

H. E. Chehabi

ARDABIL BECOMES A PROVINCE: CENTER-PERIPHERY RELATIONS IN IRAN

Amid all the attention that Iranian politics has received since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, local politics has been almost totally neglected. This neglect vitiates our understanding of contemporary Iran, as it is at the local level that state policies are carried out, contested, reshaped, resisted, or revised.¹ Beginning with the centralizing state-building of Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1926–41), Tehran increasingly dominated Iran's politics, commercial activities, and cultural life,² and most of the country's Westernized elites lived in the capital. The 1979 revolution was to some extent a populist revolt against this Westernized elite,³ and among the new rulers those whose social and family roots are outside Tehran abound. Among the common people, "the experience of participation in mass political activity . . . undermined the feeling of political abjection,"⁴ while the new rulers have attempted, not always successfully, to lessen the gap not only between rich and poor,⁵ but also between rich and poor provinces.⁶ The new prominence of provincials in national life has gone hand in hand with a greater recognition of Iran's ethnic and linguistic diversity, while at the same time the sense of common participation in the revolution and the Iran–Iraq War has knitted people of different ethnic backgrounds more closely together.⁷

Under the Qajar dynasty (1794–1925), Tabriz, Iran's largest city whose dominant language is not Persian, came close to being a co-capital of Iran. The crown prince resided there with a little court of his own, and the city's title was *dār al-saltāna*, abode of kingship, which was also one of the titles of Tehran. Azeri Turkish was widely spoken at the two courts in addition to Persian, and Mozaffareddin Shah (r. 1896–1907) spoke Persian with an Azeri Turkish accent,⁸ having spent a long part of his father's reign as heir apparent in Tabriz. Under Reza Shah and his son, Persian nationalism became official ideology, and Iran's other languages were officially ignored by the state.⁹ The Islamic Revolution changed the status of minority languages somewhat: Islamic ideology frowns on ethnic nationalism, as it imagines the nation as a community of believers rather than a community of people speaking the same language.¹⁰ The new constitution of 1979 affirms in its Article 15 that although the "official and common language and script of the people of Iran is Persian, . . . the use of local and nationality languages in their press and mass media is allowed." It adds that the "teaching of their literature in their schools, along with Persian language instruction, is also permitted."¹¹

H. E. Chehabi is Visiting Associate Professor, Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, Calif. 90025-1473, USA.

The increased prominence of the provinces in public life, plus the greater recognition of Iran's linguistic diversity,¹² make the study of local politics and the center-periphery nexus in Azerbaijan, a region where most of the inhabitants speak the Turkic Azeri language, of particular interest.¹³ Furthermore, the independence of the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan in 1992 has added a transnational dimension to the relationship between Tehran and its Azerbaijani periphery, as some leaders of the new state regard Iranian Azerbaijan as a *terra irredenta*.¹⁴

Peripheries, however, are themselves heterogeneous in that some parts of any given peripheral territory may be peripheral in relation to that periphery's center: the Shetland Islands' situation in Scotland, itself a periphery within Great Britain, comes readily to mind. These are "internal" peripheries, or "peripheries within the periphery," which find themselves in a triangular relationship with the national center and the peripheral center.¹⁵ In Iranian Azerbaijan, the city and region of Ardabil are an example of this problem. Ardabil shared with the region's center, Tabriz, a relation of peripherality vis-à-vis Tehran, yet its inhabitants traditionally felt neglected by the provincial authorities in Tabriz. The result was a widespread yearning for becoming a province in their own right, a wish that came true in 1993. That the demand for a new *province* emanated from a *city* derives from a major difference between territorial administration in the Middle East and the West—namely, that in the Middle East the true administrative unit is the city or town, with a hinterland that is attached to it, whereas in the West the administrative unit is a region, which is then given a capital.¹⁶

This essay traces the events that led to the creation of the new province of Ardabil, the third in Iranian Azerbaijan. It will argue that Ardabil's harnessing of political, social, and cultural resources, plus the disintegration of the Soviet Union, allowed them to get the Iranian government to grant them their old wish of provincehood. The conclusion will briefly consider the wider implications of this episode for our understanding of contemporary Iranian politics and state-society relations.

ARDABIL IN AZERBAIJAN

Ardabil is one of the oldest cities of Iran. In pre-Islamic times it was a center of Zoroastrianism, and the prophet Zoroaster himself is believed to have come from that general area; there is even an Islamic tradition to the effect that Sabalan (near Ardabil) is a mountain in Azerbaijan where a prophet is buried. Ardabil thrived in the Middle Ages and was the capital of Azerbaijan region for the first few centuries after Islamization. Even after it was supplanted in that capacity by Tabriz, Ardabil maintained its importance as a trading center and became an important religious center when the Safavid religious order established itself in the city.¹⁷ The head of that order, Isma^cil, re-created a unified Iranian state in the early 16th century and in 1501 had himself proclaimed shah in Tabriz,¹⁸ but before long the Safavids, retreating under Ottoman pressure, moved their capital to Qazvin and later to Isfahan. Ardabil is thus in some sense the cradle of the Iranian state as we know it.¹⁹ In Qajar times, Ardabil was overshadowed by Tabriz,²⁰ which was then not only the seat of the crown prince but also a trading center and the port of entry into Iran of modern ideas, which came from the Ottoman Empire and the Caucasus.²¹ Ardabil, by contrast, remained deeply religious, a trait reflected in the city's title of *dār al-irshād*,

abode of guidance, a reference to the Safavids. Its annual Muharram ceremonies, commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husain in Karbala (680), have the reputation of being the most fervent in all of Iran, and a greater percentage of citizens participate in them there than in any other place.²² Among the many rituals associated with Muharram, Ardabil's local specialty is *qama-zanī*, in which mourners on the 10th of Muharram, a day called *‘āshūrā*, shave their hair and hit their bald heads with daggers to draw blood.²³ These ceremonies have always been viewed with ambivalence by the higher Shi‘i clergy, many arguing that their being unhygienic makes them contrary to the teachings of Islam,²⁴ but given the strength of popular religion the clergy was never able (or even willing) to interdict them. Reza Shah also outlawed them, but with his abdication in 1941 the rituals returned, earning the people of Ardabil the reputation of being particularly backward during the last shah's reign. By now they have become a constitutive element of Ardabilis' sense of local pride, and spectators come from all over Iran to watch them. As we shall see, this strong association with what Michael Fischer has called the “Karbala Paradigm”²⁵ afforded the people of Ardabil powerful cultural resources, first in the Iran–Iraq War and then in the campaign for provincehood. But to understand the motivation behind Ardabil's secession from Tabriz, it is important to know the modalities of local administration in Iran.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN IRAN

From the late 19th century until 1937, Iran was divided territorially into a few major provinces, called *ayālats*, and a greater number of minor ones, termed *vilāyats*,²⁶ but “the number, geographical boundaries, and administrative status, particularly of the smaller provinces, tended to be fluid.”²⁷ Some of the vilayats were part of an ayalat and were ruled from its capital; others depended directly on Tehran. The governor of an ayalat (sometimes also referred to as *mamlīkat*, “kingdom”) was termed *vālī*, and a vilayat was ruled by a *ḥākīm*.²⁸ The central government in Tehran appointed the governors of both, but in practice a few governorships were hereditary in local dynasties,²⁹ while most were either given to royal princes or—increasingly—to bureaucrats.³⁰

Soon after the constitutional revolution of 1906, the law of administrative divisions of December 1907 created four ayalats (Azerbaijan, Khorasan, Fars, and Kerman) and a large number of vilayats. But under Reza Shah, two laws of 7 November 1937 and 9 June 1938, respectively, established a new rationalized system of local administration modeled after the centralized, unitary systems of France and Prussia.³¹ Just as in France the Jacobins had destroyed the individuality of the ancien régime's *provinces* and substituted for them a division of the nation into about 90 small *départements* of roughly equal size whose names were taken from natural features (rivers and mountains) to obliterate local loyalties,³² in Iran Reza Shah created an administrative system whose aim was to reach from the center as far as possible toward the periphery. The hierarchical model of France, with its *départements*, *arrondissements*, *cantons*, and *communes*, was copied in the form of *shahristāns* (translated hereafter as “districts”), *bakhshs* (divisions), and *dihistāns* (group of villages).³³ But, unlike France and more like Prussia, the districts were grouped into ten larger provinces, called *ustāns*.³⁴ *Ustān* and *shahristān* were Middle Persian words denoting territorial divisions in Sasanian times;³⁵ their choice thus reflected the Pahlavi monarchy's

desire to emphasize continuity with pre-Islamic Iran. To obliterate localism and the ethnic connotation of some of the provinces, such as Kurdistan and Luristan, the provinces were given numbers rather than names.³⁶ Unlike in France and Prussia, however, no elected provincial and district councils ever saw the day in Iran, although both the constitution of 1906 and that of 1979 mention them as part of the nation's institutional structure.

