitted. The protests began right after the show aired with protesters chanting "Death to Persian racism," "Long live Azerbaijan," and "Stop racism against Turks." Many Azerbaijani activists who organized these demonstrations were given prison sentences. A point, which I have found surprising, is that these diverse Azerbaijani groups, despite significant differences in ideologies, unite in reaction to events such as the Iran newspaper cartoon and *Fitileh* programme.

EMPOWERMENT AND AGENCY

With the colonial history and perceptions of Muslim women's subordination within Islam, as well as the political climate in the United States because of its war on terror, which promotes the idea of Muslim women as passive agents lacking agency, it is difficult to conceptualize the concepts of agency and empowerment among Muslim women. Muslim women's empowerment commonly has been analyzed by "looking at honor and shame, gender segregation and access to public space, and women's dress and veiling" (Boyd, 2015, p. 71) while centering Eurocentric values, and in many cases with abundant colonial history of the Third World. Many studies in subjects such as honor killings and patriarchal kinship structures claim that adopting European values in personal autonomy and cutting all family contacts would liberate women based on the claim that "patriarchal kinship... inhibit the exercise of personal agency" (Boyd, 2015, p. 71).

The presented narratives of women as victims and their seclusion and the separation of gender have represented Muslim women without any satisfaction in Muslim societies (Keddie, 2007, p. 10). However, these approaches pushed many scholars of the Middle East to stress on positive aspects of women's lives to challenge the negative stereotypes (Keddie, 2007, p.10). Arzoo Osanloo questions the notion of searching for agency within Islamic

principles that reinforce “oppositional notions of East versus West, or religious life versus secular” (Osanloo, 2009, p. 35). Osanloo states that “women’s agency through a renewed discussion of Islam failed to capture the multiple and indeed converging sources that inflected women’s subjectivities and produced agency” (p. 35). She claims that Iranian Islamic governance have created the situation that allows women to have new expressions of individuated rights. Osanloo’s approach questions the notion of emphasis on Islamic laws as the origin of women’s subordination and passiveness of women in Islamic societies.

Many feminists’ analyses of women’s agency and empowerment are associated with social order and the historical background of Western societies based on the Western definitions of liberation and emancipation ideologies. Therefore, the notion of free choice and autonomous agents who choose between options is a product of capitalism and neoliberalism of Western societies (Boyd, 2015, p. 77). Thus, while people are subjects of their market economy, they still have the feeling of being autonomous agents.

Christina Müller sees agency as a dependent factor that is embedded in the structure of “lifeworld” which is split up into space, time and the world within reach. Müller claims that in spite of the diversity of existing lifeworld and multiple realities of every community, common structures are enabled to provide meaning to agency and symbols. She goes further to explain that agency of subject is always oriented towards other subjects as well as the constructed social world, which encompasses the natural, environmental and cultural world (Müller, 2005, p. 51). Müller argues that “the specific meaning of agency context is dependent and constituted within social relationships” (Müller, 2005, p. 51). Therefore, the meaningful structures of agency and meaningful structure of social world stand together with their interactions. Müller brings the idea of agency in “a dual manner” which is interpreted first by the subject in a given situation and secondly reflects the ability of the subject to interpret and construct it. This approach questions the concept of free choice of subjects while the existence of the subjects is from the agency of people.

EMPOWERMENT AMONG AZERBAIJANI WOMEN

The dominant perception of Azerbaijani movements in Iran is that they are male-centered movements, so there is no space for gender demands. Hence, there is an imbalance between gender and ethnic demands, and disproportionate levels of attention given to ethnic

issues. The concern may be due to the pressure of ruling patriarchal discourse on ethnic movements that do not wish to undermine the optimistic portrayal of "liberation" candidates of ethnic rights movements by highlighting their positions on women's issues. This way of thinking also permeates Azerbaijani movements' approaches towards women's issues, mainly, ignore the issues altogether to create an uncomplicated solidarity that does not ruffle any patriarchal feathers.

The attention of Azerbaijani activists to women's issues is grounded in different ideologies. Some of them believe women play a key role in maintaining and reproducing the ethnic identity of Azerbaijanis, and thus find it necessary to focus on women and educate them in regards to ethnic identity. I met many Azerbaijani women who were aware of these approaches and were proud to have key roles in maintaining their ethnic identities. I also met Azerbaijani activists who believe democratization of the community and the country as a whole is only possible through women's liberation. Therefore, there is no unique approach to women's issues in Azerbaijani movements. Azerbaijani Turk women have not been silent bystanders in this debate; they have resisted and negotiated their positions within their community.

