Master's Thesis

Ethnic Identity Construction among Iranian Azerbaijani Youth in Tabriz City

by

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Certification Page

I, <u>KHALILI Mostafa</u> (Student ID 51115005) hereby declare that the contents of this Master's Thesis are original and true, and have not been submitted at any other university or educational institution for the award of degree or diploma.

All the information derived from other published or unpublished sources has been cited and acknowledged appropriately.

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With deep gratitude,

Mostafa Khalili

Summary

In order to understand the nature of the emerging ethnic movements among the Iranian Azerbaijanis, scholars have taken different perspectives; ranging from viewing the issue as an inevitable and natural consequence of deprivation to a result of external political influences.

However, a critical review of the literature would reveal the existence of several gaps in the majority of these researches. For one thing, many of such researches fall short in providing sociological insights and reliable ethnographic evidence for what they claim. In fact, political and historical perspectives dominate the literature. Moreover, the majority of them approach "Iranian Azeris" as a homogenous group having similar demands and same strategies to achieve these demands, which appear to be non-accurate with reference to generational differences, city versus rural and geographical location, etc.

This thesis is an attempt to take a small step in understanding ethnic identity construction process among Tabrizi youth, which in turn can contribute to understanding the nature, root causes and body of ethnic movements in this city. Yet the main distinction of this thesis from the previous work may lie in its focus on how everyday micro level "interactions" of actors "construct" their identity and distinguish them from "others."

For doing so, I have taken a qualitative approach which benefits ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation and interview as its main tool. A total number of 59 Tabrizi youth and 15 experts participated in the interviews. The questions investigated the ethnic boundary features and the self-perception of identity among Tabrizi youths. The fieldwork for this research has been done in 4 months.

The major findings reveals that the social stigma of the language and accent plays an important role in Iranian Azeris dissatisfaction and resentment than perceived political or economic discrimination by the government. Tabrizi culture, accent and customs are considered as "standard" and "indigenous" for the Tabrizi residents. Therefore, a middle-class Tabrizi who speaks with that accent usually owns a satisfactory amount of symbolic capital. Therefore, he is not much attracted to other identity alternatives of Persian's, Republic of Azerbaijan's or Turkey's. For non-Tabrizi Azeris residents of Tabriz city, on the other hand, the issue is more complicated. They are the leaders of ethnic identity movement in Tabriz. We have explained this phenomenon through discrimination and stigmatization imposed upon them in their everyday lives inside Tabriz city.

In conclusion, the thesis states that the ethnic right movement, which started as a civic middle-class movement inspired by universal human right discourse, seems to have gone far from its primary goal while gaining greater visibility. This visibility is mostly due to the emergence of an exclusive, non-modern radical movement led by non-Tabrizi Azeri residents of Tabriz concentrated in several poor neighborhoods.

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1. Introduction

While empires drew their territorial boundaries across ethnic lines, modern nation-states tend to impose the territorial integrity of the state on people of different ethnic groups within their borders. Thus, policymakers seek to understand how ethnic identity is formed and maintained. Some states have been successful in the critical task of integrating minorities into the nation state while others have failed. In areas with a long history of tribal, sectarian and ethnic conflicts, this issue becomes more relevant.

Today, the Middle East has turned into a center of severe ethnic conflicts. The question of Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, the internal ethnic conflict in Afghanistan, and the ongoing Azerbaijani-Armenian ethnic conflict are just some examples of them. Out of the ruins of the Ottoman, Russian and Persian empires in the region, Iran is the only country that has survived fragmentation from ethnic conflicts. However, the emerging ethnic rights demands among its many ethnic groups might be a sign of change.

Iranian Azerbaijanis are the largest minority group in Iran. While there is no official consensus on their population, some sources estimate that they comprise about 16-24 percent of Iran's population (CIA fact sheet 2015). They mainly live in the northwestern provinces of Iran (see Figure 1) and speak Azerbaijani language, a dialect close to Anatolian Turkish. Their practice of Shia Islam firmly ties them to the Shia majority in Iran. Historically, Azerbaijanis have played active roles in the cultural, political and economic development of the Persian Empire, as well as in contemporary Iran (Patricia 1988). Although they are commonly pictured as a loyal minority throughout the history of Iran (Grebennikov 2013), their identity has taken various forms, from an

Iranian with a strong sense of national identity, to an Azerbaijani (or Iranian Azerbaijani), a Turkic oriented ethnic group, a Shia Muslim community, and sometimes with all these distinguishing lines blurred. This has often caused confusion in trying defining their ethnic boundary.

Figure 1. Ethnic composition in the northwest of Iran and neighboring countries.
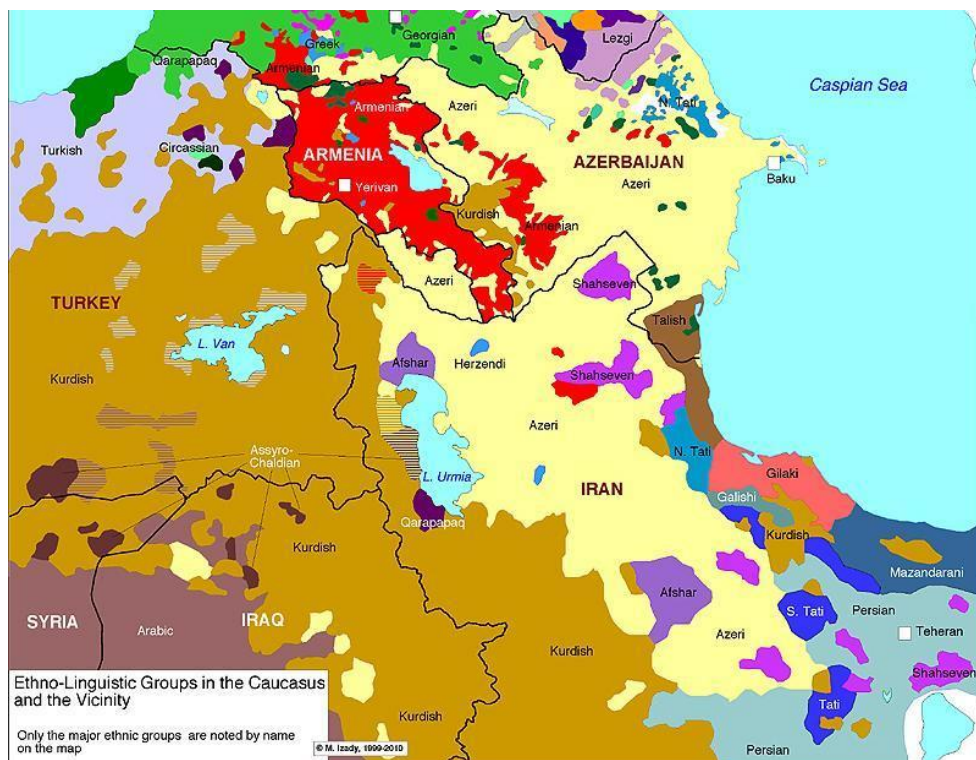
(Source: *World Language Mapping System* 2011)

During the last two decades, ethnic-based cultural and political movements have increased in the Azerbaijan of Iran (Safizadeh, 2013). Ethnic awareness is becoming more into consideration in people's everyday life practices. Though many researchers would agree that currently there is no perceived fear of secession in the Azerbaijan of Iran (e.g., Grebennikov 2013, Ahmadi 2008), the abrupt rise of civic demands like linguistic rights

and a firm stand against the social, historical stigma of being termed as "Turk" in Iran are signs of some change among them.

The current situation differs from one city to another, depending on their geographical location, political salience, cultural differences with the neighboring ethnic groups and many other factors. This research focuses on the city of Tabriz, as it is the biggest and the most homogenous Azerbaijani ethnic city in Iran. While couple of decades ago, many young middle-class families preferred to talk in Persian with their children, nowadays the trend has changed completely. Many young families prefer to choose Azerbaijani name for their children and send them to Azeri dance classes. To track the roots and consequences of these changes in Tabriz city, this study focuses on the perceived ethnic identity among the youth, considering the generational gap difference in post-revolutionary Iran.

Many scholars took different approaches in studying the dynamics of change among Azeris in Iran, from the relative deprivation theory (Saleh, 2013) to the external political influences (Souleymanov, 2012). However, due to the lack of anthropologic fieldwork, these analyses seem to be opinionated of the Tabriz city Azerbaijanis.

In oreder to specify the internal factors on youth's everyday life in Tabriz City, the following major questions were raised:

- What factors influence the ethnic awareness of Tabrizi youths?
- How do different in-group characteristics influence youths of their subjective view of ethnic identity?
- What are the dynamics of ethnic rights' movements among Tabrizi youth?
- Why have the ethnic rights movements gained popularity among the youth in certain neighborhoods?

Trying to investigate these questions, this research have taken a qualitative approach, which benefits ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation and in-depth interviews as it, main tool. Two sections of fieldworks has been done first during February and March and second on August and September 2016. The total number of 59 Tabrizi youth and 15 experts participated in the interviews. The questions aimed to explore the ethnic boundary features and the self-perception of identity among Tabrizi youths.

After this introduction, the second chapter provides a general background of Iranian Azerbaijanis. After a brief demography of study area, a historical overview of Azerbaijanis from 1823 until today briefly covered. The emergence and roots of ethnic activism is Azerbaijan has been discussed in the next section. Finally the existing literature on Iranian Azerbaijanis presented.

The third chapter reviews the theoretical framework. To find answers to the questions, this research has taken two theoretical approaches: first, Fredrik Barth's (1996) tradition of studying ethnic boundaries (groups in relation with "others") rather than the group itself, and Wimmer's (2013) multilevel process theory of ethnic boundary making. Tabrizi youth's perception of their identity in their relation to Persians, Turks of Turkey and "other" Azerbaijanis across the border is discussed. Second, the significant role of linguistic stigma in defining ethnic identity and boundary among them is discussed. The research places special emphasis on "language" and "accent" because it is considered as the major part of the sense of "stigma" or "esteem" among them.

Chapter Five is on the research methodology. First, the importance of the ethnographic method in ethnic identity research is clarified to justify the tools used in this research. Then the challenges in doing participant observation are explained in detail.

In Chapter six, observations in the field and the data analysis from the interviews are presented. This chapter is divided into four parts. First part is the perception of Tabrizi youth about their identity, language and folklore in interaction with others. This part starts with the controversial concept of authentic Tabrizi and the feeling of status difference that it causes. The role of social, economic and symbolic capital of individuals in influencing their choices towards ethnic boundary building is presented.   The second part investigates the vital role that language and accent play in people's ethnic identity construction mechanism. The third part, addresses the existing ethnic right movements in Tabriz city and the factors that contribute to shaping the movements. The focus of the last part is on *Chehelmetri* neighborhood as an important site for shaping radical movements and the motivations of ethnic activists from this neighborhood.

Chapter Seven presents the concluding remarks. Linking the observations with the theories and the literature review, this section argues that in the lack of perceived economic discrimination against Azeris in Iran, the youths' deal with the stigma of the language itself or their accent rather than other forms of discrimination. This perceived linguistic stigma is not only rooted on being mocked by other ethnic groups, but also is rooted on Azeris self-view of their language.

It is concluded that the ethnic right movement that started as a middle-class civic rights movement was inspired by universal human right discourse, but seems to have gone far from its primary goal while gaining greater visibility. This visibility is mostly due to the emergence of exclusive movements led by non-Tabrizi residents of Tabriz concentrated in several poorer neighborhoods. It seems that these groups try to define Iranian Azerbaijani identity merely through Azeri language and folklore and through

confrontation with others (Persians). Middle-class Tabrizis tend to be distanced from this

movement.

2. General Background

Iranian Azerbaijan has gone through different historical experiences. The primordial approach may provide an explanation of the vital role of ethnic awareness among different ethnic groups in present Iran. The origin of Azerbaijanis, their role in the contemporary history of Iran, their relations with the Northern Azerbaijanis and the question of Turkic identity are some of the heated debates among Iranian Azerbaijanis.

This chapter presents a brief history of Iranian Azerbaijanis from the division of Azerbaijanis between Russia and Iran until the establishment of the post-Soviet Azerbaijan and Turkey's increasing cultural attraction on Iranian Azerbaijanis. Rapid social and political changes, especially in the recent years, caused a wide inter-generational gap in perceiving ethnic identity.

2.1. Demography of the study area

Historical Persia, as with all empires, has had varying borders. Contemporary Iran is a multi-ethnic country as well. Major ethnic groups in contemporary Iran are Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Arabs, Baluchs, and Turkmans. The country has been successful in the process of nation-state building, despite ethnic conflicts. At the same time, the political territory of modern Iran has remained unchanged since 1828. This long-lasting political stability is the main argument of the majority of the citizens including ethnic minorities to respect their "Iranian" nationality regardless of their ethnicity (Ahmadi, 2008).

Iranian Azerbaijanis comprise the largest population of ethnic Azerbaijanis in the world. They generally live in four provinces of East and West Azerbaijan, Ardabil and

Zanjan with many in nearby provinces of Qazvin, Hamadan, and Markazi. Moreover, during the contemporary period, many of them have migrated to other provinces of Iran, especially to the capital, Tehran, Karaj and Qom for economic and political reasons.

