Rethinking National Narratives in the Age of Global History; Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh and the Iranian Connection

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The beginning of the 20th century was an eventful time for three neighboring imperial powers as the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906, and the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 interrupted the centuries-old monarchic rule of the tsars, the sultans and the shahs. Revolutionary movements quickly put an end to the imperial rule of the Romanovs, the Qajars, and the Ottomans, and started the process in which the modern Russian, Iranian, and Turkish nation-states were born. Muslims in the Caucasus were in the middle of all these events due to their geographical location and also their political, confessional, and linguistic ties with all three countries. Many Caucasian Muslim intellectuals actively participated in the revolutionary movements and acted as brokers of ideas across borders between imperial domains.

After its annexation from the Qajar State by the treaties of Gulistan in 1813 and Turkmanchay in 1828, the South Caucasus became a contested borderland, a buffer zone, between Qajar State, the Russian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. Their location at the borderland of three major powers enabled Muslim intellectuals, the majority of whom were Turkic-speaking, to have a sound grasp of Farsi, Turkish, and Russian, and thus to have the ability to directly engage with the developments in Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia. Caucasian Muslims accounted for a significant part of the

Russian population and had strong confessional and linguistic ties with both the Ottoman lands and the Qajar State. Speaking different languages, subscribing to different denominations, and spread all over the Russian Imperial domain, Muslims were also large in numbers. According to Robert Crews, the number of Muslims in Russia was more than the total number of Muslims under the rule of the Ottoman sultan.[1]

As a result of a geographical proximity and cultural similarity with Qajar State, many Caucasian intellectuals were involved in the Constitutional Revolution in Iran and were concerned about the developments in their neighbor to the south. Among the major Caucasian figures that participated in the triplet revolutions, one particular example stands out. Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh, one of the founders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918, was a prominent revolutionary in Iran and was an important figure in the Constitutional Movement there in the early years of the 20th century. Yet there are not many scholarly works that specifically focus on his role in the Iranian politics; Only a few historical works, such as Abrahamian's famous *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, mention his name and devote a few paragraphs to Rasulzadeh's activities in Iran, while he is completely absent from major historical works written in Farsi.

Despite the tangible presence of Rasulzadeh and other Caucasian Muslim intellectuals in the formation of modern Iran, their absence from modern histories of Iran has remained unexamined for decades. But why is Rasulzadeh left out of Iranian history while he is a much-discussed intellectual in Turkey and Azerbaijan? What methodological biases cause this negligence and what are the new theoretical frameworks, if any, that could shed more light on Rasulzadeh's Iranian connection? Furthermore, what benefits could there be in inspecting the life of Rasulzadeh within new theoretical frameworks and how will our views of Rasulzadeh and many other Caucasian Muslim intellectuals be changed as a result?

Considering the gap in historical studies, this article aims to discuss these issues in three parts. The first part of the article is devoted to the difficulties one could face in studying the life of Rasulzadeh and similar figures. The second part will be more of a survey of new theoretical and methodological contributions that could provide an alternative and more nuanced view on Rasulzadeh. Finally, in the third section, Rasulzadeh's major contributions to the formation of modern Iran will be discussed.

1. Difficulties Envisaged

There are several obstacles in studying the life of intellectuals that were present in more than one territory and contributed to more than one national movement. Many Caucasian Muslim intellectuals fall into this category since they were concerned with developments in the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Qajar State and contributed to the formation of political movements in these triplet imperial domains. However, the result of almost a year of reading the available literature in English, Farsi, and Azerbaijani Turkish made it more clear that not only Rasulzadeh, but many of his contemporary intellectuals, such as Mirza Alakbar Sabir and Jalil Mammadguluzadeh are also absent in histories of modern Iran. I believe, there are number of explanations for this absence: methodological nationalism, nationalizing languages, and the national historiography of Iran.

a. Methodological nationalism

One of the major difficulties of studying figures that were politically active in multiple imperial domains is the phenomenon known in the humanities and social sciences as "methodological nationalism." Methodological nationalism has been a common practice among scholars in historical studies and it refers to a conceptual setting in which nation-states are taken as the organic units of historical analysis. Andreas

Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, in an article on methodological nationalism, evaluated the impact of nationalism and nationalist writings in shaping the social sciences and humanities. The authors outline the main problems that methodological nationalism causes: ignoring role of nationalism in the production of knowledge, the naturalization of nation-states in scholarly works, and territorial limitations that limit scholars.[2] All of the abovementioned problems are relevant in historical studies as well, but the most important consequence of methodological nationalism in history writing is reflecting the territorial limitation of national boundaries in studying the past.

b. Nationalizing languages

Another important outcome of the "national" understanding of history is to claim languages as national assets and national treasures. Such an approach to languages makes them territorially bound entities that are at the core of a national consciousness. The most tangible result of nationalizing languages in history writing is the inclusion and exclusion of languages as "national" and "non-national" dichotomies and thus inclusion or exclusion of them in historical research. Examples of this phenomenon can be frequently seen in in nation-states: Turkish is claimed by Turkey, Farsi is an object of national pride of Iran, and Azerbaijani is the core of national consciousness in Azerbaijan.

From a historical perspective however, this is a complex problem since it leads to the elimination and exclusion of a wide range of sources in languages that are considered "foreign" and "non-national" elements. Turkic languages have been absent in writings on the formation of modern Iran since they fall under non-Iranian elements. The neighboring nation-states have followed the same path, leading to a situation where national histories in Azerbaijan and Turkey are written with insufficient direct references to Farsi and especially

Arabic sources. Until very recently, these were “foreign” elements which needed to be purified by state institutions put in charge of purifying “national languages” from foreign words and replacing them with more national versions: *Türk Dil Kurumu* in Turkey, *Farhangestane Zabane Farsi* in Iran were, and still are, government-funded organizations that have the duty to protect the national language.

Nationalization of languages results in many territorial misconceptions that cause confrontation between many national narratives. These misconceptions are often tied to our spatial understanding of the past since languages are often bound to a certain territory. The outcome of limiting languages in national narratives has been to alter the fluidity of languages as complex social and cultural entities. Often historians of the region fall into a loop of depicting national continuity through a national language and ignore linguistic developments outside of national territories. Thus, it often surprises scholars to hear that the first Turkish newspaper, *Vakayi Misriyye,* was published in Cairo in 1828 in today’s Egypt, the first Farsi newspaper, *Akhtar*, was published in Istanbul in today’s Turkey in 1876, and the first modern school book in Azerbaijani Turkish, *Vatan Dili*, was neither published in Tabriz or Baku but in Tbilisi, today’s Georgia, in 1889.

c. National historiography of Iran

The consequences of methodological nationalism and considering languages as national assets become more evident in national histories. National histories have been the dominant tradition in history writing. The rise of nation-states heavily influenced history writing and resulted in projecting the nation as a continuous historical entity. Thomas Baker discusses the rise of national historiographies as traditions that “sought to document and thereby conjure a culturally or politically powerful nascent national consciousness from a welter of memories, myths, traditions, and established

facts."[3] Being no exception, national Iranian historiography formed in the first decades of the 20th century based on the idea of the nation-state and projected national consciousness onto history. National history writing in Iran, with Persian ethnocentrism as its core value, promoted the idea of the Aryan Race. As a result, Iran as a nation-state, projected as an ancient and sacred territory, preserved a cultural and linguistic unity into the past. The development of such discourses in historiography in a multiethnic and multicultural country like Iran, however, was possible only through the marginalization of non-Persian histories and non-Farsi historical sources.

The absence of trans-border connection in Iran is a byproduct of Iranian nationalism during the Pahlavi rule. National historiography during the Pahlavi dynasty was dominated by secular nationalist narratives defending the newly built Iranian nation-state as an ancient entity. Thus, an archaic and primordial understanding of the Iranian nation was in a constant struggle to unite all the inhabitants of the Iranian Plateau based on linguistic unity and often racial unity. The history of Iran is primarily discussed in the pre-Islamic context of the ancient civilizations that emerged from the Iranian Plateau. The most notable example of these civilizations, which quickly found a central location in Pahlavi historiography after merging with the Aryan Race Theory, started with the mass migration of Aryan people from the steppes to the Iranian Plateau, eventually leading to the establishment of the Achaemenid dynasty (550-330 BC).