Given its large population, the *ayalat* of Azerbaijan was divided into two: the Third Province with Tabriz as capital, and the Fourth Province with its capital at Urmia, which Reza Shah had renamed after himself as Reza²iyeh. The Third Province had two districts, Tabriz and Ardabil. After the end of World War II, under the protection of the Soviet occupiers, autonomists set up an Azerbaijani state in the Third Province and the eastern half of the Fourth Province, and a Kurdish state in the western half of the Fourth Province. In the short-lived agreement of July 1946 in which Tehran recognized Azerbaijan's autonomy (a few months later, troops of the central government reconquered the area), the Third and Fourth provinces were united again to form Azerbaijan Province,³⁷ but in 1958, twelve years after the rout of the autonomists, the administrative *status quo ante bellum* was reestablished in northwestern Iran, and when provinces regained their names through a law passed in May 1960, the Third and Fourth provinces became East and West Azerbaijan. At the time, the redivision of Azerbaijan was widely interpreted as an attempt to divide the Azerbaijanis so as better to rule them.³⁸ But Azerbaijan was not the only province to be divided. Soon after the establishment of the ten numbered provinces, the eastern half of the Eighth Province was separated from Kerman to form Sistan and Baluchistan Province, and many others followed, so that on the eve of the revolution Iran had twenty-four provinces. The old Seventh Province (Fars) had by then been divided into the provinces of Fars, Bushehr, and Boir Ahmadi.³⁸

These successive divisions derive from the logic of Iran's territorial divisions, which makes people in each unit aspire for it to climb on the ladder of administrative divisions. A division wants to become a district, and the capital of an important district resents its subordination to the provincial capital and wants to become a provincial capital in its own right, because at each level certain services are rendered by the central state. Tehran deals directly only with the provincial governorate, the latter only with the district governorates, and so on. Because all money ultimately comes from Tehran, provincial officials provide services and divide budget allocations for the districts; district officials do the same for the divisions; and so on. At each level, there is the possibility that officials will withhold services or budget allocations to spend them in the center of their own administrative unit. When one unit climbs the ladder, therefore, one layer is eliminated, and the inhabitants can plausibly expect better state services. Economic factors play a part, too. When a town is "upgraded," all sorts of building and development projects are likely to come in to house new administrations, and new roads and streets are likely to be built. As a result, land and property prices go up, which is why local elites will push for administrative climbing. With the growth of the Iranian population, a vast upward movement at all levels of the territorial hierarchy has taken place over the years, a movement that the revolution neither stopped nor accelerated.⁴⁰ East Azerbaijan began with two districts, Tabriz and Ardabil, and had about a dozen by the mid-1980s, most of them former divisions of the two initial districts. Also, it often happened that districts would be

transferred from one province to another. For our purposes, it is important to note the elevation in 1958 of Astarā from a division of Ardabil district to a district of its own, and its subsequent transfer from East Azerbaijan to the province of Gilan.⁴¹

East Azerbaijan had two main cities, Tabriz and Ardabil, and we know that wherever one territorial unit includes two major urban centers, intense rivalry ensues. Examples are Aleppo and Damascus in Syria, Los Angeles and San Francisco in California, and, most notoriously, Quito and Guayaquil in Ecuador. In Iran, the province of Luristan is the other classic case, with the two cities of Khorramabad (for strategic reasons the capital) and Borujerd (for a long time the larger and economically more significant of the two), each too small to form the core of a province, stuck together.

In many administrative units around the world, a balance is struck between the two main cities, giving each a separate function. Within East Azerbaijan, however, Ardabil was the eternal second. Its inhabitants had the feeling that they were held back by two forces: Tehran's neglect of the provinces generally, and Tabriz's monopolization of such services and funds as were available.⁴² The latter factor seems to have made an impact only in the 1970s and 1980s, for in a study of regional planning in East Azerbaijan, based on the data of the 1966 census, the author concluded that the region of Ardabil was one of those that "should no longer act as 'attraction poles,' as they have already reached the necessary degree of development."⁴³ While Tabriz became an industrial center, Ardabil remained largely agricultural. Roads, it is claimed, were always built to serve Tabriz.⁴⁴

It seems, however, that within East Azerbaijan the gap was not so much between Tabriz and Ardabil as between Tabriz, one of Iran's main industrial centers, and the rest of the province, which, in a tripartite division of provinces according to development, belongs to the intermediate group.⁴⁵ Iranian census information disaggregating data by district is difficult to come by, but a comparison of the data for the provinces of Ardabil and East Azerbaijan shows the relative underdevelopment of the former, although East Azerbaijan's better position is due mostly to the preeminence of Tabriz.⁴⁶

TABLE 1 *Selected Data on East Azerbaijan and Ardabil*

District	East Azerbaijan Province	East Azerbaijan, Excluding Tabriz	District of Tabriz	Ardabil Province	District of Ardabil
Population (in millions)	3.27	1.9	1.37	1.14	0.54
Population per Facility					
Public Libraries	99,000	95,000	105,000	108,000	95,000
Cinemas	204,000	190,000	228,000	180,000	285,000
Bookstores	10,000	16,100	6,600	27,000	26,500
Stadiums and Sports Halls	53,300	51,000	59,600	90,000	57,000
Hospitals	99,000	190,000	59,600	135,000	114,000
Hospital Beds	658	1,738	353	1,181	1,478
Physicians	3,129	n.a. ^a	n.a.	4,978	n.a.
Telephone Lines	15	24	9	21	26
Bank Branches	6,500	n.a.	n.a.	8,400	n.a.

^an.a., not available.

In addition to these very concrete grievances, cultural differences divided the two cities. Ardabil was the earlier capital of Azerbaijan, but Tabriz has dominated it in recent memory. Ardabil has always been very pious and observant, whereas Tabriz has been comparatively cosmopolitan, not only because of its greater exposure to the West but also because, unlike Ardabil, many of the city's inhabitants are members of the Sheikhi sect, a fact that diminished the grip of orthodox Twelver Shi'ism, unrivaled in Ardabil, on Tabriz's population and favored secular tendencies. Even the dialects are different, and Tabrizis are said to make fun of the "coarse" Azeri of the people of Ardabil.⁴⁷ Ardabil was therefore truly a "periphery within the periphery."

The result of all of this was that since long before the Islamic Revolution secession from Tabriz became the wish of most Ardabilis. To this end, telegrams and petitions were sent to the Ministry of the Interior throughout the Pahlavi years, without much success. In 1980, the Ministry of the Interior prepared a bill making Ardabil a province and presented it to the cabinet, but due to the beginning of the Iran–Iraq War no action was taken.⁴⁸ Then, in 1983, the Iranian Parliament passed a "Law on the Definition and Criteria of Administrative Divisions." Regarding the highest level, the provinces, Article 9 stated that a province is constituted by the union of several adjoining districts and with consideration given to their political, social, cultural, economic, and natural conditions. The Ministry of the Interior can change the configuration of provinces with the approval of the cabinet, but the creation of new provinces had to be ratified by Parliament. A new province must have at least a million inhabitants.⁴⁹ Ardabil and its surrounding districts counted about a million and a half inhabitants. Provincehood was now legally within reach.