The focus area for this study is Tabriz city. The city of Tabriz with the population of 1.8 million (Iran's Statistical Center, 2011), the capital of the East Azerbaijan Province, is the most important historical city for all Azerbaijanis (Figure 2). Economy-wise, the city, is the most developed city in the northwest of Iran and one of the main industrial centers of the country. Historically, the city has always played a significant role both in the country and the Azeri-resident regions. For a long time, middle and higher class citizens of Tabriz have tried to show their pride of being Azeri by maintaining their ethnic identity through preserving Azeri folklore and speaking in their language in daily conversations. Ethnically, Tabriz is almost a Azeri dominant city, and it is rare to hear someone speak in Persian even among government officers even though the official and written language is Farsi. Despite being developed, there has been almost no migration by other ethnic groups to Tabriz.
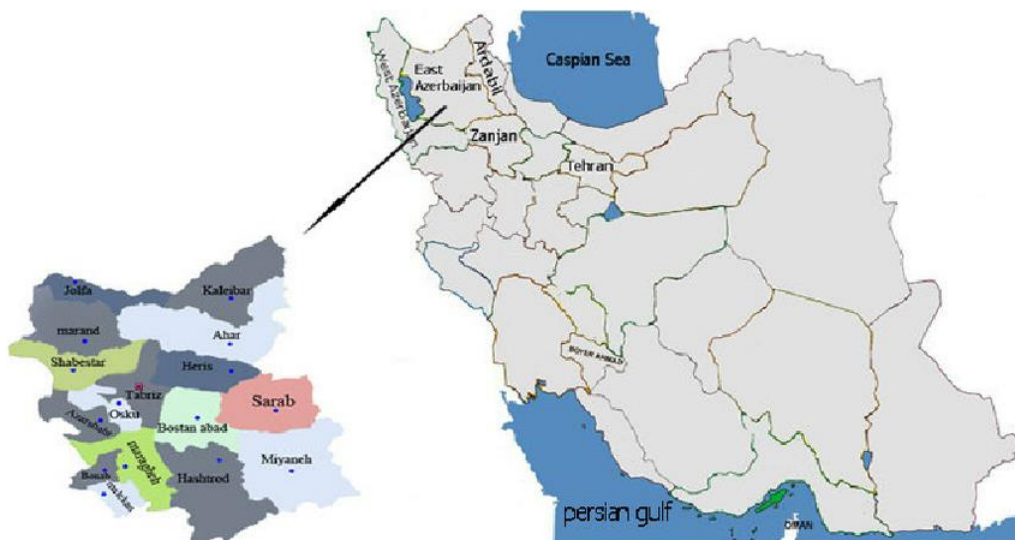
Figure 2. Geographical map East Azerbaijan province and Tabriz city, North West of Iran. Source: "*Instuitute of Iranian Ethnic Studies*"

2.2.   Historical Overview

Azerbaijan was divided between Russian and Persian Empires in 1828. The northern part was joined to the Soviet Union, and the latter became an independent nation of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Swietochowski, 1995).   Azerbaijanis along the border have experienced two different political systems and distinct processes of nation-state building and institutional order for almost two centuries. This has highly affected their cultural, religious and nationalistic sentiments (Khalili, 2016; Aliyeva, 2013).

Being under the governance of the Soviet Union for more than seventy years, residents of the Republic of Azerbaijan have been strongly influenced by socialist ideology, while Iranian Azerbaijanis have been under the influence of Persian culture, literature, and politics.

Reza Shah-e Pahlavi (1925 - 1941) took an inclusive attitude towards all ethnic groups in general, and Azeris in particular, in order to modernize the country by centralizing political power and assimilating all ethnic groups into the Persian culture (Atabaki, 1993: 53-61). This led to the severe internal suppression which lasted for several years, together with the interest of the Soviet Union to expand its political penetration in post-World War II Iran. This resulted in the establishment of an autonomous, independent Azerbaijan from 1945 to 1946 in the Northwest of Iran. For the first and only time in Iranian Azerbaijani history, Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP) changed the official and educational language of the region to Azerbaijani and promoted their ethnic rights (Hasanli, 2006). By the beginning of the Cold War and the ending of the Red Army's support, the young Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979) gained control of the independent territories. After that, until the Islamic revolution of 1979, ethnic demands of all minorities in Iran was disregarded aiming to build a homogenous national

identity focusing on the glorious past of the Persian Empire. Today, many Azeri ethnic activists bring the case of ADP, as an example of successful local governance for ethnic rights, while non-activists do not know that much about it.

Since the Islamic revolution, the new regime has used the religious notion of "Shia Muslim" as a new form of maintaining the country's national unity. Moreover, during the eight years of Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), Iranian government presented the war as a religious one. At the same time, they promoted Iran's territory as a sacred land for all citizens regardless of the ethnic group they belonged to (Ebrahimi, 2012). Moreover, in the bipolar atmosphere of the post-World War II period, demands of the political opposition in the country were associated more with socialist ideologies rather than ethnic rights.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, an independent country of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established in the North. Massive number of Azerbaijanis started to cross the so-called iron curtain after 70 years of separation. Some scholars (Shafeer, 2002) anticipated that the ties between co-ethnics would get stronger gradually (Shafeer 2002). However, research shows that different processes of nation-state building in two countries made distinct perceptions of ethnic identity across the borders (Khalili, 2016).

By the beginning of the 21st century, especially after Turkey speeded up the process of modernization, it became the center of attention for many Iranian Azerbaijanis. Rising number of the tourists and students who pursue their studies in Turkey increased the attention of Iranian Azerbaijanis towards Turkey as a successful model of integrating Islam and modernity in the Middle East. However, current political instability and

terroristic attacks in Turkey has slowed the increasing pro-Turkish sentiments among Azeris and enhanced the complexity of the situation.

2.3.   The emergence and roots of ethnic activism

The clash between ethnic and national identity have always been the main motivation behind any political activism in Iranian Azerbaijan. Being conservative Shi'a Muslims (compared to other parts of the country) and having their education in the Persian language, the majority of Iranian Azerbaijanis define their dominant identity as Iranian. However, during the last two decades, ethnic-based cultural and political movements have increased dramatically in the Azerbaijan of Iran (Safizadeh, 2013). Even though many field researchers would agree that currently there is no perceived fear of secessionism in the Azerbaijan of Iran, a sudden rise in the civic demands like linguistic rights and economic equality are signs of change taking place in the region.

When the reformist party came to power under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) in Iran, alongside with relative political freedom and civil society promotion policies, many local magazines started to be published in Azerbaijani language. However, even this limited political pluralism didn't last long, and many of the publications got suspended, and in some cases, the journalists got arrested. Some ethnic activists started to openly ask their right to educate in Azerbaijani. This right has been explicitly mentioned in Article 15 of the Iranian Constitution but never practiced. Many ethnic activists and secessionist groups started to rise in the region. In 2006, the Azeri ethnic issues became highlighted more than ever and turned into an internal security issue when a governmental Persian newspaper printed an insulting caricature of a cockroach speaking in Azerbaijani. Azeris took offense. Many thousands of them rioted in the streets

of Azeri dominant cities of Tabriz, Orumiyeh, Ardabil, Zanjan and even in the capital Tehran, claiming their rights and asking for an apology. Their main demand was to stop social, cultural and economic discrimination against Azeris. The riots were severely suppressed by the central government (Souleimanov, Pikal, and Kraus, 2013).

Some scholars interpret these emerging movements solely from the political viewpoint and link these changes to the establishment of the Post-Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan and its political penetration. Some politicians in Iran claim that it is the result of Turkey's policy of spreading pan-Turkism ideology in the region as well as the West's recent policy to destabilize the internal security of Iran. However, ethnic activist groups inside Iran, in response, deny receiving any kind of support from foreign sources claiming that it is an entirely independent movement and accusing the state of using this strategy to neglect the minorities' inalienable ethnic rights. Another group of scholars sees the rise of ethnic demands in the Azerbaijan of Iran in-line with the hegemony of human rights discourse in the global political sphere that has led many communities and groups to seek for their rights. Atabaki (2015), has recently added a new dimension to this debate by putting his emphasis on the role of individual elites (e.g.Professor Mohammad Taghi Zehtabi). In Atabaki's view, Zehtabi has significantly contributed to the rise of such demands by publishing his famous book: "The ancient history of Iranian Turks" in which he recalls iconic historical figures like "Babak" to bring back the pride of being Azeri.

2.4.   Review of the literature on Azerbaijani ethnic identity

To have a clear understanding of the ethnic identity perception among Iranian Azerbaijanis, first, we need to explore the current debates and political views over the

origins of ethnic identity. Then, the centrality of ethnic or national identity among them should be carefully investigated.

The quest for ethnic identity among Azeris in Iran starts with the controversy of ethnic origin, and continues with the demand for language rights and opposing existing social and economic discriminations. "Whether or not Azerbaijani people are originally Turks" has been the subject of debate for a long time. In his book, "Azeri or the language of the Ancient Persia," Kasravi (1946) states that Azerbaijanis are not a distinct ethnic group from Persians. On the other hand, several other ethnic activists and scholars oppose this view. The dilemma of whether Iranian Azerbaijanis are "Turks" (as they are being called as Turks in Iran), "Azeris" (as Kasravi stated), or "Azerbaijani" is an important question that is being discussed in many daily conversations of ordinary people. While many ordinary citizens are confused in using these terms, ethnic activists or others who are more aware of ethnic rights are very concerned about how they are being termed as Azeris or Turks by Persians.

There is the variety of ideas on how to deal with the ethnic diversity in Iran among different scholars. Some researchers, taking a primordial point of view, mention about the glorious, conflict-free era of the Persian Empire. They argue that all these ethnic-based conflicts in Iran are very recent phenomena, emerging just after the First World War (Ahmadi, 2008; Ashraf, 1994). They intend to prove that the different ethnic groups had lived together peacefully during the Persian Empire for centuries. The Persian language was the official language of a vast geographical area situated in current Iran and the neighboring countries even during the reign of the Azeri origin dynasties like Safavids (1502-1736) and Qajars (1785-1925). In their point of view, ethnic rights activism in Iran

has little public support and is supported by neighboring countries and super powers in order to destabilize the country (Ahmadi, 2008).

Nevertheless, Azerbaijani ethnic activists, as well as some other historians, believe that above-mentioned interpretations are a result of their Pan-Iranist tendency. They consider that throughout Iranian history, whenever the central government was weakened, rebellious movements started to grow among ethnic minorities. However, the process of modernization in Iran went forward by suppressing all the ethnic minorities during Reza Shah's era (1925 - 1941) (Taqilu, 2016).   Therefore, they argue that ethnic issues are a central problem in Iran, which rises repeatedly despite suppression whenever the country experiences political instability.

As Jalayipour (2014) explains, there are three different types of nationalism in Iran. The first category identifies with the glorious era of the Persian Empire. The second category started with the Islamic Revolution in Iran when the government promoted religious nationalism. In this type, the focus is based on being Shi'ite Muslim. Ethnic differences are kept subdued in the first and second type. The last type is civic nationalism which is based on pluralism and tolerance and opposed to any discrimination between different ethnic groups. Jalayipour believes that this type has never been practiced in Iran and is the only one which could work well for the multicultural case of Iran.

Few anthropological researches have been done on the ethnic identity question of Iranian Azerbaijanis. Surprisingly the results of these researches sometimes are paradoxical and completely contradict each other. For instance, while Souleimanov (2013), based on his fieldwork in Tabriz on September 2010, mentions that: "there is almost open talk in Tabriz about the need for federalization in Iran and the establishment of Azerbaijani autonomy".   Safizadeh's (2013) fieldwork, in a stark contrast, reveals

that Tabrizis are very loyal to the integrity of Iran. Lack of anthropological approaches to everyday life might have its roots in the political restrictions of doing fieldwork on sensitive issues for the government in Iran. Additionally, as Fakouhi (2010) states, sociological researches in Iran follow macro-level analyses. Thus, few indigenous researches conduct fieldworks in everyday life of the ordinary citizens.

Reviewed works of literature seem to fall short in addressing the differences between different Azeri residing cities of Iran, generational gaps and differences among the distinct social classes in the society. Therefore, in order to take a small step in this direction, this research focuses solely on Tabriz city and the young generation. Future work can be expanded to the study of different generations in different Azeri residing cities of Iran.

Religious and political territorial ties with Iran, linguistic and ethnic ties with the Republic of Azerbaijan and the sense of looking for a modern and westernized Turkish culture has added to the complexities of Iranian Azerbaijanis ethnic identity. In the politically unstable Middle East, ethnicity has always been one of the main reasons for the conflicts and wars and the collapse of the great empires and states. Deteriorating situation of the Kurdish ethnic issue in the region has added more fuel to the fire and has further encouraged the Iranian Azerbaijanis to demand their ethnic rights as well.

3. Theoretical Framework

Fieldwork for this thesis revealed that many factors engage on Tabrizi youth's ethnic awareness. In order to benefit the existing literature for our discussion, this chapter provides a brief explanation of some of the influential works in this field. While understanding the nature of ethnicity and its dynamics have always been of interest to social scientists, there has been little consensus about what its nature is, how should it be understood and what its effects are. On the other hand, doing research on ethnic groups has a long history in the discipline of anthropology which has contributed to the evolution of ethnic theories. In return, recent revolutionary ethnic theories suggested by some scholars - e.g. comparative and constructivist-based study of ethnicity by Barth (1996) - have proposed new approaches to ethnographic fieldworks (Cohen, 1978). In this regard, theorists usually have been divided into three groups: advocates of instrumentalism theories, primordialism, and constructivistism approach (Hale, 2004).

3.1. Ethnic identity theories

3.1.1. Instrumental approach to ethnicity

According to Instrumental approach, individuals choose between various identities according to self-interest. Instrumental approach sees ethnicity as a strategic basis for coalitions that seek a larger share of economic or political power (Mayoral & Ray, 2012). The instrumentalist approach is not limited to the economic or political aspects; instead, it can be symbolic. For example, when someone gains satisfaction from efforts to keep traditional elements of a threatened culture or when ethnicity is redefined

and reshaped in one's search for self-realization of identity (Blanton, 2015). Therefore, from this perspective, ethnicity can be created as people's historical memory and used by leaders in pursuit of their political interests (Wan & Vanderwerf, 2009).

This approach is visible among many Azerbaijanis on different occasions, when some try to conceal their origin, ethnicity or even nationality. For instance, traveling to Turkey, they try to highlight their Turkic origin while in Tehran, many would prefer to put the emphasis on national identity. This applies to their other inter-ethnic relations and in certain circumstances to their intra-ethnic relations as well. Many individuals would prefer to maximize their benefit by switching between identities.

3.1.2. Primordialist approach to ethnicity

Primordialist approach perceives ethnic membership as given or acquired through birth. Each person belongs to one ethnic group, and that group membership remains fixed over a lifetime, which later will be inherited by the next generation (Chandra, 2012). It can also be described as having emotional attachments to "the gross actualities of blood, race, language, locality religion, or tradition" (Blanton, 2015). These days, primordialism is perceived to lack theoretical sophistication. They argue that ethnic groups are objectively primordial and therefore eternally permanent but are usually accused of 'naturalizing' ethnicity (Gil-White, 1999).

Some radical Azerbaijani ethnic movements pursue a primordial approach to their ethnic identities; however, the majority of the middle-class youths in Tabriz does not perceive their ethnic group as chosen. They usually have a critical view against primordialists.

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3.1.3. Constructivist approach to ethnicity

The constructivist approach to the ethnicity is a response to the insufficiency of the other above-mentioned views. It claims that ethnicity is constructed through a process of collaboration between ethnic groups. Therefore, ethnicity is the product of a social process, not a cultural given (Bayar, 2009). Fredrik Barth is the pioneer of constructivism approach to ethnicity (Wimmer, 2008). In general, constructivist assumptions have dominated studies of ethnic identity formation and change (Chandra, 2012).