Masume, after having dealt with her son's legal issues for many years, not only learned about the legal system in Iran, she became increasingly literate regarding human rights issues. During the interview, when talking about her sons, she was using the word "rights" while referring to citizens and the state, and explaining all the injustices that her sons faced. While this may seem trivial, it is still quite unusual in Iranian society for a woman to stand up for her rights and to vocally invoke her rights through protest and the legal system. That she was vocal and uncompromising in fighting for the defense of her rights and that of her sons was an impressive feat for a woman who had been relatively apolitical throughout her life. Her approach is a sharp contrast to many other examples such as my cousin, an educated teacher who never attempted to exert her rights through the legal system when she suffered domestic violence due to timidity and a lack of knowledge of her rights under the Iranian legal system. In Iranian society, especially in areas like Azerbaijan where family relations are very close and kinship plays an important role, it is not common to see women adopt the language of rights nor vehemently invoke their rights in the social sphere.

Matsume's case is one in which her impetus to struggle for her and her family's legal and human rights was borne from her protective instincts as a mother, instincts that were stronger than the social mores that would have normally inhibited such outspokenness within a patriarchal system. The social norms in Iranian society are such that there is an unspoken rule that women are not welcome to present their case within the legal system. This is by no means a law or enshrined in the legal code, but rather negative social pressure from family members and within the social framework, which discourages women to exert their legal rights through the courts and perceive doing so as "shameful." Ironically, the biggest hindrance to women accessing their rights in the Iranian legal system is the social and family pressure to avoid bringing "personal" matters to court. Women feel inhibited about exerting their legal rights because of the almost complete lack of social support they will receive from their families and community which could verge on social ostracization.

Fatemeh's story differs from the other cases in that it highlights the serious obstacles faced by women due to the social aspects of patriarchal oppression. Fatemeh was placed in a situation in which she not only had to step out of her role as a homemaker and into the role of a breadwinner, but also was confronted with significant obstacles and intractable difficulties she faced in a male-dominated industry within a highly patriarchal society. The general view of a woman's word as meaningless, the forceful almost violent treatment by her husband's employees, the disregard towards her as a woman in a position of authority, made keeping a successful business running in the absence of her husband untenable. She lost her family's business primarily due to the strong patriarchal norms, which kept her from being viewed seriously as a businesswoman and as an equal in social and financial affairs. Fatemeh, with all challenges she faced, was able to manage her and her son's lives successfully for four years as a single mother awaiting the release of her husband. She was able to find networks to support herself and was able to become socially and financially independent in her husband's absence. Not only did Fatemeh not stay passive, she also became more active in her personal and public life. Now, Fatemeh has work experiences as well as a public life.

Pinar, unlike the other two women, elected to be politically and socially active out of her own volition without a precipitating event. She is knowledgeable about politics and the political current events, and despite the challenges she faces as an activists has chosen to stand for the causes she believes in. One of the major difficulties Pinar faced was the

possibility of social stigma or politically motivated slander of accusations of sexual indiscretion. Merely attending the male-dominated meetings in her activist circles was enough fodder for social gossip of sexual liaisons with her fellow activists. While she faced the perennial oppression, which is to be expected from governments, the most pressing issue was baseless social censure within her patriarchal community. The issues that women activists face due to patriarchal culture, the pressure that these activists face with the expectation of getting married and becoming homemakers, and if they are married the pressure to focus on their family lives at the near exclusion of any sort of activism, creates barriers for women choosing to engage in social and political activism. In this climate, women like Pinar made choices to continue their activism, and are faced with the consequences of their choices.

In amalgamation, these three cases represent a general perspective on the many obstacles facing women and political activist. While these three cases may share commonalities, it also demonstrates the difficulty in generalizations regarding women's issues and the need to address issues of importance on a case-by-case basis. The situations may range from Pinar's case of complete support from her family towards her voluntary activism to the challenges faced by Fatemeh having to become a businesswoman with a complete lack of a social support. The commonality between these women is the potential for change, that these women were able to make a meaningful difference within their own lives, were able to navigate significant life-altering changes, and became a force for positive social change. In these situations there are no specific culprits, no singular boogymen whom to blame, no singular person culture or ideology to be blamed, rather theirs is a struggle against the inertia of a system which necessitated personal and public change. To this end, there exists the need for grassroots movements, which can address the specific ethnic women's needs, assist them in having a voice, and realizing personal and social change. Moreover, Azerbaijani movements provide certain space for women to receive publicity and visibility in various ways as I mentioned in three case studies.