ARDABIL BECOMES A PROVINCE

During the election campaigns for both the second and the third majlis, in 1984 and 1988, respectively, candidates in Ardabil sought votes by promising to work for provincehood in Tehran if elected. Nothing much happened on the official side, but the cause was kept alive. In these years, local notables met unofficially with government representatives to press their case, but they were told by Mir Husain Musavi (himself an Azerbaijani), then the prime minister, that a change of status was not feasible. Creating a new province entails the creation of new administrative positions and the establishment of new offices and thus costs a lot of money—money that was not available because of the Iran–Iraq War.

During the war (1980–88), the young men of Ardabil and surrounding areas proved their patriotism by volunteering in record numbers for service at the front; it is said that only Isfahan sacrificed a higher proportion of its youth.⁵⁰ The engagement of the young men of Azerbaijan took the form of their enrollment in the 31st, or "Ashura," Division of the Revolutionary Guards. This division was headquartered in Tabriz, and it was from there that the young men were distributed to the various action theaters at the front. It seems that the volunteers from the small towns and villages outnumbered those from Tabriz, and they resented being told where to go by Tabrizis. On the wall of the barracks there was at least one graffito that read "Tabriz, the second America."⁵¹ The 31st Division, headquartered at the Karbala Base somewhere in southern Iran, distinguished itself in the war, and soon Ardabilis formed their own bri-

gade within it, the Abolfazl al-Abbas Brigade. This brigade was named after the half-brother of Imam Husain, in whom Shi'is see the personification of self-abnegation, valor, and sacrifice.⁵² The logistics of this brigade were organized from Ardabil, which gave added self-confidence to inhabitants of the city. Parallel to the fighting of their youth, the older people of Ardabil also contributed their share. The merchants of the city's bazaar invented the *kāfih ṣalavāti*, by sending victuals to the front and having them distributed in makeshift cafés to the soldiers and Pasdaran in exchange for a salvo of benediction (*ṣalavāt*) rather than cash. This was later copied by merchants from elsewhere.

This active participation in the war effort created a sense of local pride that emboldened the citizens of Ardabil to make demands on the government. As long as the war raged, however, the demand for provincehood was not pressed too much, as people wanted to avoid divisiveness at a time when unity was needed. But things were moving. In 1987, the district governorate of Ardabil became a deputy provincial governorate, and gradually some ministries, most importantly that of transportation, upgraded their Ardabil offices to general directorates (*idāra-i kull*) that deal directly with Tehran.⁵³ After the war ended in 1988, it was felt that the time had come to cash in the chips.

To press the demand for provincehood, Ardabilis of all backgrounds—that is, locals with a fierce loyalty to the Islamic Republic and members of the Tehran diaspora who were often more secular in outlook—became active. On 11 February 1990, the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, they founded the Commission for the Pursuit of the Problems of the District of Ardabil (*Hā'iat-i paīgiri-i masā'il-i shahristān-i Ardabil*) in the office of the Imam Jum'ca of Ardabil.⁵⁴ This group consisted of bazaar merchants, ulama, relatives of martyrs, veterans, and professionals,⁵⁵ and began lobbying the central government to grant more development money to the area. Several administrations complied.

Parallel to this, the local fortnightly newspaper *Bahār-i Āzarbāijān* stepped up its campaign for the cause.⁵⁶ In article after article, it was pointed out that the eastern region of East Azerbaijan was economically “deprived” (*mahrūm*), that the area's population had always been the guardians of Iran's territorial integrity (against Ottomans, Russians, and most recently Iraqis), and that the city had produced many important religious scholars and figures. However, it remained underdeveloped, and its economic potential remained untapped, which was due at least partially to the difficulty the people of the eastern regions had in obtaining services in Tabriz. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a new argument developed: that possibilities for trade had arisen from which Ardabil could profit if it developed economically. For all of these reasons, Ardabil needed to be independent of Tabriz. Opponents of division were reminded that there were already two provinces in Azerbaijan, and that this had not affected the unity of Azerbaijanis, just as the separation of Bushehr from Fars in southern Iran had not damaged the historically close ties between that city and Shiraz.

Around the time that the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan declared its independence (30 August 1991), the commission invited Iran's president, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, to visit the area. He accepted and a few weeks later embarked on a four-day tour of the eastern cities of East Azerbaijan that lie close to the border. On 3 October 1991 he landed in Parsabad, a stone's throw away from the former Soviet

border, and declared that he had come to see how the development funds made available to remedy the border areas' economic deprivation were being spent. He visited all the major towns of the area and on 4 October 1991 arrived in Ardabil, where he was received by the usual cheering crowds that greet heads of state in Iranian provinces.⁵⁷ In Ardabil, he was greeted by people chanting, "Hashemi, Hashemi, by the soul of the Imam [Khomeini] [let] Ardabil be a province."⁵⁸ They persisted in this chant even when the trip's organizers tried to make them chant other slogans.⁵⁹ In his speech at the Takhti Stadium of Ardabil, the president said that Azerbaijan had always been in the forefront of the struggle against dictatorship, and that "yesterday's warriors" were "today's producers." He added that the end of Marxism opened new possibilities for political, cultural, social, and economic relations with the former Soviet republic, and called for cross-border trade to grow.⁶⁰ As to the persistent calls for provincehood, he said, "All right; your voice carries so far that it has been heard everywhere. With all our being, we have heard your request. If God wills, we will be able to act according to your wishes."⁶¹

At this point, the opposition must have taken its case to Iran's supreme political-religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, for soon after Rafsanjani's trip a group of about fifty influential Ardabilis resident in Tehran—namely, the trustees of the Ardabilis' mosque at Galubandak in Tehran and the trustees of the Ardabilis' benevolent loan society (*Şandūq-i qarz al-ḥasana*) in Tehran—wrote an open letter to Khamenei. It said that the president, who enjoyed the leader's support, had understood that Ardabil's deprivation and lack of development were due to the provincial administration being overworked and preoccupied with the center of the province, and thus unable to administer this sensitive border area economically. Reminding Khamenei that after Isfahan Ardabil had given Iran the highest number of martyrs in the Iran–Iraq War and that its inhabitants had given generously in money and in kind for the war effort, it added that it had been said that a group of parliamentary deputies had approached Khamenei and talked about the unity of Azerbaijan without considering that the deprivation suffered in the eastern regions might lead to rebelliousness. Adding that it was U.S. policy to work for the disintegration of other countries, the letter warned that talk of the unity of ethnic groups was poison for the geographical unity of Iran. It concluded that only economic development would deprive the provocateurs of their arguments.⁶²

Meanwhile, the government increased the attention Ardabil received. On 19 April 1992, the first scheduled flight left Tehran for the new Ardabil airport.⁶³ In the spring of 1992, news spread that legislation making Ardabil a province was ready and about to be submitted to Parliament. Nothing happened, and it later transpired that no bill had been prepared. The word from the presidency was that this would be done after the elections to the fourth majlis, scheduled for the spring of 1992. In these elections, Rafsanjani allied with the economic conservatives to eliminate opponents of his economic liberalization from Parliament. The elections took place, and the supporters of the extension of the public sector were eliminated from Parliament.⁶⁴ In Ardabil, two of the city's three sitting deputies were reelected (one of them a cleric), but one lost to Nureddin Noʿi Aqdam, an ambitious young man who had started campaigning informally years before on the issue of provincehood and who had been a member of the commission.⁶⁵ Commenting on these elections, *Bahār-i Āzarbāijān* wrote that

while the first three parliaments had upheld national pride and Islamic honor, they had not addressed pressing economic issues. It added that because the hard-liners had been eliminated, cooperation between the executive and the legislative branches should become easier. It invited deputies to start working.⁶⁶ Two weeks later, another article said that now that the country had a Parliament dedicated to private enterprise, people could participate in economic development. Implicit is a parallel between economic emancipation from state tutelage and emancipation from Tabriz tutelage.⁶⁷