According to Nagel (1999), identity and culture are building blocks of ethnicity, and these two are constructed, dynamic and constantly evolving to shape individual identity and group organization. In this process, both structure and agency play important roles. While Ethnicity is the product of a sum of actions of ethnic group members, it is also constructed by external social, economic, and political factors (Nagel, 1999).

Some (Hale, 2004), find these categories unhelpful and call for producing "micro-level" explanations for why and how people tend to think and act concerning "macro-level" identity. Wimmers, on the other hand, attempts to go beyond these debates by arguing that the empirical and analytical questions that they raise cannot be solved by trying to find out what ethnicity "really is." Instead, he argues, the focus should be put on understanding why ethnicity appears in such variable forms (Wimmer, 2008). Constructivism theory is

3.1.4. Barth's theory of ethnic boundary and Wimmer's criticisms

Fredrik Barth (1996) stand against the dominant primordial approach which gives the importance to the cultural, territorial and biological differences. Instead, he asserted that the ethnicity is not given but constructed through interaction with others. Therefore,

he suggested that instead of the ethnographic study of each ethnic group separately, we should "... shift the focus of the investigation from internal constitution and history of separate groups to ethnic boundaries and boundary maintenance" (Barth, 1996: 11). In the following decades, numerous case studies in which they could fit -or contradict- Barth's constructivist theory have been done among different ethnic groups worldwide.

Inspiring by the Barth's theory, some of the interview questions for this thesis were conducted based on asking the perception of interviewees about their neighboring groups. Depending on their life experiences and daily interactions, different questions had been asked, like their relationships with the neighboring ethnic groups, with their co-ethnics across the border, and their in-group relations with "other" residents of the city who have different geographical origin.

Opposing the Barth's approach, Andreas Wimmer (2013) in his multilevel boundary making theory, argued that primordialist and constructivist theories failed to explain why characteristics of identity vary dramatically across cases because their perception of ethnicity was "as such." His theory, which is considered to have the potential of becoming a classic in the ethnic studies field by many scholars (i.e., Lamont, 2014), instead, took a more flexible approach. He states that the notion of boundary making is constructed through having different degrees of political salience, social closure, cultural differentiation and historical stability. What he suggests is a complicated multilevel process to illustrate how these characteristics are generated and transformed over time as an outcome of the struggles and negotiations between actors situated in a social field. He asserts that "Three characteristics of a field—the institutional order, distribution of power, and political networks— determine which actors will adopt which

strategy of ethnic boundary making" (Wimmer, 2008: 971). Next section explains Wimmer's critic to the current approaches in details.

3.1.5. Wimmer's model of ethnic boundary making

While the finding of this thesis shows that the complexity of ethnic boundary among the Tabrizi youth cannot be solely explained by the Barth's constructivist's view, Wimmer's theory, which is based on the interaction of macro and micro level factors, could better explain the existing situation.

Wimmer's theory is an ambitious theory which claims to propose a comparative analytical framework for explaining ethnic boundary making, redefining and diminishing, not only in one specific region as the majority of other research in the field do but in any given region (Song, 2014). Findings in ethnographic field work showed a large gap between the dominant middle-class Tabrizi youth and a particular suburb neighborhood named *Chehelmetri*. Wimmer's theory could shed light on our understanding of the emergency, roots, and consequences of radical movements among Azerbaijanis.

According to this theory, individuals and groups construct ethnic boundaries in different ways, depending on a combination of external (exogenous) and internal (endogenous) processes (Patsiurko & Wallace, 2014). Moreover, the model includes macro-structural level as well as the individual agency level in the analyzing process. Through an extensive review of the existing empirical research on ethnic boundary field, Wimmer aims to answer the question of "why the process of ethnic group formation produces varying outcomes?" (Wimmer, 2008).

Through an extensive review of the existing empirical research on ethnicity boundary field, Wimmer aims to answer the question "why the process of ethnic group formation produces varying outcomes?" (Wimmer, 2008).

The model has been explained in three steps. The first step is identifying all main dimensions or strategies that cause the varying outcomes. The second step is devoted to the macro-level analysis where three characteristics of social fields that explain which actors will pursue which strategies are introduced. The third step, at the individual agency level, discusses the consensus reach as a result of political struggles between actors advocating different ethnic categories. This consensus will, in turn, explain the characteristics of ethnic boundaries (Getting back to the structural level).

First Step:

Wimmer identifies four principal dimensions of variation for any ethnic group: different degrees of political salience, ethnic boundaries, social closure and exclusion along ethnic lines, cultural differentiation between groups, and of stability over time. In the following I will briefly explain each of these dimensions:

Political salience of ethnic boundaries:

"When boundaries are salient, political alliances are more likely to be formed between co-ethnics than between individuals on opposite sides of a boundary." At the same time, varying degrees of political salience exist. He gives us two examples: in Switzerland, no political party or civil society organization is organized on the basis of the language, while in Northern Ireland politics is mostly a matter of ethnoreligious power relations.

Social Closure and "Groupness."

It explains which ethnic boundaries are relevant for the structure of social networks and the access to resources that they enable. Some ethnic groups have closed themselves off to outsiders, while some others do not matter for hiring, marrying, befriending, etc. Depending on the degree of closure, ethnic boundaries may or may not separate groups with widely shared agreements, but if the boundaries are drawn unambiguously, they can form the basis for collective action and resource mobilization.

Cultural Differentiation

For Wimmer, cultural differentiation may or may not play a major role in ethnic boundary making. Cultural differentiation may make a boundary appear quasi-natural and self-evident, but in other cases, ethnic boundaries may unite individuals who follow heterogeneous cultures.

Stability

Some groups and boundaries are tenacious and change gradually over generations, while in other cases, considerable change may occur during a lifespan of an individual.

To continue with making a record of various possible strategies of ethnic boundary he also points out the elementary strategies: shifting boundaries through expansion of the category, shifting the boundaries through contraction, inversion, repositioning and blurring boundaries (Wimmer, 2008).

Second Step:

At the second step, he defines main factors (constraints) that shape the dynamics of ethnic boundary making among the actors of a social field. These factors which represent the macro-level analysis of this model are:

The institutional framework: determines which types of boundaries (ethnic, social class, gender, etc) can be meaningfully drawn in a particular social field. The important example is: how the modern nation-state building process had led people to distinguish between "us" and "them" rather than between "men" and "woman," "rich" and "poor," etc.

The distribution of power: defines the interests according to which actors in a social field choose the level of ethnic differentiation. Actors tend to choose that level of ethnic distinction that best support their claims to prestige, moral worth, and political power. Political alliances that determine who exactly is included in actor's ethnic category or other words, the precise location of the boundary.

Third Step:

In this step, interactions among actors of boundary making are analyzed. These interactions may or may not lead to a consensus over the social topography and meaning of ethnic boundaries. The consensus is reached when institutional structures, power differences, and networks of alliance create a zone of mutually beneficial exchange between actors.

Next, the nature of the consensus needs to be analyzed. This finally leads to introducing mechanisms that either stabilize or change a system of ethnic boundaries:

The structure of a social field may change because of an exogenous shift (new institutions, resources, actors), an endogenous shift (consequences of strategies pursued) or because of an exogenous drift (new strategies diffuse and are adopted by certain actors) (Menzo, 2012).

The nation state, according to Wimmer, provides the most common institutional context for establishing ethnic boundaries, and while institutions and networks determine how salient ethnic divisions are, the power inequalities and the extent of political consensus determines the nature of the boundaries that emerge. For Wimmer, the internal factors of boundary construction are first and foremost associated with the institutions of the nation-state and with the political interaction of ethnic groups.

Wimmer's framework applies to the finding of this research in a great deal. However, in defining the role of institutional influences, his emphasis on the nation-state with networks and political power as the center of "internal institutional impact", may not be very accurate in the case of Tabrizi youths' boundary shifting. Instead, other internal influences such as neighboring ethnic groups, self and common perceptions of ethnic identity, the influence of social stigma and the role of the civil society may play an increasing role among them. In other words, ethnic communities themselves seem to be evolving as much as state institutions are. Therefore, in an analysis of the shifting ethnic boundaries in the case of Iranian Azerbaijanis, it makes sense to focus on internal influences such as the neighboring groups, spread of the discourse of rights, the role of political elites, as much as on external factors such as the dynamics of change in the region.

Figure 3. The multilevel process theory of Wimmer
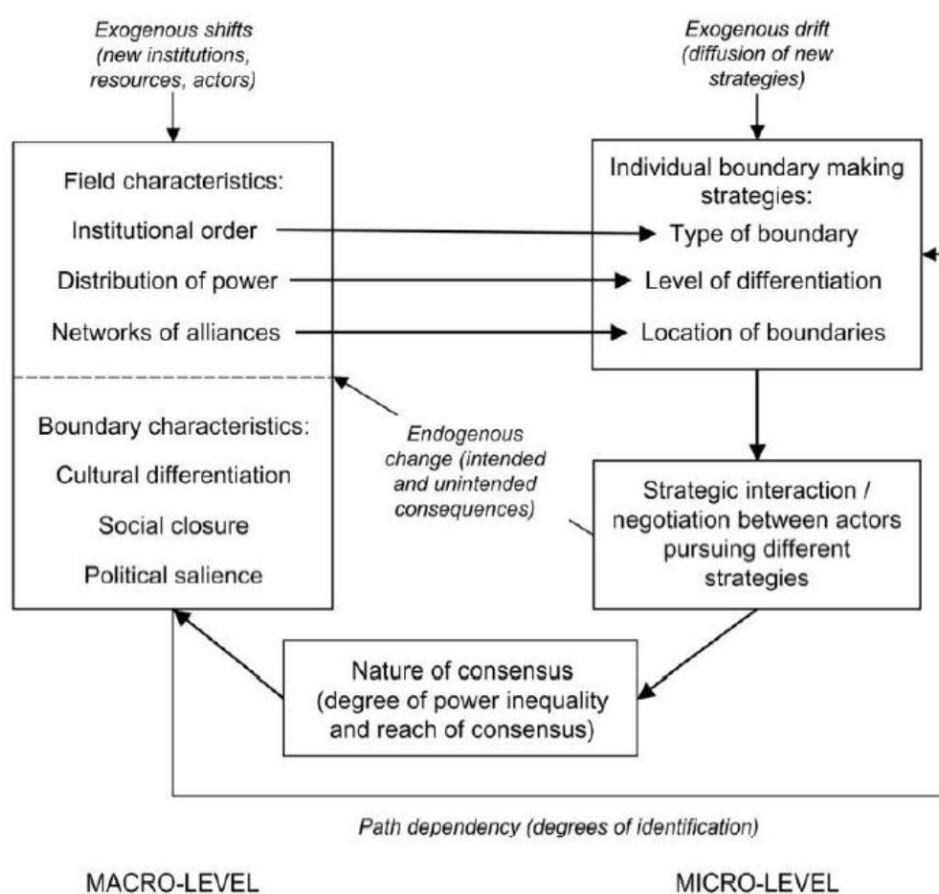
Source: (Wimmer, 2008: 1009)

3.2. Theories related to language and accent stigma

After finishing the first round of fieldwork for this thesis, I realized that one of the main factors, which play a role in shaping group and ethnic boundaries for Tabrizi youths, is the language accent. Its role differs in different daily interactions depending on the social circumstances. In the absence of the racial differences between Azerbaijanis and Persians, the only way to distinguish the ethnic or geographical origin is the language accent. Depending on the situation, some took this variation as a social stigma while for others it is a sort of esteem.

As it explained in the previous part, Wimmer's theory in explaining the micro-level interactions pays little attention to the interpersonal factors in the everyday life of the social actors. Here, I placed particular emphasis on "language" and "accent" because, first, many scholars perceive language as the very foundation of every culture. Secondly, we have to deal with our spoken language and accent all the time in our communications with others so the consequences can't be determined (DeShields & Kara, 2011). Thirdly, Azeri language and accent have caused a significant part of the sense of stigmatization among Azerbaijanis of Iran. Linguistic demands and stigma are perceived to play a more important yet symbolic role compared to economic, cultural or other social aspects in defining the ethnic features and boundaries among young Azeri residents of Tabriz city.

We shall benefit this theme at two different levels: inter-ethnic and inter-ethnic. Intra-ethnic level is about Azeri ethnic Tabrizi youth in contact with other neighboring ethnic groups (non-Azeris), while intra-ethnic level deals with the interactions between Azeri-ethnic people who are originally from Tabriz city (speaking with Tabrizi accent) and other Azeri-ethnic residents of Tabriz (speaking with other Azeri accent usually belong to smaller cities and towns).

To understand "the stigma of non-native accents," first we should have a sociological understanding of stigma itself. The classic definition of stigma has given by Goffman (1963). According to him, stigma refers to an attribute of a person that is deeply discrediting, which reduces that person from a usual person to a discounted one in other's minds and leaves a devalued social identity in that particular context (Goffman, 1963). Link & Phelan (2001) conceptualize stigma from a sociological perspective. According to them, the stigma exists when several inter-related conditions exist: people label differences, dominant culture stereotypes and negatively label undesirable differences,

some degree of separation between "us" and "them" happens. Labeled people experience discrimination and status loss, and finally, the stigmatization can harm the stigmatized person's access to power and social and economic resources (Link & Phelan, 2001). They hoped that this multi-step definition would facilitate the understanding of all different kinds of social stigma.

Now by having a general understand of social stigma, we could move towards linguistic stigma, which is observable among the youth in Tabriz city in their daily life.

3.2.1. Stigma of non-native accent

Accent stigma seems to fit into the above-mentioned definition. As an example, Rubin (1992) explored how the undergraduate students negatively judged their non-native English speaking teacher assistants even when they spoke the language completely standard. (Rubin, 1992).

Researchers have studied the stigma of non-native accent in people's everyday life communications from different perspectives. Some have focused more on the perception of the listener, while others put more stress on the speaker (of the non-native language). Studies, which focus on the listener mainly, analyzed the accent stigma as embedded in the prejudice framework and investigated about the existence of stereotyping, discrimination and cultural biases. (Mills, 2015). However, the number of research which have focused on the speaker and how experiencing the sense of stigma affects his perception of the self, identity, isolation and group membership and the consequences of these effects, are limited (Gluszek & Dovidio 2010, Mills, 2015, Derwing 2003).