Pahlavi history writing, however, dismissed three crucial elements that fundamentally shaped Iranian history and took a hostile position towards them as "invader" cultures. The first is the expansion of Islam into these lands; the second is the mass migration of Turkic tribes starting from the tenth century onwards; and the third is the arrival of the Mongols in the Iranian Plateau during the thirteenth century. With

such a narrative, Azerbaijan was defined as a peripheral part of Iranian history since most of its significance comes after the Islamic conquest, the migration of the Turkic peoples, and the Mongol invasion.

During the reign of Reza Shah, apart from Farsi, which was declared as the official language of the country, all the major languages spoken in Iran were widely suppressed and publication in these languages was forbidden.[4] In Azerbaijan, where the majority of the population spoke (Azerbaijani) Turkish, such strict regulations had devastating consequences. A majority of the locals from the lower and middle classes faced difficulties in learning the new national language due to the lack of educational infrastructure in cities and especially in rural areas. Before the state enforcement of Farsi as the national language, Azerbaijan had a long tradition of being a major center for the development of Farsi literature. However, that did not mean that everyone knew Farsi—the use of Farsi was mostly limited to bureaucrats, ruling dynasties, and poets. The everyday language of people in the region remained Azerbaijani Turkish or *Turki* as people in Tabriz, Ardabil, and the rest of Azerbaijan would call it even today.

Defining a racially homogenous nation was a big challenge for Reza Shah and his administration due to the linguistic diversity of Iran. Many Iranians spoke languages that did not have much to do with the official language. Arabic and Turkic languages, along with many others, were widely spoken in Iran. Turkic languages were, and the majority of them still are, spoken among the Qashqai people in Southern Iran, Khalaji is spoken among the locals of central Iran, and Turkmen is spoken on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. For centuries, Azerbaijanis have used (Azerbaijani) Turkish as the language of everyday communication, the arts, and literature. However, since Turkic people were seen as invaders, their languages had to be replaced with Farsi. Reza Shah’s administration followed

a policy of denying the existence of Turkic people in Iran and sought for alternative narratives to support its discriminatory policies.

Many of the national narratives in the Middle East and Central Asia, whether in Iran or Turkey or the post-Soviet space, are archaist and primordial approaches heavily influenced by the nationalist trends widespread in the region. Mahmoud Afshar, a prominent historian of Iran, despite his enormous contribution to the field of Iranian studies, provided a good example of such a narrative. In October 1927 in the periodical *Ayandeh* Afshar wrote an article on "the question of nationality and the national unity of Iran" discussing the obstacles facing the new Iranian nation-state under Reza Shah.[5] Afshar proposed a rather controversial definition of being Iranian: "In Iran our national unity is based on the unity of race (*nejad*), common religion, social life, and united history for thousands of years (…) Today when we talk about the Iranian nationality, we mean all people from the Iranian race that live in Iran or abroad. This of course excludes Armenians and Jews and foreigners residing in Iran."[6] The racial definition proposed by Afshar was and still is very dominant in writing the history of the Iranian Plateau.

A national history in Iran also takes a hostile position towards the abovementioned three crucial elements that fundamentally shaped Iranian history. Reza Zia-Ebrahimi's article[7] on nationalist historiography in Iran shows numerous examples of how the early twentieth century Iranian nationalists despised Arabs, Turks, and specifically Mongols because of the damage they caused to Iran and the Farsi language. Such an understanding of history results in multiple problems, one of which is the perceived dichotomy of uncivilized Turks whose language is incapable of competing with Farsi as the language of civilized, sedentary Iran.

