

Taleghani Fellowship Research Results, Kian Alavy

My Masters thesis uses the official newspaper of the Azerbaijan Democrat Party (ADP), *Azerbaijan*, to examine the Party's autonomous Azerbaijan National Government, which controlled northwest Iran from November 1945 to December 1946. My thesis focuses on the following questions: Once the modern nation-state was institutionalized in Iran, how did intellectuals' understandings of "nation" continue to evolve and/or compete? What role did socio-political groups and intellectuals outside the purview of the state play in articulating and shaping Iranian national culture?

The ADP's movement positioned Azerbaijani culture, and especially the Azeri language, as paramount in its challenges to Pahlavi state-building and cultural production, a project that was heavily dependent on Persian language and culture for the content of its national identifications. In challenging the content of Pahlavi state-building and cultural production, the ADP envisioned a federal model of national community that would protect Iran's diverse ethnic and linguistic communities and their respective cultures. According to the ADP's line of reasoning, the unitary Pahlavi state and the homogenous national culture it espoused disrespected the Azerbaijani people's language and culture by omitting Azerbaijani accomplishments in, and contributions to, Iran. It was the duty of Azerbaijanis to regain respect for their language and culture and demand a fair share of political power within Iran. In order to accomplish these broad goals, the ADP actively engaged the Pahlavi project of state-building and cultural production through its official party newspaper, *Azerbaijan*, critiquing this project and articulating its own historical narrative and set of national symbols for the Azerbaijani people.

My research shows how the ADP reproduced the language of nationalism outside the purview of the state and used this language, coupled with its actions, to undermine and threaten the Iranian nation-state itself. I further demonstrate how the national identifications championed by the Pahlavi state could both support and subvert the state through regional autonomy movements. By challenging Persian cultural dominance and the idea of Iranian territorial integrity, the ADP highlighted the importance of provincial narratives in delineating national culture and shaping nationalist discourse. My thesis builds upon work critiquing the nation as an evolving unity through history. In a similar fashion to the federalist movement in early twentieth century China, the ADP presented an alternative historical narrative and cultural project to "critique centralized authority and articulate its vision of the nation built from the locality upwards." Despite the eventual failure of the movement, the ADP's roughly one year of autonomous government control over northwest Iran and its sponsorship of cultural production serve as a unique case study of the place of minorities within the Iranian nation-state.