Edward (1999) discusses the "standard accent" within a country. This accent usually has a symbolic value, is more desirable and prestigious and is perceived to be spoken by the educated or upper classes in the society.

This perspective, first, would help us in analyzing the position of Iranian Azerbaijanis in their inter-ethnic relation interacting with native Persian speakers. In this occasion, our emphasis will only be on the listener. Second, we will focus on residents of Tabriz who are originally from small towns and talking in Azerbaijani having a non-Tabrizi accent. In this regard, our focus is both on the speaker and the listener since their relationship is a focus point of this thesis. It will be argued that how the sense of feeling stigmatized, especially linguistically, leads many non-Tabrizis to join ethnic activism movements and strange response to need for social esteem. Next section explains Gluszek and Dovidio's (2010) model, which focuses both on the speaker and listener stigma.

3.2.2. Gluszek and Dovidio's Model of Stigma of Non-native Accents in Communication (SNAC)

This model emphasizes the special importance of both empirical and theoretical dimensions of identifying accent as a stigmatizing characteristic. This significant is due to the rapid increase of interactions between native and non-native speakers in the globalization age. Nevertheless, the model is not limited to the interactions between the migrants from foreign countries with the native people; instead, it includes the regional and ethnic languages and accents within the borders of one country.

Figure 4. Model of stigma of non-native accents in communication
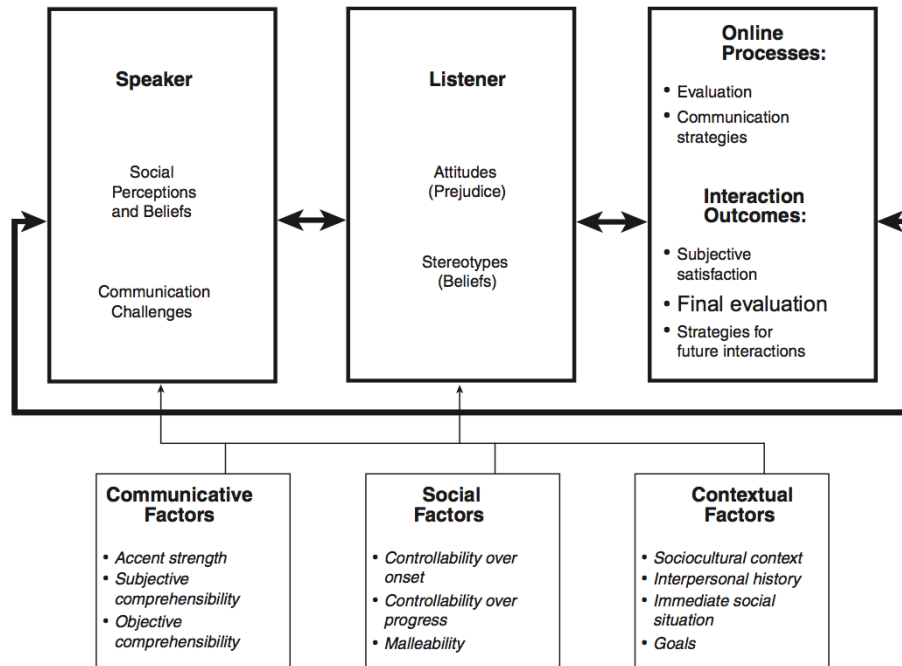
Source: *(Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010: 56)*

The other advantage of SNAC to be applied in this thesis is its two-way approach to the communication of native and non-native actors since it takes into account the psychological processes relevant to accents that affect both the speaker and listener as well as their interactions. By doing so, it offers insight into the processes behind intergroup contact (Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010).

Figure (4) elaborates that how different communicative, social and contextual factors affect both speaker and listener. It shows that online processes of the evaluation and communication strategies affect both counterparts. These interactions would be repeated in everyday interactions among the native and non-native speakers. Both parts need to reach to a sort of subjective satisfaction in every interaction in order to maximize their social esteem. By bringing out many examples of previous research, SNAC proposes

a better understanding of the consequences of this stigmatization on both sides, especially the speaker, in defining their strategies for the future interactions.

This part is inspired us to think about how this process influences Tabrizi and stigmatized non-Tabrizi residents of Tabriz to lead them for redefining their perceived ethnic identity and boundaries.

4. Research Methodology

This chapter starts with justifying the use of ethnographic fieldwork in studying the ethnic identity construction of the Tabrizi youth. Then the importance of the studied fields has been clarified in detail. The chapter finishes by explaining the interview procedures and participant's information.

4.1. Ethnographic research

This research has a qualitative approach using ethnographic fieldwork as its main tool to investigate the ethnic boundary features and the self-perception of identity among Tabrizi youths. Ethnographic fieldwork digs into people's everyday lives to reveal many aspects of their social and cultural behavior, which are the collective sum of their simple actions. Therefore, actors may not be conscious about how the everyday routine activities make up social action. However, the aim of ethnographic research is not to simplify the complexity of the social world but to yield objective macro level hypotheses through unique subjective micro-level routines. In depth interviews, narratives and participant observations which help us to deepen this understanding (Bloommaert and Dong, 2010).

Furthermore, conducting ethnographic research is especially important when it comes to the ethnic studies. Anthropologists are the main contributors to the field of ethnicity (Cohen, 1978). This is mostly due to the debated nature of this concept that encourage the scholars to closely and thoroughly analyze it. These debates are shaped mostly around: the never-ending disputes over the definition of ethnicity and what it is consist of (Nagel 1994, Isajiw, 1979, Obidinski, 1978 to name a few), variation of the

outcomes from case to case (Wimmer, 2008), and popularity of constructive approach to ethnicity.

4.2. Participant observation

4.2.1. Fieldwork schedule

The fieldwork for this research was done over 4 months once in the February and March and again on the August and September 2016. Even though the time between two ethnographic fieldworks was only couple of months, many terroristic attacks made Turkey's internal security unstable and abruptly decreased the number of Iranian tourists. I tried to track and compare any potential change on people's perception of having Turkic origin versus belonging to Iranian national identity between these periods.

4.2.2. Choosing the fields

Many different places had been chosen to observe the daily contact of Tabrizi youth with other ethnic groups or with others from different Azeri cities.

In Tabriz city, Laleh-park Shopping mall, as the first modern Turkish branding shopping center in Iran, had been chosen to investigate. Since the architecture of the mall, most of the brands, coffee shops and restaurants are Turkish branches, it is important to consider the role of identity claiming by using Turkish commodities. Laleh-park is the place where they find the same branches with exactly same products in Tabriz and Istanbul; therefore, some would feel that they are strolling in the Turkish society. Moreover, some Persians from other cities frequently make a shopping tour to this place since the Turkish textile are famous as being cheap and high quality. Therefore,

interaction between two ethnic groups observed almost everyday afternoon during doing the fieldwork.

The Tabriz-based Tractor-Sazi football club has earned massive support of ethnic Azerbaijanis across Iran, breaking all nationwide attendance records. Many thousands of Azerbaijani fans accompany the Tractor-Sazi football team to its matches. During the four months of fieldwork, the researcher participated in all Tractor-sazi matches with Persian teams. Many of the spectators find games very important since the team is the advocate of their ethnic rights.

Moreover, some other cultural and linguistic related classes and meeting had been attended. Some examples of these places are as follows: Azerbaijani language classes in the university of Tabriz (as an optional credit for students), some home gathering of cultural and ethnic activists, traditional Khorshid café where is famous to be the gathering place for ethnic rights activists and some meetings of the student association of research on Azerbaijan in the university of Tabriz.

To understand the ethnic boundary making strategies of Tabrizi youth, this research did not confine the focus only on the current residents of Tabriz, but also some other Tabrizis who were living in Turkey or in the Republic of Azerbaijan had interviewed. In short, visits to Istanbul and Baku, I interviewed some Tabrizi students who live there. To understand everyday interactions, I used Tabriz-Baku and Tabriz-Istanbul buses which gives an opportunity to have long discussions with passengers about ethnic otherness. In Tehran, besides interviewing with some Azeri ethnic scholars, I tried to observe the everyday interactions of Azeri youth who speak Persian with accent.

After finishing the first round of fieldwork, the results showed that the youth from certain neighborhoods perceive their ethnic identity quite different than others. To test

this hypothesis, the suburb neighborhoods of Chehelmetri and Heydarabad were selected to do participant observation.

4.2.3. Challenges in ethnographic fieldwork

The tradition of anthropological researche in Iran is rarely practiced among many social scientists as elsewhere (Fakuhi, 2010). Shahsavani (2010:128), a distinguished anthropologist in Iran, states that "the centrality of anthropology has not yet been born. Good theoretical work grows in academia when there is professional security". She maintains that in this politicized circumstances of the country it is needed to start a new trend. Bulookbashi accuses Iranian researchers for not having 'taken advantage of their superior familiarity with local folklore to emphasize an indigenous autonomy similar to that stated by other Asian, African or American cultures' (Bulookbashi, 2010:34).

As an indigenous researcher who speaks Azerbaijani language with Tabrizi accent, the author of this research had an advantage of having enough knowledge about the field and using his social network to create trust among interviewees. However, some obstacles made it difficult to investigate the everyday life of people.

Post-revolutionary Iran (1979-), is highly politicized and the government has little patience to hear the voices of opposition parties. In this situation, the rise of secessionist groups in Iranian Azerbaijan made the situation even worse. Even though this research aimed to focus on people's perception rather than having political approach, many locals found it a sensitive issue to talk about. That is why convincing interviewees to talk about their perception, especially among some ethnic activists, was difficult and needed patience and the strong trust ties. The author, sometimes, was accused by some

interviewees and even cultural experts to be belonging to Iran's or another foreign countries' intelligence service, intentionally or unintentionally.

Considering this situation, in everyday contexts, sometimes the researcher did not introduce himself as a student overseas, but as a local curious person. However, considering the ethical framework of the research, all interviewees were well informed about the status of the researcher and the academic objectives of research.

Another obstacle for the research was the difficulty of studying gender differences in ethnic identity. As a young male researcher, the author faced several difficulties in finding the young girls to interview because of the cultural barriers. This issue was more considered in *Chehelmetri* neighborhood. Only one girl who was an ethnic activist family interviewed in suburb regions. This only one case cannot be the advocate of many silent voices of half of the population of research focus group.

4.3. Interview

4.3.1. Interview guidelines

All interviews were chosen based on having at least three years of recent experience of living in Tabriz, whether the participants were born in Tabriz or not. Since the in-depth interviews were semi-structured, the guidelines were adapted to the different groups of the participant. The interviews with the youth were different from that of experts. First, the interview guideline with the youth participant will be discussed. Then the interviews with experts are presented.

The guidelines contained the following topics: the use of language in everyday life, cultural leisure activities, ethnic identity and ethnic otherness, and political views on Azeri ethnicity. These topics were chosen by care in their order. To decrease the

sensitivity of the research focus, most of the interviewees were told as being interviewed about their general life style. Interviews started with some general information on participant's family background, places they were born and lived and their family background. The prevalence of inter-ethnic marriage in their family circle was asked. Then their cultural, linguistic and folkloric practices were asked to reveal how important it is to practice them in Azeri, Persian, or Turkish. The usage of language in their everyday life, relationships, writing SMS's, etc. was asked. The questions about language usage were started by general questions like "how do you feel if you have a Persian speaker boy/girl friend?". In this way, respondents may explain more in details about the status, usage and their attitudes on the language usage in an implicit way. Other questions like their interest in learning the writing system of Azeri language were asked to elicit this information. Finally, the role of having accent in speaking Persian or Azeri in their social relations was asked. As an Instance, they were asked:

- How do they feel when they travel to Tehran?

- How will they react if they were being mocked by some other ethnic groups because of the lack of ability in talking Persian fluently?

- Which Azeri accent should be considered as the base for formal writing language?

- What is the Tabrizi people's perception of non-Tabrizi accent?

The second theme was to ask about their cultural and leisure activities. The questions in this theme were asked to understand whether their cultural and leisure activities were ethnically organized. For instance, they were asked:

- What kind of poems do they usually read?

- Which sorts of music do they prefer (Azeri, Persian, Turkish)? and why?

- What kind of dance do they like to perform?

The third theme was ethnic identity. This theme started with asking some general questions to make it easy for informants with the topic. Then more personalized questions were asked. Some of the questions are as follows:

- How would you identify yourself, given a choice to introduce between an Iranian or Azerbaijani?

- What differentiates Azeris from the other ethnic groups?

- How is your perception about your co-ethnics in the republic of Azerbaijan?

- Which of Turkic, Azeri or Iranian identity is superior for you?

The questions to investigate the last theme, which is their political view, varied according to the participant's background in engaging ethnic based activities. The direct questions of their political view about their ethnic rights were avoided; instead, they were asked indirect questions like if they feel any sort of discrimination against Turks in the country. Their opinion about some ethnic riots in Azeri cities in response to some insulting programs in public TV channels was asked. Their support for Tractr-sazi team and its importance as the symbol of Azeri ethnic rights demands were discussed. Finally, they were asked to suggest a way to overcome the ethnic based conflicts. In some cases, direct questions like how do they think about possibility of secessionism or to engaging actively in the ethnic rights movements were asked.

The interview guidelines with the experts consisted of following parts: language, social stigma and ethnic identity and boundaries. Expert interviews, in contrast with the youth, hardly dealt with the personal questions. Instead, the questions focused on the historical background and scientific literature and theories. Again, the guideline started with the language and social stigma issue to put the interviewees in the ease. The usage

of the Azerbaijani language –as a spoken language- was discussed with them in details. Having an accent as a social stigma in two different levels were discussed: inter-ethnic stigma (Azeris talking in Persian) and intra-ethnic stigma (Talking in non-Tabrizi accent). Social status of the Azeri's in the puzzle of multi-ethnic Iran were brought into light. The questions were based on the theories of the stigmatization caused by accent on the perceived social identity of Iranian Azerbaijanis.

In the theme of ethnic identity and boundaries, questions were connected to the Wimmer's four dimensions of ethnic group features: political salience of the Azerbaijanis in the context of national unity of Iran, their cultural differences with the neighboring ethnic groups, their social, economic, symbolic role in the Iranian and regional context and the historical stability of the region were discussed in details. The interview questions were all connected to the main research questions.

4.3.2. Respondents

The total number of 59 youth and 15 experts participated in the interviews. Appendix 1and 2 show some useful information about the participants.