The three Ardabil deputies became active, even though apparently they did not get along with one another.⁶⁸ They started seeking appointments with influential government figures, inviting them to visit Ardabil, and lobbying for development funds. Men who were approached included Ayatollah Abdolkarim Musavi Ardabili,⁶⁹ Ayatollah Meshgini,⁷⁰ and General Zahirnezhad.⁷¹ The deputies were successful in obtaining a few promises for development projects.⁷² On 30 June 1992, seven deputies from the region met with Rafsanjani and reminded him of his promise.⁷³

Around the same time, the Ministry of the Interior named a new mayor for the city of Ardabil. Following the example set by the energetic mayor of Tehran, he set about to change the face of the city and enhance local pride.⁷⁴

In the summer of 1992, the Ashura celebration in Ardabil became politicized for the purpose of provincehood. The 10th of Muharram has often acquired political significance in Iran, but in this case what is interesting is that the politicization was carried out within the ideological parameters of the regime. A few years earlier, the authorities of the Islamic Republic had tried to prohibit *qama-zanī*, but the devotees of the practice had chanted “Whoever objects to this, may his house be destroyed.”⁷⁵ As the campaign for provincehood gathered momentum in the summer of 1992, activists stationed themselves with a scroll outside the *Husainiyyas* (buildings where the martyrdom of Imam Husain is commemorated), and as the *qama-zans* appeared, they had them sign the petition with the blood on the tips of their knives.⁷⁶ Thousands of signatures were gathered, hundreds of them written in blood, and the petition was sent to Tehran. A similar action was taken on a smaller scale in Astara to demand incorporation into the new province.

Then, on 19 July 1992, the *Haiʿat-i paigiri* organized its first seminar, titled “Growth and Development of the Eastern Region of Azerbaijan.” It took place in Ardabil, lasted two days, and was attended by 200 area notables—that is, imam jum^{ca}s, deputies, and local dignitaries. A man from Astara said that people there watched Ardabil television, and that if Ardabil became a province, Astara would like to join it—a veiled reference to the linguistic unity between the two cities. One of the Ardabil deputies, Hujjat al-Islam Qazipur, pointed out that for fourteen years construction of a small clinic in Namin (a village near Ardabil) had remained unfinished, while in the same time span several hospitals had been built in Tabriz. The imam jum^{ca} warned that the United States would use the independence of the former Soviet Azerbaijan to plot against Iran.⁷⁷ At the end of the seminar, an eight-point declaration was issued that supported Khamenei’s pronouncements on the West’s “cultural offensive”; thanked Rafsanjani for visiting the area; asked the government to establish the new province before discussing the second development plan; requested that the government strengthen the reach of Ardabil radio and television, as many inhabitants of the newly independent Azerbaijan had expressed interest in its programs; asked the government to train

muballighs (missionaries or propagandists) and prepare programs for spreading Islamic morals and customs in the Republic of Azerbaijan; and stated that, given the need for know-how, the government should establish new institutions of higher education.⁷⁸

In late summer 1992, the government began to act on Rafsanjani's promise. A new governor was named for East Azerbaijan, and perhaps it is no coincidence that he was a native of West Azerbaijan. A neutral outsider, he traveled to Ardabil and promised to work for the creation of a new province. In mid-September, the Office of Administrative Divisions submitted a plan to the executive that called for three new provinces in Iran: Tabarestan (capital, Gorgan), which would have seceded from Mazandaran; Qohestan (capital, Birjand), which would have separated from Khorasan, Iran's largest province by far; and Ardabil. It indicated that feasibility studies for the provincehood of Qom and Qazvin had also been carried out.⁷⁹ This did not mean that the executive was about to send a bill to Parliament, and so on 27 September 1992 the deputies sent a letter to Mohajerani, the vice president for parliamentary affairs, requesting that things be sped up.⁸⁰ On 14 October 1992, the cabinet adopted the Ardabil part of the plan, but postponed establishment of the other two provinces.⁸¹ News of the government's decision was broadcast on the evening news. In Ardabil, people went into the streets, started distributing sweets and *noql* (sugar-coated almonds served at happy events such as marriages), and congratulated one another. In the mosque, the imam jum'ca and the district governor gave speeches. Banners went up, and the throngs chanted, "Ardabil has become a province; the soul of the Imam [Khomeini] is happy," "Long live Khamenei; long live Rafsanjani," "Hashemi, Hashemi, thank you, thank you," "Ardabil has become a province; Iran has become a rose garden."⁸² Celebrations continued until 16 October 1992 and carried over into the Friday prayers at the mosque. A few days later, the deputy No'zi Aqdam gave a speech in Parliament in which he thanked the government and besought his peers to consider the bill soon. He ended by saying that this revolutionary act of the government was a powerful slap in the face to Israel and America.⁸³ Now everybody waited for the government to introduce the bill in Parliament. The Ardabilis of Tehran issued a statement asking Parliament and the Council of Guardians to adopt the bill before 11 February, the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.⁸⁴ As if to underline the urgency of the matter, on 14 November 1992 the Ardabil chapter of the Medical Association sent an open telegram to Rafsanjani, complaining that the eight-channel Coronary Care Unit (CCU), which the presidency had offered to Ardabil four years earlier, had arrived in Tabriz, but that Tabriz authorities were refusing to forward the apparatus to Ardabil. Pointing out that although Ardabil had a population of more than a million and a half, its hospital had only four channels of CCU, the letter asked the president to see to it that Tabriz released the units.⁸⁵ Two days later, the Ministry of Health heeded the request.⁸⁶ On 20 November, the Ardabili diaspora organized a big meeting at the Galubandak mosque to thank the government; General Zahir-ezhad spoke first.⁸⁷ In early winter, the government sent a bill calling for the establishment of Sabalan Province, named after the mountain that dominates Ardabil, to the Committee of Internal Affairs of Parliament. The committee debated the bill and adopted it on 3 January 1993, but made two changes. In deference to the name Azerbaijan, and to maintain the geographic identity of the area, "Sabalan" was changed to "East Azerbaijan" (meaning that East Azerbaijan would have to become Central

Azerbaijan), and in view of the wishes of the people of Sarab, that district was left under the jurisdiction of Tabriz. Astara was left with Gilan. On 12 January 1993, the bill had its first reading. Opponents of the bill objected to it on procedural grounds and by arguing that the establishment of a new province would cost money that was needed more urgently elsewhere; that parts of Iran were far more deprived than eastern Azerbaijan; and that a territorial reorganization of the country should be realized systematically and not piecemeal. A deputy for Tabriz hinted in not very clear language that dividing Azerbaijan might strengthen Azerbaijani nationalism, and added that although it was understandable that the people of Ardabil wanted a province, it was not clear how this would benefit the outlying districts of the new province. Proponents, among them the deputies for Ardabil, reiterated the old arguments, pointing out how old the demand was and arguing that in final analysis the people's wishes should count most. After one day of debate, a vote was called, and at the request of twenty-five deputies it was secret.⁸⁸

In Ardabil, suspense was in the air. The government had placed armed guards outside important government offices and other installations, as it feared that rioting would break out if Parliament did not approve the bill. The local inhabitants were glued to the radio sets, and when the results of the vote were announced (152 for, 42 against, 10 abstentions) there was jubilation all around, even greater than when the cabinet had adopted the plan. Some people climbed onto the roofs and shouted *Allāhu akbar* (God is the Greatest), just as had been done during the Islamic Revolution. Others swarmed into the streets, chanting slogans and distributing sweets and *noql*. Interestingly, there was dancing in the street, even though highly observant Ardabil frowns on dancing. The drivers of bulldozers took their engines to the streets and moved the scoops up and down rhythmically. The security forces who had been posted outside important buildings joined in the celebrations. Local television recorded the scenes and broadcast them to the entire country, which was not used to seeing dancing on television. After this initial success, the bill went back to the Committee of Internal Affairs for its second reading. On 4 April 1993, the committee adopted a slightly modified version of the bill that changed the proposed name of the province around Tabriz from Central (*markazī*) to Middle (*miāni*) Azerbaijan (probably to avoid any hint of Tabrizi centralism), and added an amendment specifying that the new province should receive part of old East Azerbaijan's budget allocation in proportion to its population.