Here figures like Rasulzadeh come into the picture and fit

into what has been discussed so far. First, since most of his writings were in Turkish, a supposedly foreign language for Iran, many nationalist historians of Iran would dismiss them. Second, along with contributions to Iranian politics, Rasulzadeh contributed to the formation of Azerbaijani nationalism and Turkist political thought. These are three forms of nationalism that evolved as hostile political ideas and considered each other serious threats. Thus, Rasulzadeh's later activities made Iranian nationalists unhappy and consequently nationalist historians left him out of their historical research. Furthermore, the territorial limitation that national narratives impose on history writing neglects cross-border entanglement, "connectedness" as global historians would describe it, putting Rasulzadeh and other Caucasians out of the picture.

I believe that in order to discover more about intellectuals like Rasulzadeh specifically and the role of Caucasian Muslims in the formation of modern Iran, it is necessary to go beyond competing national narratives, not to discredit or demonize nationalism as a social phenomenon but rather to focus on how a "national" understanding of history alters our understanding of the past. How can we go beyond national narratives and what approaches could help us better understand the lives of people like Rasulzadeh? I believe that a few theoretical discussions will pave the way for this research.

2. Going beyond national narratives; new theories and methodologies

A combination of newly developed theoretical discussions along with few methodological considerations are particularly useful to discover more about the life of contested intellectuals like Rasulzadeh. If we want to get rid of the "national container," we should be looking to the new developments in history writing, as they are more concerned with revealing

exchange, entanglement, and connectedness rather than national histories that generally aim to prove a national continuity. Comparative history, imperial studies, and borderland theories are among the new approaches in history writing that enable global historians to go beyond national narratives.

a. Comparative history

Comparative analysis has been an inevitable part of scientific research for many years. Scholars from different disciplines of the social sciences, deliberately or unintentionally, have used comparison in their research. Being no exception, historians have also used comparison to better communicate with their audience, convey their arguments and make their account more explanatory. An earlier example of a historian who dealt extensively with the use of comparison in history is Marc Bloch. Being one of the founders of the *Annales School*, Bloch was among the first historians who incorporated the notion of comparison from other fields of social science into history. Bloch first argues that the comparative method is a necessity for historical inquiries and then defines what he means by comparison. According to Bloch, a historical comparison is a process in which historians "choose one or several social situations, two or more phenomena that appear at first sight to offer certain analogies between them; then to trace their line of evolution and as far as possible explain them." [8] In other words, comparison is a useful tool which facilitates the explanation of historical events.

Comparative analysis of history enables historians to de-familiarize the familiar and bring new insight to their research by asking better questions. Jürgen Kocka, a distinguished social historian, in his analysis of the German *Sonderweg* underlines the role of comparison in better understanding historical issues.[9] He uses the term "asymmetrical comparison" and defines it as a comparative perspective that allows historians to focus on specific

historical issues in a country.[10] In addition, Kocka believes that "asymmetric comparison is often the only way to open oneself to comparison and it can lead to questions that cannot otherwise be posed and to answers that cannot otherwise be given."[11] Furthermore, using comparison in history facilitates the work of historians in detecting similarities and differences in their study. Charles Tilly, as a sociologist who has dealt extensively with the use of comparison in history writing, also believes that comparison enables us to "track down uniformities and variations" in different accounts.[12]

Comparison is also one of the main components of *global history*. A global understanding of history stresses the importance of cross-cultural exchanges, questions eurocentrism, and moves beyond the restriction of national historiographies.[13] The comparative perspective is one of the approaches deployed by global historians in their research. Patrick O'Brien, a well-known global historian, argues that comparison is one of the "plural methodologies" that global history incorporates in order to rethink human history. Furthermore, O'Brien emphasized the widespread use of comparison in a global understanding of history: "comparisons and connections have dominated the flow of publications that have marked the restoration of global history to university and school curricula in humanities and the social sciences."[14] But not all global historians agree with O'Brien. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, a history professor from UCLA, prefers to use "connected history" as opposed to "comparative histories." In order to do global history, Subrahmanyam emphasizes the notion of connectedness in history and encourages scholars to go beyond their area of expertise, advising to "break out of our specializations and compare notes perhaps even to reorient our research agendas and tune our violins."[15]