In table 1, Special focus was put on the interviewees' origin and their accent in talking Azerbaijani. As it is shown on the Table 1, they were chosen from various backgrounds, life experiences and social status. The youth participant's mean age was 27.9 (SD:4.9, range 20-35: 46 males, 13 females). Snowball sampling used to choose the interviewees.

The first round of fieldwork was more focused on interviews and the second round on participant observation and expert interviews. Thus, the total of 56 interviews (52 with the youth and 4 with the experts in Tabriz and Baku) during the February and March,

2016, and the total of 18 interviews (7 with the youth and 11 with the experts in Tabriz and Tehran) in the second round, between the August and September, 2016, were conducted. In some cases, the participants discussed the interview questions in the group of 2 to 5 people. Those interviews are highlighted in the tables. All the names here have been changed in order to preserve the personal information of the participants.

Any interview conducted out of Tabriz city has been mentioned in the comments. Other comments, which make the interviewee distinct from the others, are mentioned in the comments.

5. Discussion on the Findings

In order to best determine and present the main factors influencing ethnic boundary dynamics among Tabrizi youths, this chapter has been divided into two parts to discuss intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic effects. For the Tabrizi people, ethnic "others" are defined as: Persians, Turks of Turkey, and Azerbaijanis across the border. While the self-perception of the youths has been subject to gradual change in line with the social and political changes regarding each of the mentioned ethnic groups, the influences are hard to trace, as the city is quite homogenous. The next section of this chapter deals with the intra-ethnic interactions within Tabriz. Findings show that the accent one speaks is the main indicator to identify him as an indigenous Tabrizi or a migrant from the suburban parts, and this can play a significant role in choosing the path of whether to join or to stay reluctant or opposed to the ethnic movements. The chapter ends by focusing on the role of the suburban neighborhood of "Chehelmetri", as a famous residential area in promoting the ethnic activism in Tabriz.

5.1. Ethnic boundary construction through inter-ethnic relations

Who the Iranian Azerbaijanis are, and how they should be called or recognized by others are highly controversial issues. I asked the question of "what is your ethnicity?" from all of my interviewees. Surprisingly the answers vary from Turk, Azeri, Azeri Turk, Iranian Azeri, Iranian Azerbaijani and sometimes Iranian Azerbaijani Turk. While these answers may not be fundamentally different from each other, the way every individual perceives these terms can be completely different. This section has considered Tabrizi

youths' ethnic identity as constructed through their direct or indirect contacts with other ethnic groups in their neighborhood: Persians, Turks, and Azeris across the border.

As discussed before, if primordialism sees ethnic and national identity as natural, fixed, homogenous and inevitable, constructionism perceives ethnic and national identities as contingent, heterogeneous, and subject to change, as the product of human interaction, history, and politics (Hall 1990).

Having cultural similarities with Iran, ethnic similarities to the Azeris in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the their ethnic origin in Turkey, Iranian Azerbaijanis enjoy the opportunity to alternate between any of these identities. From another perspective, it seems that the individuals move between these identities to maximize their personal benefits much more than inheriting a primordial identity.

5.1.1. Perceived inferiority or superiority towards Persians

If an Iranian Azerbaijani travels to non-Azeri dominant cities of Iran, he has to deal with different reactions to his Azeri accent when speaking in Persian. It appears as if Persians need to take a certain stance toward Azerbaijani-speaking people. The most common reaction would be asking which Azerbaijani city one is from or to use some metaphors in a sarcastic way to express their view of "how dumb or intelligent" Azerbaijani people are. It seemed that everyone needs to react somehow "differently" when they met Azerbaijanis. Most of the time, they would start a conversation by saying how good, hospitable, and intelligent Azerbaijani people are. Yet, after feeling more intimate, they may make a sarcastic comment about Azerbaijani people or in extreme cases, one would relate a stupid act to them being Turkish (Azerbaijani).

The official language of the entire institutional and educational system of the country is Persian for all including Azerbaijanis. While all educated Azeri youth are fluent in the Persian language, their daily communication skills may not be fully advanced since they communicate mostly in Azerbaijani. Moreover, they can never fully overcome the accent problem even if they speak Persian perfectly. In many cases, even among the highly educated youth, they face some situations of being mocked because of their accent or inability to use a correct Farsi expression. Such experiences cause them to lose confidence when facing Persians and increases the feelings of inferiority among them.

There is a famous expression among Tabrizis saying that there are three different categories of people in Iran: anyone who speaks in their accent is Tabrizi, anyone with a non-Tabrizi accent is a rural person and all the Persian speakers regardless of where they come from are prestigious Tehranis."This saying indicates the existence of a perceived inferiority among many Tabrizis when facing Persians.

"Majid", a businessman, believes that if one's cell phone or car number reveals that he is from Tehran, he will enjoy a higher social status in everyday life contacts and especially in doing business in Tabriz. One might say that since Tehran is the capital and the biggest and most prestigious city of the country, this sense of inferiority is not limited to Azeris. However, this sense of inferiority among Azeries is not merely towards Tehrani people but it is more like attributing a high social status to all Persian speakers. However, having this perception is highly dependent on one's experience of living with or being in close contact with Tehranis. For instance, interviewee "Nima," who lived in Tehran for few years, says that Tehranis should not be seen as one whole. "Depending on the neighborhood people live in, their culture, social status and lifestyle can vary extremely. Life condition in Tabriz is much better than many neighborhoods of Tehran".

In another sense, asking the interviewees about their perceptions of an ideal partner, many girls expressed that they would like to have Persian boyfriend rather than a Tabrizi or one from neighboring Azeri cities. For many of them, Persians seem to be more open-minded than Azerbaijanis. Interviewee "Sevada" believes that Persian guys know much better how to treat a lady. Many boys also consider Persian girls as more open to relationships and open minded as well.

During my fieldwork I realized it is fairly common for Azeri girls to choose to speak in Persian in their friendship circles. While many of them speak in Azerbaijani with their families, it seems that choosing Persian in social interactions brings them a higher social status. However, many were reluctant to attribute a specific meaning to it during interviews. Interviewee "Sahar," said that languages are only tools for communication. So she doesn't care which language she is using. Yet, it is not common among the males to talk in Persian unless they have to. In some gatherings, I observed that it is common to see that girls communicating in Persian while boys answer them in Azerbaijani.

Besides all mentioned above, there is an increasing tendency among Azeris, especially among the ethnic activists, to stand against such presumptions by taking the opposite side. For instance, Hassan, a former political prisoner who regularly holds part-time jobs in Tehran denies the superiority of Tehranis:

> " … Who are Tehranis? There was no city named Tehran a few hundred years ago. The whole city is shaped by the migrants, and the biggest group of migrants are Turks. Living in Tehran is like being at home for me … We [Azeris] built Tehran … we comprise half of the population of Tehran ..."

The existence of such paradoxical perceptions towards Persians makes it difficult for individuals to take a neutral stance towards the ethnic differences. Thus the ethnic lines are gradually striking in the region.

The influence of schooling institutions is one of the most critical issues shaping self-perception of Iranian Azerbaijanis. All the youth interviewees were asked about how they would perceive Persian as the educational language instead of Azeri. Many of them complained about unfamiliarity with Azeri literature due to their inability to read in Azerbaijani. However, many of them, even some of the ethnic rights advocates, believed that Persian literature is far richer than Azerbaijani or even Turkish and Arabic literature. They emphasized the importance of the Azerbaijani language only in the spoken and folkloric level. While Azerbaijani dance style for the youth meets their need to feel socially distinctive from the Persians, they usually read Persian poems and listen to the traditional Persian music. Interviewee "Hamed" states that:

> "I only listen to the nostalgic Azeri songs, since the new songs are all copied from Turkish style … Even the old songs are not as rich in content comparing to Persian ones. We have Hafiz, Khayyam, Rumi in Persian … who is the famous poet of Azerbaijanis?"

While expert interviewees, except some ethnic activists, agreed on a view that Azerbaijani is a local spoken language non-comparable with Persian, scholars in Baku who were interviewed showed a strong disagreement to the inferiority of Azerbaijani language. Interviewee "Shokat," a historian in Baku state university, asserted that Azerbaijan has great Poets, many of whom are from Tabriz. It was shocking for her to hear that some Tabrizi youth prefer Persian literature to Azerbaijani.

Such comparisons might not have a scientific basis. However, the important issue here is whether the reason Iranian Azerbaijanis undermine their own language and literature has its roots in the influence of Persianization of the educational and social institutions, or it is based on the existence of influential Persian classical literature figures.

5.1.2. "Us" vs. "them": Azerbaijanis across the border

The question of their co-ethnics became more important for Iranian Azerbaijanis especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The opening of borders was a critical point in the history of Azerbaijan for both Northern and Southern Azerbaijanis. There is little anthropological literature explaining the events of the first years after the borders opened. Shafeer (2002) describes the removal of the iron curtain in an emotional way when Azeris crossed the borders to meet their relatives after 70 years of imposed separation. In her book, "Iran and the challenges of Azerbaijani Identity," she asserts that family ties had played a crucial role in maintaining the ethnic identity among both Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijanis. However, her work has been criticized by several indigenous scholars due to the absence of anthropological field research (Atabaki, 2004).

Despite Shaffer's prediction, family ties are no longer a determining factor. The recent policy of "entering to Iran without Visa" for the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan, hasn't received much interest from the Iranian Azerbaijanis and hasn't led to enhancing their emotional ties with their co-ethnics on the other side of the border (Khalili, 2016).

Respondent "Leila," was among the first group of cultural experts who traveled to Baku just after the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan. She, as well as other senior expert interviewees, assert that when they faced with the reality of post-Soviet

Azerbaijan, she was shocked. She explains that they were so happy to travel to their beloved communist land after several years of being separated. However, when they came back from the trip, they were all disappointed that their dreams about a utopia of an equal and free society has failed. Interviewee "Mahmood" talks about how difficult it was for him to visit post-Soviet Baku. He regretfully says that it was extremely hard for him to see how one could easily sleep with beautiful girls by offering only an inexpensive pair of Jeans or a fish can. Although the youth, as the target group of this research, did not witness those days, it seems that the historical memory of the older generation has been transmitted to the younger generation in the shape of a very pessimistic view towards their co-ethnics in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Such pessimism also exists among the Azerbaijanis across the border judging their co-ethnics in Iran. In the first instance, many of them would see Iranian Azerbaijanis as Iranians, inhering dominant Iranian culture, rather than their indigenous culture. When I attended a wedding ceremony in Nakhchivan city of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the DJ played a "Persian song" for me as their "dearest Iranian guest" and asked me to perform a "Persian dance" for them. It was surprising to me that they expect an Azerbaijani to perform Persian dance and not the Azerbaijani. One could easily observe that even though citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan call Iranian Azerbaijanis as their brothers and sisters, many still believe that Iranian Azerbaijanis are Iranians who belong to the Persian culture more than Azerbaijani.

Recently, there have been many contacts between two Azerbaijanis. Since 2008, the Iranian government does not require visa from citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan; so many Azerbaijani people are traveling to various Azerbaijani cities in Iran, especially to Tabriz, mostly seeking for medical care. Nowadays if one goes to any hospital or

famous clinic in Tabriz, they will most probably find few travelers from the Republic of Azerbaijan. Since there are not sufficient health services and good doctors in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the cost of treatment is higher in their home country than in Iran, they prefer to travel to Tabriz to find good doctors who speak their language and to access inexpensive and high-quality surgery or medication. The main interaction of these two groups usually happens in the hospitals and doctors waiting room. Although the treatment cost for Azerbaijanis is officially set by the municipality at twice the usual fee of Iranians, some doctors charge foreign patients even up to five times more than Iranian nationals. That's why they treat foreign patients better and sometimes out of the waiting line. This fact could be heard from anyone who had faced northern Azerbaijanis in medical care centers.

Interviewee Shahram states that:

> "While they are traveling to Iran even to cure a very small disease, we could imagine how underdeveloped their country is … when we do not have enough facilities for our own Iranians, why should our government let them come … I see from their behavior and even dressing that their culture lags behind ours..."

In home decoration, fashion and clothes, and wearing of makeup, the majority of Iranian Azerbaijani women think that people in the Republic of Azerbaijan are lagging behind the modern world. They rarely follow the media of North Azerbaijan unless for some nostalgic films or songs, since they consider them as socially unfashionable and outdated, while those in the Republic of Azerbaijani have the same conception about Iranian Azerbaijanis. I had some discussions with the young generation from Baku who judge Iran as a barbaric country ruled by Islamic clergies. They think that Iranians have

no freedom, but their own country is secular and is a much better place to live compared to Iran.

Jamil Hassanli, a well-known historian, and an opposition politician describe this phenomenon as the signs of failure of the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan. He asserts that:

> "While our media fails to produce attractive programs, how we could expect Iranian Azerbaijanis to connect to us? When they travel to Azerbaijan, they might be charged 100 manats [Azerbaijan Currency] for bribery from the border to Baku, how we could expect them to advocate Azerbaijan? … They have their economic interest in Tehran; many had inter-ethnic marriages. This fact linked them to Persians more than to their co-ethnics. "

A significant feature that distinguishes Iranian Azerbaijanis from those of the Republic of Azerbaijan is their paradoxical attitude towards Armenians. Following the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, from the late 1980s to 1994 the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan assume Armenians as their sworn enemy, who committed atrocities in Karabakh city. However, Iranian Azerbaijanis never considered that war as their own, and have hosted a quite big Armenian diaspora living in peace for a long time in the city of Tabriz. Many of my young Iranian interviewees had never even heard about the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, even though the conflicted area is geographically close to them. Interviewee "Arzu," who is an advocate of Azerbaijani culture and attends the weekly meeting of some Turkic cultural activists said that she has heard about the place (Nagorno-Karabakh) in some Azeri songs but does not know where the area is located and what the conflict is about. Few

interviewees knew about it, and even if they had heard about it, they did not have much sympathy for the Azerbaijan displaced persons from the Nagorno-Karabakh area.

The results of two different processes of the nation-state building in Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan could be obviously observed today among the people, specifically the youth. The majority of interviewees and other Tabrizi persons, I communicated with in daily felt that visiting Azerbaijan was not a priority. I didn't observe strong ethnic based sentiments among the majority of youth in linking their identity to their co-ethnics across the border. For many youths who were interviewed, national identity was far significant to the ethnic identity.