CONCLUSION

Feminism is tied to different social movements in different historical periods that turned feminism into a variety of theoretical paradigms in its development, and these

innovations have added new levels to the theoretical knowledge on feminism. Many of today's racial and ethnic justice movements have close ties with women's participation. Azerbaijani movements are the movements that created an opportunity for women to bring attention to their intersection of gender and ethnic issues.

Moreover, the influence of Azerbaijani movements on women's lives is different on an individual level. In this research, I tried to focus on some patterns among experiences of Azerbaijani women. It is important to note the visibility that Azerbaijani movements provide to women. These visibilities come from women's direct participation in the movements as well as their indirect participation such as interviews in media on behalf of their husbands or sons. Maybe there are certain nationalist ideologies in approaching women within Azerbaijani movements, but women's participation in these movements opens a window for them to explore new worlds. Through these participations, women could construct and build new identities for themselves. Importantly, women are able to build networks through these movements.

Institutionalized rejection of differences in Iran has created many challenges to minority groups, especially women, to receive visibility in order to express their issues. By joining Azerbaijani movements, women seem to enjoy the social recognition within their community that they were going to lose in their daily lives. At the same time, the masculinization of women who become breadwinners and household heads during their male family members' imprisonment has a remarkable effect on women's lives. The absence of husbands, in addition to the difficulties that cause some freedom to women, puts them into decision-making positions in their households. The created situations force women to take over the management of their family as well as the business of husbands if it is necessary. This publicity makes women familiar with the environment around them that previously was unknown.

Azerbaijani movements have patriarchal approaches toward women like many other social and political movements similar to many other political groups in Iran. Many of the political parties of Azerbaijan that I checked recognize women's rights as their main component of the party. However, they are marginalized groups that currently do not have any political power, or much of their main activism is centered in diasporic communities. Therefore, it is difficult to see if they are going to be successful in promoting women's rights.

CONCLUSION

I knew when I began to explore this subject, that I would receive great resistance from the Persian community in the diaspora and accusations of “racism” or of cultural “disrespect” from my Iranian counterparts. This was to be expected because it is important to understand that they see their Iranian/Persian culture as an ancient one; a culture that has been an Empire in the region throughout the last three millennia. The Persians are proud of their culture, of the influence their culture has had on the world, on their history, on their traditions and their artistic achievements. The problem is not about the achievements and greatness of their culture, but is about their inability to see the beauty, value, relevance and importance of other cultures in Iran. The beginning of addressing this problem is the distinction that constructive criticism to a culture is not an attack on a culture.

The particulars of the Azerbaijani women’s experience in Iran provide a model of the dimensions and interacting factors that fuel systems of discrimination and oppression, whether they be intentional or unintentional. The situation provides a double-tiered system in which women face endemic factors particular to their own culture as well as an overlapping tier of social discrimination, which compounds the problems already faced by the women within these communities. The intent in elucidating the dynamics of this model is not to demonize or compound the already prevalent view of Iranian culture as “backwards” or “oppressive” as perceived in Western societies, but rather to explore the unintended consequence and minority experiences of women living in a larger nation-state with nationalistic ideology blind to cultural differences. In exploring the difficulties faced by these women, one can also begin the process of finding solutions to these social issues and employ strategies to better address their plight, not just to the women of Iranian Azerbaijan, but to other minority women in similar situations. The plight of the Azerbaijani Turk woman, while not identical, is comparable to the Latino woman’s experience in the United States, the

Kurdish woman's experience in Turkey, as well as countless other examples throughout the world.

The case of Rahele Zamani echoes the situation faced by many Azerbaijani women who became victims of their conditions and circumstances. In Rahele's case, her unjust execution explains the insensitivity of the system to the very real cultural differences between a dominant culture and the minority culture. In this insensitivity, the dominant system feels justified treating minorities as second-class citizens. In many ways, to begin to address these issues is to first address the overarching paradigm that encompasses both minority men and women within a nation ruled by a dominant culture. Addressing this issue either in Iran or here in the United States presents some major problems, most significant among these is the difficulty of letting the dominant culture understand that a problem actually exists.