In combination with comparative methods, a few theoretical

considerations will also facilitate this research. Taking Caucasian intellectuals, like Rasulzadeh, out of national containers requires other theoretical frameworks that can explain why they were so much involved in different imperial spaces, and also shed light on trans-border and trans-imperial connections and entanglements. One of the recent and yet evolving developments in history writing is imperial studies. Contrary to the one flag and one language essence of nations, imperial spaces were political entities that were legally, socially, religiously, and linguistically more pluralistic. But what is more relevant to this research is the notion of legal pluralism, which will be the grounds for explaining why Caucasian Muslims could be actively present in three imperial spaces and three major revolutions

b. Imperial spaces, legal pluralism

Empires as complex sociopolitical entities have become popular topics for historians in recent decades. Since the imperial turn, historians have devoted considerable amount of literature to imperial enterprises and made enormous contributions in understanding imperial dynamics. Yet, one of the main challenges for scholars in studying empires is to understand the flexibility of the legal systems of empires and make sense of their bureaucratic structures. In this paper, I intend to discuss how recent scholarship in borderland studies has changed our understanding of law and violence in empires.

Empires were political entities with legal pluralism. Despite the classical perception of empires as political entities with rigid legal systems, recent studies talk about the multiplicity of legal practices. Empires tolerated legal pluralism in their territories according to their needs and interests. Lauren Benton, in her groundbreaking book *A Search for Sovereignty; Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900,* describes the imperial legal landscape as "a fabric that was full of holes."[16] Benton argues that empires implemented various interpretation of law in different parts

of their dominion. Furthermore, empires were also "evolving structures with multiple faces"[17] that incorporated asymmetrical and contradictory religious laws. Mustafa Tuna's monograph on Volga-Ural Muslims in the Russian Empire serves as good example of such asymmetry in the imperial legal landscape. The Russian Empire, as an Orthodox power, integrated its Muslim population into the political system by empowering local *ulema* and establishing the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly.[18] Tuna furthermore emphasizes that the *ulema* functioned as trans-imperial subjects who became part of the state apparatus and facilitated better administration and monitoring systems. Except in small-scale administrative issues, the Russian administration did not interfere in the affairs of its Muslim subjects in the Volga-Ural region and when it did, it happened through mediation with local *ulema.*[19]

The legal landscape of empires was also diverse in terms of space and geography. The intertwined relations between law and geography become more significant especially in studying European colonial powers. Furthermore, the expansion of European colonial networks created a competition over spatial boundaries to assert hegemony on the oceans, seas, and rivers, as well as in the mountains. Benton calls these geographies "anomalous legal zones"[20] in which legal practices could vary from other parts of empires. In order to further explain her analysis, Benton uses the term "legal pasturing" to refer to the practice of sovereignty of empires on the oceans, seas and rivers as contested geographies in inter-imperial rivalries. Thus, empires could make alliances with pirates and support them in order to have control over "corridors" to protect and maximize their interests. Consequently, such complexity made the notion of sovereignty a very liquid term at sea: "Ships sailed with multiple passes and multiple flags and they chose to display the colors and present the passes selectively and according to the ports, ships or courts with which they were engaged."[21] Such a complex system required empires to regulate

maritime legal systems which can be considered early forms of international law. Legal orders in imperial spaces were very similar in their borderlands where two or more powers tried to assert their power through legal posturing.

One of the key concepts developed by scholars in imperial studies is the notion of borderland. Borderland refers to a space where two or more political entities overlap within a certain geography. Assertion of political power in the borderland often makes these geographies an arena of continuous struggle over political and social legitimacy for the imperial cores and thus a place where multiple identities could emerge and co-exist. Borderland studies is relevant to this study since it provides a sound theoretical discussion on how and why Rasulzadeh and other Caucasians were so active in revolutionary movements in three imperial domains.