Political and historical changes have always played an important role in promoting one identity over another. In the case of Azerbaijan, just after the economic boom took place on 2006 by utilization of BTC pipeline, the urban structure in Baku developed dramatically. It was the time that Iranians Azeris were praising their co-ethnic nation. However, since 2012, the oil price went down and made many problems to the oil economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Their currency has devalued to more than half in recent years. Same people who wanted to attach themselves to the Republic of Azerbaijan saying that the country is fast developing because of the Western-style management, later changed to criticizing the oil-based economy.

Alongside with all these political changes, it seems that many youths will try to switch between these identities to maximize their benefit.

5.1.3. The question of Turkic origin

There is a heating debate among Persian and Iranian Azerbaijani elites on how Iranian Azerbaijanis should be called. However, Persians and Azerbaijanis themselves

commonly use the term "Turks" to refer to Iranian Azerbaijanis (pronounced as Tork in Persian). It has been a subject of debate for a long time whether or not Azerbaijani people, in Iran or the Republic of Azerbaijan, are originally Turks. The term "Azeri" is not considered as correct by some academic scholars, but it is commonly used by Iranians in informal conversations (Kasravi, 1946). Recently, especially after Turkey sped up the process of modernizing the country, while Iran and Azerbaijan are still lagging behind, Azerbaijani people in both the Republic of Azerbaijan and in all the widespread diaspora tend to consider themselves of "Turkish ethnicity." Some historical debates suggest that all Turks including Turkish people, Azerbaijanis, Turkmens and even some ethnic groups in eastern China used to belong to a larger nation that was once called "Turkistan." Promoting pan-Turkism ideology, they are searching for a way to prove that they originally belonged to the same ethnicity. However, since Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan were not under the Ottoman Empire for a long time, this left a gap between them and the Turks living in contemporary Turkey. In current demography, the most Eastern parts of Turkey is dominated by the Kurdish ethnicity which is far different from Azerbaijanis. This fact has resulted in a situation where Iranians and Azerbaijanis find themselves completely different culturally and linguistically from the residents of the area across the Turkish border. This may be due to the vast geographical area, occupied by Kurds, between Azerbaijanis and Turkish people belonging to Turkey (See Figure 1 in the introduction).

Interviewee "Arzu," who sojourns to Ankara says that many Turkish citizens even do not know if there is an Azerbaijani population living in Iran. She asserts:

> "It is easy for us to learn and speak in their dialect … because we follow Turkish media. Everyone in Tabriz watches Turkish TV series, while for

them it is difficult to understand us. For example, my father could understand
them, but they could not understand him. "

Many other interviewees who lived in or traveled to Turkey several times assert
that Turkish citizens only consider themselves as the highest status Turks by looking
down at others. While some of them resist against this prejudices, others see it as natural
and the result of being so-called non-original Turk. How to deal with their origin
sometimes turns to be a critical question for many Iranian Azerbaijanis. Being called
Turks in Iran and by themselves while being rejected as of not being indigenous Turks of
Turkey creates confusion among them.

Interviewee "Majid" explains his experience as:

" I believe that the original Turks are Turks of Turkey … because they
speak the right language … we are not indigenous Turks … Turkish people
do not consider us as belonging to the same ethnic group, but they call us
Azeri … we are close to the Azeris across the border, not the Turks of
Turkey."

By the beginning of the 21st century, satellite TV among Iranian Azerbaijanis
became common despite its illegal status according to the Iranian law. Turks have been
pioneers in spreading their cultural and political influence in the region through
broadcasting interesting and entertaining programs with which the reserved, boring
Iranian public media cannot compete. Therefore, as the language similarity makes it fairly
easy for Azeris of Iran to master the Turkish language within a few months, the Iranian
Azerbaijanis follow the Turkish media widely.

On the other hand, Turkey hosts the largest Iranian diaspora many of whom have
Azeri origins. Until 2012 Azeri students from Iran had an advantage of enjoying 70

percent tuition reduction scholarship for those who could pass an interview to demonstrate their Azerbaijani language ability. Many Tabrizi youth found studying in Turkey cheaper than in a private university in Iran. Moreover, as a foreign student, they were not obliged to take an entrance examination. Therefore, many Tabrizi middle-class families sent their children to Turkey and started to visit Turkey regularly.

From the tourism perspective, until the most recent years, Turkey was one of the most famous touristic destinations for many Iranians, especially Azerbaijanis. In this regard, visiting or living in Turkey might be considered as one of the few ways through which Iranians, as citizens of a politically closed country to the West, could join the globalization trend.

One could easily observe the gradual increase in the usage of Turkish words in daily conversations of the middle-class Tabrizis. Many middle-class Tabrizi youths who have traveled to Turkey or learned language through media, consider the usage of Turkish words in daily conversations as a form of symbolic capital. However, others who are not familiar with these words do not feel comfortable to hear "foreign words." Interviewee Ali expresses that: "Our language has already mixed enough with Farsi … we should not let the Turkish words to enter to our literature... It will ruin our tradition. "

To observe the influence of Turkish culture and commodities, I chose Laleh Park shopping center as one of the main research sites. Established on 2013 in Tabriz city, Laleh Park is the biggest and only Turkish brands shopping center in Iran. The whole center has been built by Turkish construction companies exactly in the same architecture of Turkish shopping centers. The place is considered as a small scale Turkey in Tabriz by many Tabrizis. In many occasions, I saw that shopkeepers were switching between Persian, Azerbaijani and Turkish continuously, especially dealing with their female

customers. They told that this is a way of attracting middle-class youths to the Turkish commodities.

Though, for many years, Iranian Azeris looked up to the Turkey's economic and cultural advancement, the recent rapid change in the political sphere in the Middle East has changed Turkey's ideal image for them. While doing the first round of fieldwork for this research in February and March 2016, the internal security of Turkey was not affected much by terroristic attacks. At the start of my second fieldwork, the situation changed dramatically. Many bomb attacks happened in different regions of Turkey, and the lack of security in the country gradually changed Iranian Azerbaijanis' perception in praising Turkey's advancement. I reached to the interviewees once again during the second fieldwork and traced the changes regarding their attachment to the proud of having a Turkic origin. In many cases, praising Turkey's integrating Islam with democracy was replaced by disappointment from the unstable political situation there. For many, who had believed Turkey as the best model for the Middle Eastern countries to follow, it was difficult to see the fade of their hopes to follow the Turkish model of modernity in Iran.

5.1.4. Discussion

The finding of this thesis showed us that there is some common belief towards other neighbor groups among the Tabrizi youths. Even though some individuals or ethnic activist stand against the dominant perspective, their resistance is taking a form of social resistance against the attitude of their own people, more than to be with other ethnic groups. While the majority of Iranian Azeri youths consider Iranian identity above all other alternatives, they are enjoying the commonalities with neighboring groups to maximize their interest rather than alternating the identities. As Wimmer (2008) argues

on the influence of institutions on ethnic groups, Iranian Azerbaijanis seldom question their national identity and unity in front of others. This is in contrast to the opinion of some other scholars (e.g. Cornoll, 2015) who put emphasis on the external penetration of the neighboring states.

Bringing the focus back into the everyday life, in the homogeneous Azeri dominant city of Tabriz, the residents have little chance to face neighboring ethnic groups directly. Yet, they experience the language influence of other ethnic groups in their daily life. While using the Persian language and Turkish words are considered as belonging to the prestigious middle class, the use of accent and words close to the northern Azerbaijanis could be seen as belonging to the lower classes or radical movements.

5.2. Ethnic boundary shifting through intra-ethnic daily interactions

This section provides an overview to the main issues that affect Tabrizi youths' self-perception of their ethnicity in their daily life. As mentioned before, there are little contacts in Tabriz with people from other ethnicities since the city is a homogeneous Azeri. Many interviewees declared that they do not feel a big tangible economic or political discrimination against Azeris in Iran; however, the ethnic activist groups are rapidly increasing in the city. To find out the reasons behind it, I investigated in the daily interactions of Tabrizi youths. The findings demonstrate that the indigeneity is an important issue for them. Although indigeneity, at first glance, seems to be a general global issue everywhere and not directly related to the ethnic identity, the fieldwork revealed that the place of origin of the person could be the main drive for   him in joining ethnic civil or radical movements.

After discussing about the dilemma of indigeneity in Tabriz, we will move to the importance of ethnic language in Tabrizi youth's everyday lives. Accent variation, as the main source of social stigma for the suborders, is discussed later. Having non-Tabrizi accent, they cannot well-assimilate in the city and in result are potential to join radical ethnic movements. *Chehelmetri* neighborhood has been presented as an example of the result of such dissimulation.

5.2.1. The dilemma of indigeneity in Tabriz

Historically and politically speaking, Tabriz city has always been the most important city for Iranian Azerbaijanis. The role of the city in Iranian constitutional revolution (1905 – 1911) and later in the Islamic revolution of Iran is significant (Abrahamian, 1982). This role has been carried out by the influential Tabrizi individuals and social and political groups, together with the active contribution of the middle and upper-middle class families of the city. This historical image has shaped the Tabrizi Identity as indigenous and Tabrizi accent as the most prestigious among Iranian Azerbaijanis. However, we rarely see a similar situation in case of other big Azeri cities such as Ardabil or Zanjan. Here, instead of defining the concept of indigeneity in its nature, which proved to be controversial, we intend to look at the everyday life of Tabrizis people to see how they perceive and practice it in real life. The term "indigenous Tabrizi" came up during the discussion in almost all interviews I conducted and many daily interactions I had in the field. Here, different categories for being recognized as an indigenous Tabrizi, and the perception of not-Tabrizis towards them are presented.

Many people believe that to be an indigenous Tabrizi; one should have his/her origin in Tabriz for centuries. At the same time, they would say that it is almost impossible

to find such people in Tabriz today. This is how "Khalil," one of my interviewees, who claim to be an indigenous Tabrizi, puts his understanding of Tabrizi indigeneity into words:

> "Today, one can hardly find an indigenous Tabrizi in Tabriz; they have all migrated to Tehran or the overseas. Many of the current residents are the rural migrants who came and occupied the city… some of them have ruined the indigenous Tabrizi culture. They are the majority in Tabriz now … everywhere, in Bazar, administration offices … they have washed away all the authentic Tabrizi culture."

However, talking about the second generation of migrants to Tabriz, "accents" play a more important role. The youth who have been born and brought up in Tabriz or others who had migrated to the city since their childhood usually could speak with Tabrizi accent. Especially if one of their parents speaks with Tabrizi accent, it would be easier for them to consider themselves as a Tabrizi origin. This way, they can adhere to Tabrizi identity as the most prestigious one among Iranian Azerbaijanis. "Masoumeh" explains about her experience as follow:

> "My family migrated to Tabriz when I was only 2 years old. So I was brought up in Tabriz and learned to speak with Tabrizi accent. However, when I talk to my parents at home, I have the rural accent, but I can easily switch to Tabrizi accent in my daily life and social interactions outside of home and never get confused. I have kind of got used to it."

In response to another question about the indigeneity, she defines herself as Tabrizi since she speaks with the same accent of indigenous Tabrizis. However, in some other social occasions when she does not know how to behave as a Tabrizi in some rituals

like marriage or funeral ceremonies, she needs to get the information from her acquaintance who has migrated to Tabriz before her family.

Some other individuals who neither were born in Tabriz nor speak with Tabrizi accent belong to the group that believes living in Tabriz for certain years is enough to make you an indigenous resident. For instance, Saeed explains his originality as follows:

> "I was born in Ardabil, raised in Tehran, but since my teenage-hood, I have lived in Tabriz. I speak Persian with my parents and siblings at home while my mom and dad speak in Azerbaijani together. When we migrated to Tabriz, I had used to talk in Persian with my friends. After entering the university, I felt that I should be a supporter of Azerbaijani ethnic rights. So I started to speak in Azerbaijani in public. Even though Tabrizis do not accept me as one of themselves, I strongly define myself as Tabrizi."

He complained about Tabrizi accent being a big deal for the arrogant indigenous Tabrizis. Another interviewee, Kiyanoush, who was born from a Persian mother and Tabrizi father, but speaks Azeri with Persian accent, complains about his situation:

> "For me, who does not speak with their accent, it is impossible to expand my social network in Tabriz. My carrier demands trust and social relations. But they don't let me inside their circle even though I am an indigenous Tabrizi".

The importance of indigeneity in Tabriz is shown in everyday life. People judge the others based on their accent more than any other criteria. Tabrizi accent, as the basic component of the symbolic capital for the one who speaks it, brings the feeling of stigmatization to the others immigrants who don't. In the case when the immigrants belong to the middle class, they could live in the city center interacting with the other so-called indigenous Tabrizis; otherwise, when they are poor migrants and live in the suburb

areas the situation is far different. In some cases, like *Chehelmetri* neighborhood, this dissimilation results in showing rebellious actions, which will be discussed in details later.

5.2.2. The role of accent variation in in-group assimilation

In the lack of perceived economic discrimination against Azeris in Iran, the youths' deal with the stigma of the language itself or their accent rather than other forms of discrimination. This perceived linguistic stigma is not only rooted in being mocked by other ethnic groups but also is rooted in Azeris self-view of their language.

Like in any other part of the world, the accent is playing an important role in shaping the initial judgment about a person in Tabriz city. Here, we are going to explain about different categories of the Azerbaijani youth in Tabriz and their differences, which could be identified by their accent:

The first group is Tabrizis who have been born in Tabriz, and either one or both of their parents have Tabrizi accent. In such cases, children usually take Tabrizi accent and even sometimes, after they grow up, they start to criticize the non-Tabrizi accent of their parents.

Another category consisted of the youth who have been born in or migrated to Tabriz in their early childhood. Here depending on the neighborhood they live in and the social environment of school they go to, children would take either Tabrizi or their parent's accent. In the case of the poor neighborhoods where only migrants from certain villages reside, children would usually take their parent's accent. In the mixed neighborhoods in downtown where domination is with Tabrizis, usually, children would take the dominant accent of the city.

Interviewee "Sahar", who was born in Khoy, but brought up in a middle-class neighborhood in Tabriz, speaks fluently with Tabrizi accent. She says that:

> "Certain words are different in Khoy's and Tabriz's accent. Therefore talking at home with my parent's, I usually follow the Khoy's accent, but in public, I always talk in Tabriz's accent because otherwise Tabrizi's would mock my accent … I never get confused in alternating between accents. It is something that I got used to it since my childhood …"

Other group consists of the youth who have been migrated to Tabriz as a teenage or others who live in Tabriz as students or job holders. For them, there is no way to escape the perceived sense of stigmatization of being considered rural in Tabriz. Many of them who I interviewed with, were very unsatisfied with how Tabrizis treat them as rural people. "Mohammad" talked about how tough it has been for him to deal with the people who look down at him every day. That despite having a good job and financial status, in many social interactions, he might get affected because of his accent.