When the bill had its second reading one week later, on 11 April 1993, debate centered on the provinces' names. It was argued that renaming all offices in two provinces would be too costly. One deputy suggested that "*miāni*" had an obscene connotation and would be seen as an insult by the people of Tabriz.⁸⁹ The committee's proposal was defeated. At this point, one of the three Ardabil deputies suggested that Tabriz remain the capital of East Azerbaijan, and the new province be named Ardabil. This proposal was accepted in a public vote.⁹⁰ In Ardabil, people again swarmed into the streets, distributed sweets and *noql*, and chanted slogans. Soon after, the governor of East Azerbaijan was named temporary governor of Ardabil Province. He spent a few days each week in Ardabil, but people began asking why the government had bothered to change their status if it did not give them a governor of their own. By the summer of 1993, no one had been named, reportedly because different groups consulted by the government (bazaar, veterans, families of the

martyrs) could not agree on a suitable candidate. After a few months, the first governor was named, and he, too, hailed from West Azerbaijan.

EPILOGUE

It is appropriate here to mention briefly three other events that relate to this story. In the summer of 1993, after a series of Armenian advances had made hundreds of thousands of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan homeless, Iran's policy of neutrality in the Caucasian war became ever more unpopular in Iranian Azerbaijan.⁹¹ To reassure Iranian Azerbaijanis and to issue a warning to Armenia, Ayatollah Khamenei visited Iranian Azerbaijan for a number of days. Khameneh, where Khamenei's family originally comes from, is in East Azerbaijan, and although he was born and raised in Mashhad, he speaks some Azerbaijani. On this tour, he spoke mostly in Persian to the masses that came to cheer him, but on one occasion, when he warned Armenia not to go too far, he used Azeri.⁹² He promised funds for development projects in some of the deprived areas of East Azerbaijan that he visited, but he did not venture into the new Ardabil Province, as if leaving that to Rafsanjani.⁹³ By this trip, the Iranian government signified both to the people of East Azerbaijan and to the new Caucasian states that it did not intend to neglect Iranian Azerbaijan.

The next episode, which sheds additional light on the story of Ardabil, concerns the aborted attempt in the summer of 1994 to elevate the city of Qazvin, about 120 kilometers east of Tehran, to the rank of provincial center. Again, we had a city that did not like being ruled from another city—in this case, Zanzan, in whose orbit Qazvin had been placed after belonging to the Central Province (Tehran) for a long time. But the arguments were the opposite of Ardabil's. Qazvin is a rich industrial city surrounded by a very productive agricultural region that supplies large amounts of Iran's food, and so proponents of provincehood argued that this rich region needed an administration of its own to run things more efficiently. On a trip to Qazvin, Rafsanjani promised to accede to the local people's wish, and so a bill was prepared for this purpose. When the government announced its plans to make Qazvin and the surrounding areas a province, people celebrated in the streets and distributed sweets and *noql*. But when the necessary bill was introduced to Parliament, opponents argued that the Qazvin region was too small to be a province (Article 9 of the law on territorial divisions had had to be overridden); that the government should look after the interests of the deprived areas rather than the privileged ones; and that the president's promises were binding on him, not on Parliament. The bill was narrowly defeated (103 to 105, with 21 abstentions).⁹⁴ Rioting immediately broke out in the city; government offices were ransacked; and security forces had to be brought in to reestablish government authority, with some loss of life. It later transpired that the uprising had not been instigated by oppositional forces but had been spontaneous, with some connivance by the local authorities.⁹⁵ In the end, to appease the people of Qazvin, the district was detached from Zanzan and added to Tehran Province.⁹⁶ As for Qom, its secession from the Central Province was decided by the government in 1995 and was endorsed personally by Khamenei.

The third episode concerns *qama-zani*, the ritual in which men in Ardabil cut their heads with a knife on the 10th of Muharram. Like the monarchy before it, the Islamic Republic had been trying to outlaw this custom, without much success. Then *qama-*

zani had been incorporated into the efforts to gain provincehood. As the 10th of Muharram approached in 1994, Ayatollah Khamenei, in a series of talks and fatwas, called the practice illicit, but in addition to the reasons usually given by the ulama he pointed out that these rituals projected a bad image of Iran and its religion abroad. Based on these rulings, the Ministry of the Interior outlawed *qama-zani*.⁹⁷ Immediately, the imam *jum'ca* of Ardabil, who also doubles as the local representative of Ayatollah Khamenei, sent him a letter to assure him that the people of his city would follow Khamenei's orders. Khamenei wrote back, asking the people of Ardabil to desist from mourning Imam Husain in a way that would bring ridicule over religion.⁹⁸ It is as if the government, having done the Ardabilis a favor, now asked for one in return. When provincehood for Qazvin was being discussed in Parliament, opponents of the bill asked rhetorically what provincehood had done for Ardabil. The minister of the interior replied that, whereas 9,000 men had participated in *qama-zani* in previous years, according to government information, in 1994 they had obeyed Khamenei's strict orders to abstain from the practice.⁹⁹

CONCLUSION

I have deliberately adopted a narrative style to recount the sequence of events that changed the status of Ardabil, as one of my aims has been to provide insight into the political process of Iran. This is not to underestimate the impact of exogenous factors. It is legitimate to ask whether the Iranian government would have responded to the Ardabilis' long-standing desire for provincehood had the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan not become independent.¹⁰⁰ However, this episode also yields important insight into contemporary Iranian society and politics.

First, there is ethnicity in contemporary Iran. The ethnic fact is openly acknowledged in Iran, and the central government is more willing than the previous regime to allow the expression of cultural particularism.¹⁰¹ In the case of the Azerbaijanis, this policy is aided by the fact that they are very well integrated in the Iranian polity. As mentioned earlier, Ardabil is the cradle of the modern Iranian state, and its founder is buried there. The people of Ardabil and surrounding areas participated enthusiastically and voluntarily in the war effort and sacrificed their lives in large numbers, which is the best indicator of their attachment to Iran: one does not die for a country one does not consider one's own. At the more elite level, the very fact that a former head of the judiciary, the current speaker of the Assembly of Experts, and Iran's highest-ranking soldier were all from the area of Ardabil, not to speak of the Azerbaijani origins of Iran's supreme leader, show how well Azerbaijanis are represented at the top of the state hierarchy and that they are indeed part of Iran's *Staatsvolk*. This is particularly true of the clergy, whose Azerbaijani members are at ease speaking their mother tongue in public;¹⁰² at Friday congregational prayers in Azerbaijan, one of the sermons is given in Persian, the other in Azeri. This outlook is in stark contrast to the Jacobin attitudes of the Pahlavi monarchy, and derives naturally from the clergy's need to be understood by their flock. If we recall that in revolutionary France the eradication of minority languages attempted by the Jacobins after 1794 aimed at countering the clergy's influence in the provinces,¹⁰³ we have a striking confirmation of Amir Farman Farma's insight that the 1979 revolution was revolutionary and counterrevolutionary at the same time.¹⁰⁴

Fortunately for Iran, then, the Pahlavi shahs' attempt to define Iranian nationhood in purely Persian terms has not taken an exclusive hold of the popular imagination. The reason is twofold. First, the old state tradition of Iran had accustomed its people to living together. Second, the role of Shi'ism must be underlined in cementing ties between Azerbaijanis and Persians in Iran. As Bryan Turner has pointed out, the role of religion in the development of nation-states has not been sufficiently appreciated. Some nation-states are in fact "nation-church-states." Iran fits that model.¹⁰⁵ By the same token, the secularization of Iranian society, observable even in Ardabil, might weaken this last bond, while the creation of an independent Azerbaijani state to the north of Iran might in the long run provide an alternative to the first bond. The only way to avoid the destabilizing effects of such trends is for the Iranian government not to repress Azerbaijani culture in Iran and to cultivate close relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan to make it less likely that the Baku government support ethnic entrepreneurs who wish to emphasize what separates Azerbaijanis and Persians rather than what unites them.¹⁰⁶ Iranians must find a concept of nationality that is neither religious nor linguistic, which means that it must be based on history and the legal equality of all citizens. But it is precisely the state of law (*Rechtsstaat*) that is missing in Iran.