c. Borderland studies, Borderland people and intellectuals

Among the many possible approaches to borderlands, Mary Louise Pratt's theory of "contact zones," which she describes as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other," is indeed a useful way to conceptualize the diversity within borderlands, but its elastic definition leaves one wondering what does not qualify as a contact zone.[22] Encounters between different peoples, cultures, and religions do not only occur at the margins of empires or in far-flung colonies: they also take place in imperial metropoles and other core regions that are far from homogeneous spaces. Pratt is right, however, to argue that identity formation is a two-way process in colonial contexts. In other words, while local inhabitants selectively borrow aspects of the colonizer's culture (a phenomenon Pratt refers to as "transculturation") to articulate a communal identity, the colonizing power also gains greater self-awareness through its interactions with native populations that it seeks to civilize. Experiences in the periphery, then, often have a profound impact on the center's conception of itself, as

Pratt's discussion of European travel writing clearly demonstrates.

The borderlands in between the Ottomans and the Qajars and the Russians were a geography of constant change and contact where three imperial powers interacted the most with each other. Such a massive and complex borderland, a "contact zone," was a geography of confessional diversity and heterodoxy. Cemal Kafadar, in his book *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State,* describes in detail the heterodoxy of religious practices and confessional diversity. He believes that people of the borderland were, to an extent, tolerant toward each other: "Nor were Muslims and Christians constantly engaged, in their actions or thoughts, in a struggle against each other."[23]

Borderlands are also contested territories. Imperial entities competed to assert their sovereignty in the borderlands. The struggle for sovereignty between the Ottomans, the Qajars, and the Romanovs turned their borderlands into an arena of tension. Markus Dressler describes this tension as "primarily a conflict about political supremacy in Eastern Anatolia."[24] Such a description of the borderlands also fits the definition of "shatter zones." Shatter zones, according to Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz, are disputed geographies far from the imperial capital in which multiple identities emerge and empires try to integrate and absorb these identities.[25] Being no exception, the Ottoman-Qajar-Romanov borderlands witnessed clashes of different confessional and sectarian identities both with the imperials centers and amongst each other.

Here borderland intellectuals come onto the scene: people that are highly mobile, multilingual, and familiar with political currents in different imperial domains and thus able to quickly react to political developments in different imperial domains. Borderland intellectuals like Rasulzadeh were nodes in the large network of revolutionary intellectuals through

which the idea of revolution and change was transmitted into the Qajar State. For instance, Haydar Khan Amoghlu was the key figure in forming the Iranian Communist Party, Rasulzadeh was the key figure of the Democrat Party of Iran, and Mirza Alakbar Sabir was a leading figure in the evolution of contemporary literature in Iran. Being aware of the new developments in historiography and some alternatives on how to read the life of intellectuals like Rasulzadeh, the following pages are devoted to his Iranian connection and some sources that can shed light on his activities in Iran.

3. Rasulzadeh and engagement in Iranian politics

Political developments in Iran and the future of the country were always matters of concern for Rasulzadeh from the early phases of his political career. He lived in Iran for few years and he was well-known to most of the political figures in Iran during the late Qajar era. Rasulzadeh's Iranian connection can be discussed in three chronological fragments. The first fragment of his life was the time prior to 1909 when he was a reporter on the Constitutional Movement. In the second phase he was present in Iran as the chief editor of the most important Iranian newspaper of the time, *Iran-e-Nov* (*The New Iran*). Finally, the third fragment, is the time after his exile from Iran and when he published his works in exile.

a. Reporting the Constitutional Movement

Rasulzadeh's interest in Iranian affairs started early in his life as his youth coincided with what later on became known as the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. From the beginning of the constitutional struggle in 1906, Rasulzadeh closely followed the events and started to author opinion pieces and reports in various newspapers in the Caucasus. In this part of his life, his engagement in Iranian politics was through numerous reports he published in various newspapers. The first article in which he dealt with the Constitutional Movement in

Iran was an article under the title of *İranda Hürriyyət* (*Freedom in Iran*) which was published in the Baku-based *Irshad* newspaper. In this long article, Rasulzadeh cannot hide his empathy with the constitutionalists in Iran and praises the uprisings and supports the revolutionaries with an important reference to Iranian history: "Our Iranian brothers, let anyone who has doubts about your future have them! I don't doubt it: The history of your predecessors also knew such hard times. Kavehs faced injustice by Zahhaks,[26] and as Nadirs who faced Afghan invasions,[27] this time, under a despotism it's time for a national and public union! Long live freedom in Iran! Long live the constitution!"[28] Rasulzadeh's reference to Iranian history and empathy with the constitutionalists in Iran in this article are milestones in his engagement with the Qajar State and its social and political developments.