The situation for females is even worse. In order to overcome the stigma of being rural, the common strategy for them is to conceal their origin. I faced several female students who would normally prefer to speak in Persian rather than with their local Azerbaijani accent. In situations that they could conceal their origin, many prefer to talk in Persian in order to enjoy the high social status of being Persian among Tabrizis. Many of them refused to have an interview about their motivations of speaking in Persian instead of their mother tongue. Through informal conversations I had with some of them, I realized that they try to justify themselves in different ways. One of them claimed that she is more comfortable with Persian because she has spent her childhood in a Persian-speaking city. For another one, her mother being Persian was the reason not to speak

Azeri despite living all her life in an Azeri city. However, it was difficult to investigate whether these claims worked for them as a defense mechanism to overcome the stigma they faced with every day, or it was the reality of their lives.

Many of the first and second generations of migrants are unsatisfied with how they are judged in their daily lives in Tabriz. Their reactions to this phenomena vary from the identity concealment to becoming an ethnic activist. But for those who speak the language with a dominant accent, the only occasion in which they might feel embarrassed and judged as "dumb" is when they travel to dominant Persian cities which do not happen on a daily basis. This might be the main reason behind the fact that Tabrizi youth are less unsatisfied with the ethnic policies of the government than non-Tabrizi Azeri residents of the city.

5.2.3. Ethnic rights activism in Tabriz

It is an unquestionable fact that ethnic activists play the most important role in shifting the ethnic boundaries. Today in Iran, the commonly used word to refer activist groups is "identity seekers" (*Hovey at tab* in Persian). Their demands vary from basic political or educational rights to seeking for the independence from Iran. Although the main question of this research is not centered on the categorization of ethnic activist groups, understanding the reasons behind shaping and increasing the influence of these groups help us to understand the dynamics of boundary making among Tabrizi youths.

In recent years, there is an increasing trend in promoting ethnic rights, especially the right for having education in mother language among Tabrizis. While the number of middle-class families who prefer to speak with their children in Persian is shrinking in Tabriz, the preference of the Persian to Azeri is still common in the other Azeri dominant

cities. There is much literature about the rise of these rights; however, little research has been done to investigate who is more potential to join civic or radical movements. Borrowing the concept of "social field constraints" from Wimmer (2008), this section argues that the distinct field characteristics of different Tabrizi youths constrain their freedom to choose whether to be a radical, civil or non-activist.

The first topic discussed in this section was about the importance of being from Tabriz which specifically defined as having Tabrizi accent among the folk. I found very few educated middle-class Tabrizi youths, who were eager to join the identity-seeking groups. It seems that the indigeneity and symbolic capital it brings to its holder, have little place in encouraging individuals to be ethnic activists. Many of these Tabrizi accent speaking youths express their hatred of the activist groups in general and the radical secessionist groups in particular, by calling them as pan-Turk groups and a threat to the territorial integrity of Iran. They think that these groups are recessive and lacking the modern thoughts.

On the other hand, among the young migrants, especially in the poor neighborhoods of the city, activism and radical movements are significantly popular. Many of them have never traveled to Persian-speaking cities to be stigmatized in direct contact, yet they claim to be discriminated in all aspects of their social life. Though they are minorities, their voices are being projected in the media much more than the other youth who share the majority. Social media spreads a picture of an individual holding an independent Southern Azerbaijan flag in Tabriz very fast. Such movements are gradually changing the picture of Azerbaijanis in the eyes of other ethnic groups which results in shifting ethnic boundaries.

To investigate the roots and reasons behind this emerging youth movement, *Chelehmetri* neighborhood, as a well-known center for these movements is being discussed in the next section.

5.2.4. Chehelmetri neighborhood and its role in changing ethnic boundaries

Located in the northwestern residential area of the city, Chehelmetri, Hyderabad, Rezvanshahr and Khalilabad neighborhoods have been studied in this research. Through interviewing experts and not-experts[1], I realized that these neighborhoods are known for ethnic activism in Tabriz city. Even Though there are differences in the economic status of the residents of each of these neighborhoods, we have neglected these differences since culturally the youth in these regions share very similar culture and have close contacts with each other.

The area was consisted of remote drylands or in some parts agricultural lands. The land owners sold them at low prices to the thousands of newly arrived job seeker migrants in Tabriz in the late 1970s. Initially, almost all houses were built illegally, but later many of the owners applied for the documentation authorized by the city municipality. However, many houses and shops still do not have authorized documentation and trading these properties without the municipality control is still practiced.

Historically, Chehelmetri and nearby neighborhoods have been constructed by poor migrants from Northern parts of the East Azerbaijan Province. The neighborhood is homogeneous to a high degree compared to the other parts of Tabriz city. Origins of the residents vary from the cities and villages close to the border of Iran and the Republic of

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[1] The information of the interviewees who reside in these neighborhood have been listed In Appendix 1.

Azerbaijan to the nearby cities located in the northern parts of Tabriz such as Qaradagh or Arasbaran. The main parts of the Qaradagh area are Ahar, Kaleybar, and Varzgan. Depending on the street they live in, the residents have migrated to Tabriz from the 1970s until the very recent years. For some of them, the third generation of the migrants has been already born in Tabriz city. Despite all the variations, they have many cultural similarities due to strong neighborhood ties and relations between them.

Since many of the residents work in carpet weaving industry or hold other local jobs which require little contact with the other neighborhoods of the city, their cultural interactions are usually limited to the people in downtown. Except for a few educated young people who would meet their future spouses in university and marry someone from other neighborhoods, others would whether marry someone from their own village or its neighborhood. Therefore, the way they conduct their rituals and ceremonies is usually more influenced by the rural rather than Tabrizi culture. This way, in this relatively isolated part of the city, the rural culture even among the second or third generations of the migrants, tends to be reproduced.

Qaradagh region is famous for its rich traditional folklore in Azerbaijan. Many traditional Azerbaijani musicians called "Ashiq" are from this area. While in other parts of Iranian Azerbaijan, The tradition of musical performance at marriage ceremonies has been fading, in Qaradagh region still they still exist as an important part of the ceremony.

Geographical proximity to the Republic of Azerbaijan and witnessing the separation of Azerbaijan to two parts influenced their folklore a lot. Many poems have been written about separation of family members after the Turkmenchay treaty. Some historical ethnic hero's play a powerful symbolic role in making them be more conscious about ethnic separation and ethnic rights.

People of Qaradagh, as all ethnic groups of the world, have or create many things as a symbol to be proud of. "Babak," a historical figure who is a symbolic hero of Azerbaijanis who stands against Arabs invasion, has his castle in Qaradagh. For many years, Azerbaijani ethnic activists attend a symbolic ceremony of Babak's birthday in the Castle located near Kaleybar city. These annual events increased their senses of proudness to their origin. "Sattarkhan," as the national hero of the constitutional revolution in Iran is an example of the proud of Qaradaghi origin people.

However, the dominant view in Tabriz towards Qaradaghis is looking down at them, considering them as a nomadic and uncultured people. Many of non-Qaradaghi origin interviewees of this research expressed that they would judge people from that area, at least, as newly arrived migrants who should learn how to live in the city if not considered them as dumb. At the same time when I was asking Qaradaghis that how other Tabrizis would judge them, some like Naser said that: "They respect us, they afraid of us … They know we are brave and great people …"

As a migrant from Qaradagh to Tabriz, one should deal with the stigma of their origin in their daily life. Although many of them were migrated to Tabriz long time ago, still one could see that they did not assimilate in the city's dominant culture. Being neglected in the city because of having the stigma of their origin and having proud of who they are and what their ancestors did for Azerbaijan are two paradoxical sentiments that they deal with it in their everyday life.

Today, various cultural and economic barriers made certain obstacles in the way of assimilation with the city culture for the young generation. Since they have so called rural accent, it is difficult for them to get accepted in other Tabrizi youth circles. While nowadays dominant middle-class youth living in different parts of metropolitan Tabriz

choose their friend's circles regardless of their neighborhood, the youth in Chehelmetri have strong social cohesion with their friends living nearby. This strong cohesion among them might be a natural resistance against being ignored by other middle-class youths in the city.

The Tabriz-based Tractor-Sazi football club which turned to be the main gathering place for many ethnic activists plays a vital role for them to show their ethnic based demand. Whenever Tractor-size hosted a match in Tabriz, many youths gather in the main square of Chehelmetri and filling into the buses to attend the match. During the play, many of them shouting politically-flavored slogans ranging from moderate demands to establishing school teaching in Azerbaijani, to emphasize on their distinct ethnicity.

Although many thousands of supporters from all over Azerbaijan come to Tabriz to support the team, most of the Tabrizi interviewees in this research emphasized that the radical slangs are from the Chehelmetri supporters and others who come from the rural areas. Most of the uneducated interviewees from Chehelmetri emphasized that usually, they do not care what they are shouting during the match. They only follow what the leader says. When I joined to some matches with my interviewees, I witnessed that they are repeating some radical slogans as a chant. However, usually during the interviews, they refused to accept.

Many youths who are following the few educated ones engage in several ethnic activities which are going on in the neighborhood. As a stranger and outsider, they rarely let me participate in their gatherings and meetings. Even participant observation in their neighborhood for about two months brought many questions to them about my affiliation and any potential political use of such anthropological researches. It is very common among them to become an Azerbaijani poet. Almost in all interviews and daily talks they

used several poems to describe their feelings or beliefs. Poets usually use different Azeri pen names and prefer to be called by their pen names. They also use the term "müəllim" (means teacher in Azerbaijani) to call the educated ones to respect them in the common way of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Such naming and gathering are not common in other neighborhoods of the city. Many of these uneducated youth are well aware of the Azerbaijan and Armenia conflict and were eager to participate in the possible future war. At the same time, during the interviews, they were showing respect to the territorial integrity of Iran. It is difficult to judge if this respect was because of the fear of possible consequences of a recorded interview or their real belief.

5.2.5. Discussion

In this section, intra-ethnic interactions among the youth in Tabriz city will be discussed by combining the findings and theories. First, the role of non-Tabrizi accent in stigmatizing migrants will be analyzed using the SNAC model. Then the social and cultural features of Chehelmetri neighborhood will be taken into consideration using Wimmer's (2013) model of ethnic boundary making.

1- As it reviewed in the theoretical framework, social stigma comes into existence when the dominant culture stereotypes and negatively labels undesirable differences. It is when people experience discrimination and status loss, which may harm their access to power and cause other consequences. Being a speaker of a non-native language or having a non-standard accent can affect social status of the speaker, as we saw in two cases discussed: non-Tabrizi Azeris facing Tabrizi people, and Azeri people facing Persians (Farsi speakings). The complexity of these interactions could be shown using The Model

of Stigma of Non-native Accents in Communication (SNAC) from the both sides of the speaker and listener (see Figure 2).

From the listener's point of view, Tabrizi people look down at the others who possess non-Tabrizi accent by labeling them as non-indigenous, rural and uneducated. Some instances for such presumptions are: not letting them in their social circles, not willing to marry them or to see their accent as a "bad credit" when making their decision. On the other hand, Persian speakers look down at Azeris as a whole labeling them as dumb (promoting through Azeri ethnic jokes) and "Shahrestani" (town dweller).

On the other hand, from the speaker's point of view, in the case of the non-Tabrizi Azeries when facing Tabrizi their communicational challenge is how to communicate without revealing their rural background. While in a broader sense, when Azeries face Persians, they concern about how to speak Persian without making grammatical or word-choice mistakes to prevent being judged or mocked.

For non-Tabrizis, having a fear of being judged by others who speak in Tabrizi accent, their communication strategy is usually to hide their rural accents by speaking Persian (among the females) or to avoid making friendship with Tabrizis (among the males). In another occasion, when Azeris, in general, face Persians some of their communication strategies would be avoiding communication, hiding their Azeri accent, or trying to justify their accent by talking about it are some of the.

These communication strategies will lead them to shape their future interactions strategy gradually. In this sense, some non-Tabrizi migrants from specific neighborhoods might try to achieve symbolic capital by being recognized as an activist. Other Tabrizi middle-class youths who face the stigma of having accent insist on Azeri's linguistic rights while keeping a distance from radical identity seekers.

Taking any of these strategies varies depending on communicative factors (how successful speakers are in hiding their accents) and contextual factors (the situation in which the conversation happens, how educated or high-ranked the speaker is, what is the goal of conversation).

While only accent variation cannot describe the rapidly increasing radical movements in Chehelmetri neighborhood, we will try to implement Wimmer's analytical framework in the next section.

2- Some scholars like "Sajad" believe that no middle and upper middle-class Tabrizi would join to the current ethnic activist groups for some reasons. First, historically they know the strong ties between Iran and Azerbaijan. Second, there is no convincing ideology behind such radical ethnic demands in the 21ˢᵗ century when ethnic boundaries are blurring.

Accepting these presumptions, interviews, and observations of this research showed some other results as well. Mainly the youth from the middle and upper middle-class families believe that being an ethnic activist is not a political act which could enter their circle. The reason might be lied in keeping a distance from the main advocates of these movements who are the poor and lower classes. Instead, some of them would actively engage in other civil movements of Iranian society, if they happen to be eager to participate in any.

Many others choose the strategy of boundary blurring arguing that talking about secessionism in the 21st century is not a modern move. By having these thoughts in mind, while many have a Primordial view to Iranian national identity, they want to distinct themselves from the rural or unassimilated generation of immigrants.

On the other hand, In Chehelmetri neighborhood, all of the youth participants declared that the main roots of bold ethnic activism in their region is economic deprivation which they suffer in comparison with other parts of the city. Many scholars put the main emphasis on that as well. However, one might argue that why the same phenomenon does not exist in other suburb parts of the city. Although Chehelmetri, Hyderabad, and Rezvanshahr neighborhoods are considered as a suburb poor regions, they are not slammed neighborhoods. Many youths work and earn enough money to handle their daily life and inexpensive entertainments.

This research, propose that the main motivation behind political activities among the youth in these neighborhoods lies in being stigmatized by other residents of the city in daily contacts. For instance "Saber" says that they live in a part of the city where is like a refugee camp. No one from else would visit their region and would be eager to talk to them. Lack of social interactions causes their local culture to get reproduced among new generations. This social closure increases their level of Groupness and social cohesion. They are affected by the consequences of nation-state building process in Iran much less than the middle-class families. At the same time, their strong support of ethnic rights movements, which in some cases even brought severe consequences of being arrested by Police, made their neighborhood as one of the politically important areas of the city. For many interviewees, this political salience was a sign of proud and honor.