In Rahele's case, the fact that a woman was being tried for a capital crime without representation, having no ability to understand Farsi, and by extension the court proceedings, is to any outside observer a crass injustice. However, to the dominant culture, there is no misdeed. Emphasis is placed on the adherence to protocol rather than the fact that the particulars in this case meant that adherence to protocol would have ensured injustice. To begin to combat this pattern of behavior is to promote within the dominant culture a respect for minority cultures and a curiosity to explore other cultures, and the complexity of minority identities. In the case of Azerbaijani in Iran, it is important to understand that Azerbaijan, because of its geography, has been influenced by Persian and Western culture. Moreover, the Turkic language of Azerbaijan culturally and linguistically connects Iranian Azerbaijan to the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey as well as other Turkic speaking regions. These factors created a unique identity of Azerbaijan within Iran. Thus, the historical processes that created Iranian identity based on being Persian and Shia has diminished and marginalized the identity of minority groups. Non-Persian ethnic groups who do not fit within the definition of Iranian identity have been seen as the "others."

In the second tier of oppression of Azerbaijani women is the cultural patriarchal norms, which dominate much of the interactions that take place at the levels of communities and families. This tier is in many ways reinforced by the insulation of the Azerbaijani culture within Iran due to linguistic and cultural differences between Turks and Persians. For all the

efforts of the Persian feminists, their attempts to create a movement for the betterment of women in Iran does not benefit women who neither understand feminist literature due to their inability to speak or read Farsi nor are they likely to feel a sense of camaraderie with women with whom a palpable cultural chasm exists. The insular nature of their circumstance demands grassroots activism on the part of Azerbaijani women who both understand the dynamics of patriarchy within the Azerbaijani culture and can speak directly to these women based on shared culture and language. Again, these attempts by women to participate in women's movements specific to Azerbaijan may be seen as seditious in nature, but are born more out of the necessity of their circumstance than of an attempt to force identity politics on gender issues.

These local activists are able to bridge the efforts of feminists from other parts of the world and Iranian feminists and translate it into local activism which takes the best of their sister organizations and channels it into a movement specific to the culture and concerns of Azerbaijani women. These grassroots movements can take into account the expressions of patriarchy and the value of women within their culture in a manner that is understood and accepted at the local level. As in the hikayes of my grandmother expounding the virtues of women in Azerbaijani culture, a local activist can express the empowerment of women in terms such as the Koroglu hikaye in which Koroglu's wife, Nigar, was his valkyrie, in many ways his equal and the source of his strength. Explaining in culturally acceptable terms that their sense of manhood does not demand the servility of women, and expounding the virtues of respect for women and the empowerment of women as a social good in terms which are historical and widely accepted. By speaking in terms specific to this community, and by having the activism come from within rather than being seen as a colonial influence, this community benefits from the efforts of their own activists.

This, in many ways, would be greatly complemented by assistance from Persian feminists, however, given the nature of the two-tier system, addressing the issues within each tier and bridging the efforts at each tier requires time and empathy. It requires an understanding by Persian activists of the importance to Azerbaijanis of hikayes and their culture, of Azerbaijanis' insulation within Iran less by choice than due to cultural misunderstanding, and an understanding by Persian activists that they have more in common with their Azerbaijani counterparts than what they truly understand. When Azerbaijanis did

not feel the effort and empathy for Persian activists to understand their issues, Azerbaijanis began grassroots Azerbaijani movements as a form of resistance against the discrimination that they face within Iranian society.

The growth of an endogenous women's movement made up of Azerbaijani women and addressing the issues of Azerbaijani women has created a template to address the specific needs of this community and has become a powerful force for change. While there exists a concept of a universal sisterhood in terms of feminist movements, this universal spirit oftentimes does not address cultural differences and attempts to better women's conditions by cultural assimilation. This necessitates homegrown movements made up of local women who can deal specifically with the issues faced by local women. In the case of Azerbaijani women, it has not only assisted in promoting women's issues, but has also allowed for greater women's participation in other movements such as linguistic and cultural movements. This greater visibility of women as a force for change reinforces the role of women within Azerbaijani culture and in of itself creates social change by empowering women.

In summation, the situation of Azerbaijani women represents a success story of women's empowerment in a system of double-tiered oppression analogous to the theoretical model of women of color. This success is best explained by the native local forces of change in the form of local independent activists and local movements, which have arisen in response to the particular problems facing the community and the shared challenges of Turks in Iran. While the implementation of solutions specifically addressing the two-tier system is still far from a reality, by understanding the nature of the systems of oppression, one can begin developing strategies and tailored solutions to the problems this community faces. The use of this model, the formation of empowerment strategies, and any solutions learned from this experience would serve as a useful model in other similar double-tiered systems of oppression faced by minority women around the world.

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