Second, Iran confirms the pattern that wars often put pressure on states to be more responsive to citizens.¹⁰⁷ The Iran–Iraq War was a citizens' war. For much of the duration of the war, young men volunteered to fight at the front, and many nonbelligerents were proud to send victuals to feed "their" troops. After demobilization, these soldiers and their relatives understandably feel that, having made great sacrifices for their country, they should now be able to count on the state.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, when demands are formulated, the tone is respectful but not deferential. It is to some extent the populism of the Iranian regime that encourages such demands. Poorer parts of the country are not called "poor" (*faqir*) but "deprived" (*mahrūm*). Implicit in this grammatical construction is that someone is responsible for the deprivation—that is, that the inhabitants of these poorer areas are victims of human agency, not of fate. This leads them to make demands on the state to repair past wrongs rather than to beg for charity. When Rafsanjani said in his speech that "yesterday's warriors" were "today's producers," he recognized the legacy of the war. Discontented and unemployed war veterans have always been a source of political instability.

Third, we may see a genuine civil society emerging. Discussions of civil society in the Middle East often concentrate on associations formed by secular people, mostly intellectuals,¹⁰⁹ and portray Islamism as inherently hostile to civil society.¹¹⁰ However, such a view is inadequate, as associations emanating from religious life can fruitfully occupy the space between the individual and the state.¹¹¹ The case of Ardabil illustrates this. The Commission for the Pursuit of the Problems of the District of Ardabil, the Board of Trustees of the Mosque of the Ardabilis in Tehran, and the Board of Trustees of the Benevolent Loan Society of Ardabilis in Tehran all grew out of the people's religious subculture, yet in many ways they fit the model of civil society. They are associations that were formed by citizens independently of the state, and in at least some of them people of varying political persuasions worked together to advance a cause dear to them.

Fourth, Iran's political system is not a monolithic dictatorship. That the government placed security forces at sensitive points in Ardabil before the parliamentary

vote shows that it was not assured of a favorable outcome, and the events of Qazvin show how right the government was to fear the wrath of its disappointed citizens. Iran is governed by an authoritarian regime that permits limited pluralism, in which the government is responsive but not accountable to the people.¹¹² However, the system is not adequately institutionalized. When the presidency presents hospitals with CCUs paid for by that office, and the supreme political-religious leader promises funds out of his office's budget for development projects during a tour of a province, this proves the existence of personalistic patronage networks outside the institutional channels of government. With stagnating oil income, strict limits are placed on government largesse. It would seem that in the future, as in the past, the people of Ardabil would do well to rely above all on their own ingenuity and commercial acumen.

NOTES

Author's note: I thank Abbas Amanat, Vodud Aqamalizadeh, Ali Banuazizi, Touraj Daryaei, Reza Jafari, Nikki R. Keddie, Afshin Matin-asgari, Nader Nezam-Mafi, Augustus Richard Norton, Said Saffari, S. Kazem Sajjadpour, Ali-Asghar Schirazi, A. Reza Sheikholeslami, Majid Tafreshi, and three anonymous reviewers for their help and suggestions. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Kavous S. Emami, but for whose passion for the outdoors I should not have embarked on the trip to Azerbaijan; to the administrators of the Islamic Azad University of Ardabil, who graciously hosted me in their city in the summer of 1993; and to St Antony's College, Oxford, which provided an ideal setting for research and writing.

¹On the importance of local politics, see Joel S. Migdal, "The State in Society: An Approach to Struggles of Domination," in *State Power and Social Force: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, ed. Joel S. Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²For interesting studies on the capital city, see *Téhéran: Capitale bicentenaire*, ed. Chahryar Adle and Bernard Hourcade (Paris and Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1992).

³See Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), chap. 1.

⁴Kaveh Ehsani, "Islam, Modernity, and National Identity," *Middle East Insight* 11, 5 (July–August 1995): 49.

⁵Vahid F. Nowshirvani and Patrick Clawson, "The State and Social Equity in Postrevolutionary Iran," in *The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, ed. Myron Weiner and Ali Banuazizi (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

⁶Hooshang Amirahmadi and Farhad Atash, "Dynamics of Provincial Development and Disparity in Iran, 1956–1984," *Third World Planning Review* 9 (1987); Hooshang Amirahmadi, "The State and Territorial Social Justice in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 13 (1989); and Ahmad Sharbatoghli, *Urbanization and Regional Disparities in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991), chap. 7.

⁷See Ehsani, "Islam, Modernity, and National Identity"; and Bernard Hourcade, "Ethnic, nation et citadinité en Iran," in *Le Fait ethnique en Iran et en Afghanistan*, ed. Jean-Pierre Digard (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1988).

⁸A recent edition of early Iranian recordings includes a short speech by this shah, in which his accent is noticeable.

⁹See Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and Autonomy in Iran after the Second World War* (London: British Academic Press, 1993), 53–61. It should be pointed out, however, that this repression was at no point as severe as it was at times in Turkey: the *speaking* of languages other than the official one was never outlawed in Iran, and the languages of the Christian minorities (Armenians and Chaldaeo-Assyrians) were even taught in their schools.

¹⁰The notion of a nation as an imagined community is taken from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

¹¹"Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Middle East Journal* 34 (Spring 1980): 190.

¹²This is reflected, for instance, in official textbooks, which now speak of the "ethnic groups" (*aqvām*) of Iran. See Nouchine Yavari-d'Hellencourt, "Ethnies et ethnicité dans les manuels scolaires iraniens,"

in *Le Fait ethnique*. The corollary of this recognition is, as might be expected in a religiously defined state, that non-Muslims now face more institutionalized discrimination than before the revolution.

¹³For a discussion of the Turkic element in Iran, see Louis Bazin, "Les turcophones d'Iran: aperçus ethno-linguistiques," and Xavier de Planhol, "Le fait turc en Iran: quelques jalons," in *Le Fait ethnique*.

¹⁴This view has antecedents in the Soviet period. See D. B. Nissman, *The Soviet Union and Iranian Azerbaijan: The Use of Nationalism for Political Penetration* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987). For a discussion of the different national trajectories of Azerbaijanis on both sides of the border, see S. Enders Wimbush, "Divided Azerbaijan: Nation Building, Assimilation, and Mobilization Between Three States," in *Soviet Asian Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. William O. McCagg, Jr., and Brian D. Silver (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979).

¹⁵See W. J. M. Mackenzie, "Peripheries and Nationbuilding: The Case of Scotland," in *Mobilization, Center-Periphery Structures, and Nation-Building: A Volume in Commemoration of Stein Rokkan*, ed. Per Torsvik (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1982), 158–60; and Juan Linz, "Peripheries within the Periphery?" in *ibid.*, which discusses the Basque case.

¹⁶G. Demorgny, *Les réformes et l'enseignement administratif en Perse* (Tehran: Pharos, 1913), 60–61, as quoted in L. Bouvat, "La réorganisation de l'administration persane," *Revue du Monde Musulman* 22 (March 1913): 277–78. In today's Iran, twelve out of twenty-six provinces bear the name of their capital.

¹⁷On this period in Ardabil's history, see Monika Gronke, *Derwische im Vorhof der Macht: Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte Nordwestirans im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993).

¹⁸On Ardabil under the Safavids, see A. H. Morton, "The Ardabil Shrine in the Reign of Shah Tahmasp I," *Iran* 12 (1974); Margaret Medley, "Islam, Chinese Porcelain and Ardabil," *Iran* 13 (1975); and Bert Fragner, "Ardabil zwischen Sultan and Shah. Zehn Urkunden Shah Tahmasp II," *Turcica* 6 (1975).

¹⁹Because of the Islamic Republic's antimonarchical ideology, however, Ardabilis cannot fully put this fact into the service of their local pride.