As explained before, Wimmer (2008) discussed how boundary features of ethnic groups affect their historical stability. He argues that high level of cultural differentiation, social closure, and political salience would cause a historical instability to an ethnic group. This point of view is applicable to the Chehelmetri youth. Since they have experienced high degrees of all mentioned features, their group historical stability is

extremely low. While their parents usually do not care about the ethnic activism, the youth changed this dominant non-political sphere to the very political one.

As it mentioned in the methodology part, the participant observation and interviews were done for this part are only projecting the male voices. Cultural barriers of being a young male researcher made it impossible to bring a whole picture from the phenomenon by taking both genders into consideration. Regarding the validity of findings, even though I tried my best to use some links to make the interviewees feel relieved that this research is only for the academic sake, it is difficult to judge that to what extent they concealed the reality.

6. Conclusion

In order to understand the nature, degree of importance and popularity of the emerging ethnic movements among the Iranian Azerbaijanis, scholars have taken different perspectives; from approaching the issue as an inevitable and natural consequence of deprivation of Iranian Azerbaijanis from their basic ethnic rights to a mere result of external political penetration.

However, a critical review of the literature would reveal the existence of several gaps in the majority of these researches. For one thing, many of such researches fall short in providing sociological insights and reliable ethnographic evidence for what they claim. In fact, political and historical perspectives dominate the literature. Moreover, the majority of them approach "Iranian Azeris" as a homogenous group having similar demands and same strategies to achieve these demands, which appear to be non-accurate in different dimensions such as generation gap, city, geographical location, etc.

This thesis is an attempt to first, prove the vital importance of having a micro-sociological approach by presenting the existing variations and heterogeneity among different groups. Second, it aims to take a small step in understanding ethnic identity construction process among Tabrizi youths, which in turn can contribute to understanding the nature, root causes, and body of ethnic movements in this city. Yet the main distinction of this thesis from the previous works may lie in its focus on how everyday micro level "interactions" of actors "construct" their identity and distinguish them from "others."

For doing so, this research has taken a qualitative approach which benefits ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation and in-depth interview as its main tools.

The questions aim to investigate the ethnic boundary features and the self-perception of identity among Tabrizi youths.

The ethnographic findings of this research demonstrates that social stigma of the language and accent plays a more important role in Iranian Azeris dissatisfaction and resentment toward the current situation than perceived political or economic discrimination by the government. Nevertheless, different groups of Iranian Azerbaijanis do not experience the linguistic and accent-based stigmatization in the same way.

In the dominant Azeri city of Tabriz, Tabrizi culture, accent and customs are considered as "standard" and "indigenous." Therefore, a middle-class Tabrizi who speaks with Tabrizi accent usually has a satisfactory amount of symbolic capital living in Tabriz. Therefore, he is not much attracted to other identity alternatives of Persian or Fars', or that of affinity with Republic of Azerbaijan or Turkey. In other words, in instrumentalist terms, they choose to enjoy their indigenous Tabrizi identity over Turkish affinity with people in Turkey, as the two identities are culturally and linguistically distinct; They chose the Tabrizi identity over the Azerbaijani identity of the people in the Republic of Azerbaijan, as they see Azerbaijan as economically and culturally undeveloped compared to Iran despite the linguistic similarities. Finally, they choose the Tabrizi identity over Persian or Fars identity as they don't have to deal with this "other" on a daily basis to suffer from social linguistic and accent-based stigmatization. Moreover, no widespread belief of being economically or politically discriminated by Persians exists among the majority of Tabrizi youths. As Wimmer (2008) argues, they usually choose the blurring strategy of ethnic boundary making by expressing that the ethnicity is not an important issue in the 21st century. We might argue that being proud of being "Tabrizi" could compensate for the perceived stigma of being a "dumb Turk" in Iran. They already enjoy

speaking with a dominant accent, and this meets their need for the needed social distinction.   In the case of some individuals who are concerned about their ethnic and linguistic rights, they prefer not to join activist groups to preserve their distinction from people with perceived 'low-culture.' They do not want to be in the same category with rural and migrants of the poor neighborhoods.

Non-Tabrizi Azeri residents of Tabriz city, on the other hand, find themselves in a more complicated situation.   While many of them had few contacts with Persians in their lifetime, their demands and dissatisfaction target Persians and the central government. We would argue that the main roots of such ethnic unrests can be traced in being discriminated inside Tabriz city by speakers of Tabrizi accent, and not Persians. They have been affected much less than others have by the institutional language of the country. However, their voices are louder than anyone else is in the city.

The findings of this research demonstrate how the process of nation-building which   "constructed" a strong Iranian identity in the 19th and 20th centuries,   has started to get threatened by other emerging discourses including the discourses of "rights" and the "ethnic identity" nationwide.   The discourse of rights directly or indirectly has shaped the main body of criticisms against the discourse of Iranian national identity by bringing up discussions concerning ethnic and linguistic rights of ethnic minorities in Iran. However, by taking a closer look, it seems that this emerging movement has been distancing itself from its origin and becoming as exclusive as its opponent was. If Reza Shah unified the country by suppressing ethnic minorities and imposing the "Iranian identity" and "Persian Language" as the only legitimate identity for all Iranians, today some ethnic activists are known as "identity seekers" are not merely looking for their basic and legitimate rights, but have gone to the other extreme end by exaggerating the

role language and folklore play in defining distinct groups as a "whole". The ethnographic research confirms the hypothesis that the radical "identity seekers" do not represent the majority of Tabrizi people. This is especially important due to all the possible political and administrative consequences that such a perception can cause. As discussed in the previous chapter, high levels of cultural difference and social closure together with the increased political salience of certain neighborhoods of the city result in empowering the social field constraints among the residents.

Increased political salience, cultural differences, and groupness among the youth in certain neighborhoods of Tabriz city, caused by their historical instability. The youth in Chehelmetri, compared to the others in downtown have more potential to join radical groups. This situation is applicable to the migrants and students who are originally from small cities but are now living in Tabriz for a couple of years. Therefore, seeing the majority of the Tabrizi youth as radical and secessionist not only blurs the reality but also can be used as an excuse for the Iranian government to suppress all the basic ethnic right demands of the Azeri people.

Moreover, the newly evolving civil movement inspired by the "universal" discourse of human rights, and the critical analysis of the nation building process and Iranian identity is itself in danger of becoming a "local" exclusive movement. The important question here is what is this "identity" that the "identity seekers" are looking for? Who needs it? And how they are benefiting from it? Therefore, the different tendencies among the different groups of ethnic activists should be recognized, distinguished from one another, and critically analyzed.

In conducting the fieldwork of this thesis, I came across many difficulties. The political sensitivity of the issue made it difficult to reach fully random interviewees. Since

many ethnic gathering's activists are held secretly and in underground, they rejected to allow me participating in any of their serious meetings. Moreover, although I tried my best to choose my respondents from diverse social classes (see Appendix 1), still there is a fear that the work cannot be representative of the entire Tabriz city. The other main shortcoming of the research is an unintentional undermining of the female voices. While it was not that difficult to find the female interviewees among middle-class Tabrizis, I only had the change of interviewing one female in the Chehelmetri neighborhood. Thus my data in that part of the city, could only represent half of the youths' population. This limitation also applies to my ethnography. It is recommended for the future researchers to train an opposite sex assistant to have a holistic picture of the studied population.

In conclusion, my recommendation to the policy makers in order to control the rapid diffusion of the radical tendencies among ethnic Azeries would be putting their efforts to decrease poverty and marginality in the suburb poor areas of Tabriz city. Moreover, building some public facilities and administrative offices in neighborhoods such as Chehelmetri would increase their daily contact with other citizens and decrease the sense of being discriminated, ignored and marginalized.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: The youth interviewees' profile

No.	Name	Age/Sex	Accent	Occupation	Comments
1	Reza	23/M	Tabriz	University Student	Former ethnic activist
2	Saeed	31/M	Ardabil	Carpenter	Born in Ardabil, early life in Tehran and Ardabil, Lives in Tabriz for 20 years, strong belief in his Tabrizi identity
3	Arzu	25/F	Tabriz	University Student	Some family members live in Turkey - Regular travels to Turkey
4	Maryam	35/F	Tabriz	House wife	Married to a Kurdish dentist, many times traveled to Turkey
5	Kiyanush	31/M	Persian	Computer technician	Lives in Rasht since 6 years ago
6	Nazli	27/M	Urban	University Student	Many travels to Turkey and once to Baku
7	Ali	33/M	Tabriz	Silver industry	Doing business between Iran and Turkey
8	Hassan	33/M	Tabriz	Exchange shop	Many travels to Turkey and once to Baku
9	Masoume	22/F	Tabriz	University Student	
10	Majid	35/M	Marand	Businessman	Commuter between Iran and Turkey
11	Hossein	27/M	Varzgan	Worker	Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
12	Masoud	26/M	Tabriz	self-employed	
13	Sepehr	21/M	Meshgin	University Student, activist	Lived in Tabriz for 5 years
14	Alireza	21/M	Urumiyeh	University Student - Ethnic activist	Lived in Tabriz for 3 years
15	Elnaz	33/M	Tabriz	self-employed	Talking in Persian at home
16	Neda	26/F	Tabriz	University Student	Talking in Persian at home

No.	Name	Age/Sex	Accent	Occupation	Comments
17	Yeganeh	35/M	Baku	House wife	Came to Tabriz from Baku after marriage
18	Armin	29/M	Tabriz	University Student	
19	Ahmad	28/M	Ahar	Clerk	
20	Nazanin	24/F	Tabriz	House wife	
21	Mohammad	21/M	Bilasuvar	University Student - Ethnic activist	Lived in Tabriz for 5 years, From the Iran -Azerbaijan border area
22	Habib	27/M	Ardabil	University Student, ethnic activist	Former political prisoner, Lived in Tabriz for 3 years, Working in Tehran on vacations,
23	Polat	35/M	Tabriz	Architect	Studied in Baku for 5 years, lived in Tabriz for 5 years
24	Sarah	33/F	Persian	Architect	Denying to be Azeri origin and knowing language, Studied in Baku for 5 years, lived in Tabriz for 5 years
25	Yunes	31/M	Ardabi	Shop keeper	Former political prisoner, studied in Tabriz for 4 years and married with Tabrizi girl
27	Saber	23/M	Varzgan	Carpet weaver, poet	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
28	Araz	24/M	Kaleybar	Carpet weaver, Ethnic activist, Translator	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
29	Adel	28/M	Kaleybar	Factory worker	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
30	Behzad	20/M	Mugan	Elevator repairing	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
31	Safa	24/M	Kaleybar	Worker	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
32	Behnam	30/M	Tabriz	Shoes maker	
33	Sahar	21/F	Tabriz	University Student	
34	Saeed	21/M	Germi	University Student	Lived in Tabriz for 3 years

No.	Name	Age/Sex	Accent	Occupation	Comments
35	Khalil	34/M	Tabriz	Shop keeper	
36	Rasul	31/M	Tabriz	Tailor	
37	Hossein	20/M	Ahar	Worker	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
38	Babak	21/M	Ahar	Car mechanic	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
39	Romic	30/M	Armenian	Musician	Armenian
40	Sana	23/F	Tabriz	University Student	
41	Nima	28/M	Tabriz	Optician	
42	Jalil	34/M	Tabriz	Mechanic	
43	Kazem	35/M	Persian Accent	Mechanic	Born and lived in Tehran for 30 years, lived 5 years in Tabriz
44	Shahram	28/M	Tabriz	Worker	
45	Mortaza	20/M	Tabriz	University Student	Belongs to Ahle-Hagh religious minority
46	Sevada	28/F	Tabriz		Lived in Istanbul for 2 years and in Tehran for 3 years
47	Yashar	35/M	Tabriz	Musician	Belongs to religious minority of Ahle-Hagh
48	Bahman	35/M	Baku	Clerk	Interviewed in Baku, ethnic activist, political refugee in Azerbaijan
49	Abolfazl	33/M	Baku	Engineer	Interviewed in Baku, ethnic activist
50	Karim	33/M	Tabriz	Optician	Belongs to Bahayi religious minority
51	Mohsen	28/M	Tabriz	Medical Doctor	
52	Zahra	30/F	Kaleybar	Journalist, writter, ethnic activist	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
53	Heshmat	35/M	Ahar	Lawyer	
54	Naser	29/M	Kaleybar	University Student	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood

No.	Name	Age/Sex	Accent	Occupation	Comments
55	Mehdi	25/M	Kaleybar	University Student	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
56	Akbar	21/M	Varzgan	University Student, Azeri musician	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
58	Abazar	25/M	Kaleybar	Low rank police officer	Born and lived in Tabriz, Resides in Chehelmetri neighborhood
59	Babak	32/M	Tabriz	Engineer, ethnic activist	Editor of an Azerbaijani journal

Appendix 2. The expert interviewees' profile

No.	Name	Age/Sex	Accent	Comments
1	Iman	59/M	Poet, writer and Journalist	In close contact with the Azeri scholars and linguistics in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Lived in Tabriz for 40 years
2	Taghi	59/M	Painter, Ethnic activist	Having strong secessionist and pan-Turkish ideologies
3	Mehman	65/M	University lecturer	Interviewed in Baku, politician, historian,
4	Shokat	42/F	University lecturer	Interviewed in Baku, anthropologist
5	Sajad	63/M	University lecturer	Azerbaijani books writer
6	Rahim	67/M	University lecturer, ethnic activist and writter	Interviewed in Tehran, studied and lived in Turkey for several years, Lives in Tehran
7	Amin	40/M	Religious Teacher	In close contact with the youth in Tabriz
8	Masoud	36/M	University lecturer	Born in Zanjan, lived in Tabriz for 4 years
9	Elham	40/F	University lecturer	Usually talks in Persian
10	Leila	58/F	University lecturer	Azerbaijani cultural activist
11	Mahmood	65/M	Self-employed	leftist and ethnic activist, In close contact with scholars in Baku, former political prisoner
12	Nabi	60/M	Book shop owner	cultural activist and Former political prisoner
13	Seyed Ali	63/M	Self-employed	Political and ethnic activist

No.	Name	Age/Sex	Accent	Comments
14	Sadegh	60/M	High school teacher	Writer in Azerbaijani language
15	Asghar	39/M	Journalist, writer, ethnic activist	Interviewed in Tehran