²⁰For the history of the city, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Ardabil," and Bābā Šafarī, *Ardabil dar guzargāh-i tārikh* (Ardabil: Islamic Azad University Press, 1991). For a glimpse of Ardabil in late Qajar times, see Staatsrat v. Hahn, "Die Stadt Ardebil einst und jetzt," *Asien* 10 (October 1910).

²¹On the Ottoman nexus, see Anja Pistor-Hatam, *Iran und die Reformbewegung im osmanischen Reich: Persische Staatsmänner, Reisende und Oppositionelle unter dem Einfluß der Tanzimat* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1992), and *Les Iraniens d'Istanbul*, ed. Thierry Zarcone and Fariba Zarinbaf-Shahr (Tehran: Institut Français de Recherches en Iran and Istanbul: Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes, 1993).

²²Ritual fervor in Ardabil is attested to as early as 1634, when a diplomatic mission led by the Duke of Holstein observed it. See Adam Olearius, *Vermehrte Neue Beschreibung der Muscovitischen und Persischen Reyse*, ed. Dieter Lohmeier (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1971, reprint of 1656 edition), book 4, chap. 23, 454–58.

²³An excellent ethnography of Muharram ceremonies in Ardabil is Asadullāh An'āmzādih, "Ta'ziya va ta'ziyakhāni dar shahristān-i Ardabil" (B.A. thesis, Tehran University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Cooperatives, 1976).

²⁴See Werner Ende, "The Flagellations of Muharram and the Shi'ite 'Ulamā'," *Der Islam* 55 (1978).

²⁵Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

²⁶On the history of administrative divisions in Iran, see Kāzīm Vadi'i, "Idāra va taqsimāt-i kishvari-i Īrān," *Barrisihā-i tārikhi* 4 (Summer 1969), and "Taqsimāt-i kishvari," *Dāyirat al-Ma'ārif-i Fārsi* (Tehran: Franklin, 1966).

²⁷Shaul Bakhash, "Center-Periphery Relations in Nineteenth-Century Iran," *Iranian Studies* 14 (Winter-Spring 1981): 31. See also G. Demorgny, *Essai sur l'administration de la Perse* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1913), 43–75.

²⁸This nomenclature is almost identical to that used in the Ottoman Empire. See Norman Itzkowitz, *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 41–42.

²⁹Such as the Ardalans of Kurdistan, the Khozimeh-Alams of the vilayat of Qa'enan, part of the ayalat of Khorasan, and the Khaz'als of Muhammara. On these three provinces, see, respectively, B. Nikitine, "Les valis d'Ardelan," *Revue du Monde Musulman* 49 (1922); Piruz Mojtahedzadeh, "Sair-i takāmul-i marzhā-i khāvari-i Īrān: Naqsh-i ḥukūmat-i Khuzaima dar Qā'īnāt va Sīstān," *Rahāvard* 9, 35 (Spring 1373/1994); and Mostapha Ansari, "The History of Khuzistan: 1878–1925: A Study in Provincial Autonomy and Change" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1974).

³⁰For details, see Bakhsh, "Center–Periphery Relations."

³¹Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1961), 60.

³²See Bruno Rémond and Jacques Blanc, *Les Collectivités locales* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques and Dalloz, 1989).

³³Today, the word *ayālat* denotes the states of federations, and *vilāyat* is colloquially used to refer to the area of one's origin outside the capital, much as the word *province* is used in France. Interestingly, in Turkey *vilayet* survived to our day as the term used for the basic territorial unit.

³⁴W. Hardy Wickwar, "Pattern and Problems of Local Administration in the Middle East," *Middle East Journal* 12 (Summer 1958): 250–51.

³⁵Rika Gyselen, *La Géographie administrative de l'Empire Sassanide* (Paris: Groupe pour l'Etude de la Civilisation du Moyen Orient, 1989), 38. See also Michael G. Morony, "Continuity and Change in the Administrative Geography of Late Sasanian and Early Islamic al-ʿIrāq," *Iran* 20 (1982). As a suffix meaning "place of," *istān* has had a worldwide career—to wit, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and even South Africa's now defunct "bantustans."

³⁶In addition, the borders were in many cases drawn without any respect for traditional linkages. For example, the desert city of Kashan, south of Tehran, was placed in the Second Province alongside Mazandaran, whereas Arak, also south of the capital, became an exclave of the First Province, essentially Gilan. Both Mazandaran and Gilan are Caspian provinces. The Jacobin logic of this is similar to that of a never-implemented French plan to divide France into *départements*, each shaped like a square with a side length of 72 kilometers. See Rémond and Blanc, *Collectivités*, 72.

³⁷See Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*. The text of the agreement is on pp. 185–89.

³⁸Although this may or may not have been the case, it bears repeating that the division of Azerbaijan predates the autonomist interlude and goes back to a time when autonomism was not an issue.

³⁹It is important to keep this in mind, given the temptation to interpret the creation of Ardabil Province as nothing but an attempt to divide and rule the Azerbaijanis.

⁴⁰For a case study illustrating this trend in the case of Khorasan, see Ghulāmriżā Sāqib Ḥusainpūr, "Taḥqīmāt-i kishvari," *Tahqiqāt-i juḡhrāfiyāʿi* 3, 1 (Summer 1988). A similar movement can be observed in Turkey, where the number of provinces began to rise in early Ottoman times and continued after the advent of the republic.

⁴¹Astara, on the Caspian sea and Iran's border town with Russia, is only 70 kilometers from Ardabil and has traditionally been its outlet to the sea. With Astara transferred to Gilan, the latter now encompasses all of Iran's northwestern coastal plain. The date for this transfer is given as 1960 in *Dāyirat al-Maʿārif-i Fārsī* (s.v. "Āstārā") and as 1963 in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (s.v. "Astara"). This disagreement is a typical example of the general confusion and uncertainty that surrounded the administrative status of lesser towns in Iran throughout the Pahlavi period.

⁴²*Tamāshā-i zindigī*, nos. 1–2 (Farvardīn-Urdibihisht 1372 [Spring 1993]): 26–27, 84 (hereafter TZ).

⁴³Farrokh Zamani Ashtiani, *Die Provinz Ostazarbayegan: Studie zu einem raumplanerischen Leitbild aus geographischer Sicht* (Bern: Arbeitsgemeinschaft Geographica Bernensia, 1979), 98. This book is in both German and English.

⁴⁴For instance, when the rich Moghan Plain was developed for agribusiness in the 1970s, it was connected by a good road to Tabriz but not to Ardabil, to which it is closer.

⁴⁵Sharbatoghlie, *Urbanization and Regional Disparities*, 124, 134.

⁴⁶The information is taken from the statistical yearbooks for the provinces of East Azerbaijan and Ardabil for the years 1993–94. Although Iranian statistics are not necessarily trustworthy, they can be used for comparative purposes.

⁴⁷See Riżā Pir-ʿAbdulmalikī, "Gilihā va dilgīrihā pāyān girift," TZ, 100.

⁴⁸*Rūznāmih-i rasmi: mużākirāt-i jalasa-i ʿalāni-i majlis-i shūrā-i islāmī*, session 69, no. 13963, 14 January 1993, 31.

⁴⁹*Majmūʿa-i qavānīn-i sāl-i 1362* (Tehran: Shirkat-i saḥāmi-i rūznāmih-i rasmi-i jumhūri-i islāmī-i Irān, 1984), 170.

⁵⁰That the two cities where the Safavids began and ended should take such a prominent part in the war may or may not be a coincidence.

⁵¹Personal communication from a former volunteer.

⁵²For a discussion of the uses of the Karbala paradigm in the Iran–Iraq War, see Haggay Ram, *Myth and Mobilization in Revolutionary Iran: The Use of the Friday Congregational Sermon* (Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1994), 206–22.

⁵³*Bahār-i Āzarbāijān* (hereafter *BA*), 23 September 1992, 8.

⁵⁴*BA*, 20 February 1993, 2; *TZ*, 41–47.

⁵⁵This list is given in this order in *BA*, 22 December 1992, 8.

⁵⁶It is a sign of the paucity of services in Ardabil that there is no printing press capable of producing the newspaper in the city. The paper is published in Tehran and sent to Ardabil. Articles are in Persian, but the penultimate page, reserved for poetry, contains Azerbaijani poems as well as Persian poems.

⁵⁷In a local history of Ardabil published in 1992, the author mentions that the shah and his consort were also received enthusiastically by the people of Ardabil as late as the summer of 1976; Bābā Šafarī, *Ardabil*, 3:146–48.

⁵⁸*Hāshimī, Hāshimī, turā ba rūḥ-i Imām* (or *qasam ba rūḥ-i rahbar*) *Ardabil ustān shavad*.

⁵⁹*TZ*, 46.

⁶⁰*Kaihān*, 5 October 1991, 2.

⁶¹Quoted in *BA*, 23 October 1992, 8.

⁶²The text is reproduced in *ibid.*, 21 April 1992, 8.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 21 April 1992, 1, 2.

⁶⁴On these elections, see David Menashri, “The Domestic Power Struggle and the Fourth Iranian Majles Elections,” *Orient* 33, 3 (September 1992); and Farzin Sarabi, “The Post-Khomeini Era in Iran: The Elections of the Fourth Islamic Majles,” *Middle East Journal* 48, 1 (Winter 1994).

⁶⁵It is difficult to say whether even within the limited choice offered citizens in Iranian elections these three were the top vote-getters. In an enigmatic article rife with allusions that are difficult to decipher, *Bahār-i Āzarbāijān*, 7 September 1992, 1–3, hinted at rigging.

⁶⁶*BA*, 22 May 1992, 1, 8.

⁶⁷*BA*, 6 June 1992, 2.

⁶⁸Private communication.

⁶⁹A founding father of the Islamic Republic and for many years head of Iran’s judiciary, he had been eliminated from power in the course of the factional struggles that followed Khomeini’s death in 1989.

⁷⁰A native of Meshginshahr, a city near Ardabil, he is the speaker of the Assembly of Experts that chooses Iran’s top political-religious leader.

⁷¹He had been chief of staff of the armed forces and Iran’s highest-ranking officer. On General Zahirnezhad, see *Les cahiers de l’Orient*, 5 (1987): 250.

⁷²For details, see *BA*, 7 July 1992, 2; and *ibid.*, 7 September 1992, 8.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 23 August 1992, 1.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 23 July 1992, 1. This was confirmed by my local informants.

⁷⁵In Azerbaijani: *Bīzah irād adinīn, khānasī virān ulsūn*.

⁷⁶*BA*, 23 July 1992, 1.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 7 August 1992, 8. Ardabil has one state and two private universities. See *TZ*, 38–41, 68.

⁷⁹*BA*, 23 September 1992, 8.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 8 October 1992, 8.

⁸¹Apparently Ayatollah Khamenei himself intervened to prevent the division of his home province, Khorasan; see the speech by Ali-Mohammad Gharibani during the debate around the first reading of the bill on provincehood: *Rūznāma-i rasmī*, 12 January 1993, 28. Another rumor I heard in Tehran was that the reason a second province in Khorasan was not created was that no agreement could be reached as to its capital.

⁸²“*Ardabil ustān uldi, rūḥ-i imām shād uldī*”; “*Khāmīna² i zindabād, Rafsanjāni pāyanda bād*”; “*Hāshimī Hāshimī, tashakkur tashakkur*”; “*Ardabil ustān shuda, Irān gulistān shuda*.” The first chant is in Azerbaijani; the others are in Persian.

⁸³*BA*, 23 October 1992, 8.

⁸⁴For text, see *ibid.*, 7 November 1992, 4.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 22 November 1992, 2.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 8 December 1992, 8.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 22 December 1992, 1. See also *TZ*, 48–50.

⁸⁸*Rūznāmih-i rasmī*, 12 January 1993, 21–32.

⁸⁹He confused the word *miāni* with *miānīn*.

⁹⁰*Rūznāmih-i rasmī: muḏākirāt-i jalasa-i alāni-i majlis-i shūrā-i islāmī*, session 98, no. 14052, 11 April 1993.

⁹¹See Seyed Kazem Sajjadpour, "Iran, the Caucasus, the Central Asia," in *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and its Borderlands*, ed. Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁹²At this point, death threats had been received by the Armenians of Tabriz, but the situation was defused when the Armenian religious leadership in Tehran issued a statement in support of the Iranian government and condemned the ongoing Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan.

⁹³However, on 29 July 1993 the imam jum'ca of Ardabil, Ayatollah Moravvej, was named Khomeini's representative in that city: *BA*, 7 August 1993, 3.

⁹⁴*Risālat*, 1 August 1994, 5, and *ibid.*, 4 August 1994, 6.

⁹⁵The Iranian press did not report on the riots, except for a series of articles titled "From Los Angeles to Qazvin" by Abbas Abdi, editor in chief of *Salām*, in which he criticized the government for encouraging more coverage of the riots in Los Angeles than on the issue of Qazvin. See *Salām*, 13–16 August 1994.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 6 August 1994, 2.

⁹⁷See *Risālat*, 12 June 1994, 4; *ibid.*, 13 June 1994, 2.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 18 June 1994, 2.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 4 August 1994, 6. *Qama-zanī* is still practiced in Ardabil, but in more private settings. In May 1996, tourists went from Tehran to watch the ritual.

¹⁰⁰On the other hand, one cannot be sure, as in politics we cannot set up experiments. Perhaps the mobilization and organization of Ardabilis might have yielded the desired result even without the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

¹⁰¹On the day that provincehood for Qazvin was debated in parliament, the deputy for Bukan, a Kurdish city in West Azerbaijan, called on the government to increase Kurdish programming on radio and television, to keep its promise to found an academy for Kurdish language and culture, and, for good measure, to make Bukan and surrounding areas a province. See *Risālat*, 4 July 1994, 6.

¹⁰²When the provincehood of Ardabil was celebrated in Tehran, the deputy for Meshginshahr, a cleric, was the only one to speak in Azerbaijani. He also wrote an Azeri poem for the occasion: *BA*, 21 January 1993, 7.

¹⁰³David A. Bell, "Lingua Populi, Lingua Dei: Language, Religion, and the Origins of French Revolutionary Nationalism," *American Historical Review* 100 (December 1995).

¹⁰⁴Amir Farman Farma, "A Comparative Study of Counter-Revolutionary Mass Movements during the French, Mexican, and Russian Revolutions with Contemporary Application" (Unpublished D.Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1990).

¹⁰⁵Bryan S. Turner, "Religion and State-Formation: A Commentary on Recent Debates," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 (September 1988): 330.

¹⁰⁶For a glimpse of official anti-Persian attitudes in the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, see David Nissman, "The Origin and Development of the Literature of 'Longing' in Azerbaijan," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 8 (1984).

¹⁰⁷In Great Britain, for instance, the end of World War I brought advances for the trade-union movement as well as for women's suffrage. See Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: The Bodley Head, 1965), chaps. 2, 3.

¹⁰⁸A prime example of this is the veterans' sanatorium constructed in Ardabil on the initiative of a wheelchair-bound veteran who had been injured during the liberation of Khorramshahr, and who personally lobbied city, provincial, and state officials for funds: *TZ*, 66–67.

¹⁰⁹For the case of Iran, see Eric Rouleau, "La République islamique d'Iran confrontée à la société civile," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 1995, 6–7.

¹¹⁰See, for instance, S. N. Eisenstadt, "The Jacobin Component of Fundamentalist Movements," *Contention* 5 (Spring 1996): 159.

¹¹¹See, for instance, Diane Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters in Cairo* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹¹²This is discussed in H. E. Chehabi, "The Political Regime of the Islamic Republic in Comparative Perspective," in *The Middle East in a New World Order: The Imperative of a Holistic Approach*, ed. Bahman Baktiari, Scott Harrop, and Mohsen Milani (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, forthcoming).