Excited by the telegrams about the victories of the revolutionaries he received from Tabriz, Tehran and Rasht, Rasulzadeh found the inspiration to author additional articles a few months after his first piece. In 1906, Rasulzadeh wrote four more articles on Iran and the developments in the country and openly expressed his support of the constitutionalists. He also directly attacked the Qajars as despots who had consciously kept the country in darkness and prevented the masses from making progress. In an article under the title of *Revolution in Iran* published on July 21, 1906, Rasulzadeh shows his mastery of Farsi by starting with a poem[29] from the famous poet, Saadi of Shiraz, expressing his deep concerns with the future of the upheavals and his hope that when he wrote his next article Iran would have a constitution. He saluted the Iranian freedom fighters: "Some time ago, we wrote a piece called *Freedom in Iran*. Thank God that the Iranian freedom fighters have not let us down, and they are the reason we have now written one called *Revolution in Iran*. Hopefully, in time, we will be able to write a piece called 'The Constitution in Iran'… Long live the Iranian freedom

fighters!”[30]

Within a few weeks, as Rasulzadeh hoped, Muzaffar al-Din Shah signed the first draft of the constitution and established a parliament by decree on 5 August 1906. The spirit of revolution, however, did not last long as the life of Muzaffar al-Din Shah came to end in January of 1907. With his death, his son Muhammad Ali became the next shah of the Qajar Dynasty and set strict policies against the revolution. Within a year, Muhammad Ali Shah was able to suppress the revolution all over the Qajar State and enforce his despotic rule. It was thought that the suppression of the revolution would be completed by the siege of Tabriz on 20 June 1908 as the forces of Shah started to regain control over Tabriz. The siege of Tabriz, however, was the turning point both for the Shah and his opposition since an unexpected resistance movement from the city stopped the Shah’s forces. Rasulzadeh’s direct involvement with the resistance movement also starts from this period.

Nasiman Yagublu, a prominent researcher of this period, in his book *The Encyclopedia of Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh*, discusses the details of Rasulzadeh’s presence in Iran and his activities in the cities of Rasht and Tabriz as the special reporter of the Baku-based *Taraqqi* newspaper. According to Yagublu, Rasulzadeh was physically present and assisted the revolutionaries especially in the city of Tabriz,[31] where he had been in contact with the leaders of the resistance. In a special report published by *Taraqqi*, Rasulzadeh describes what he had witnessed during the siege of the city: “Here, you will rarely see people who have not participated in the war, from the elderly to children, everyone grabbed a gun and joined the resistance. You will barely see people who have not been wounded by bullets.”[32]

After the victory of the revolutionaries over the forces of Muhammad Ali Shah, in the summer of 1909, the victorious

revolutionaries gradually took over the country and marched towards Tehran to form a national government. Yagublu believes that Rasulzadeh was among the revolutionary forces who marched to Tehran.[33] It is not very clear what exactly Rasulzadeh's relations were with the various forces within the revolutionary vanguard during this brief period, however, shortly after the Triumph of Tehran on July 13, 1909, he aligned with intellectuals like Seyed Hasan Taghizade and participated in the activities of the Democrat Party.

Rasulzadeh's activities in Tehran intensified as he became the editor-in-chief and supervised the editorial committee of *Iran-e-Nov*. For a young, twenty-five-year-old revolutionary, who already had years of experience in journalism and active political life, it was a great success and also an important opportunity. Ervand Abrahamian, in his famous work *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, introduces Rasulzadeh as the founder of *Iran-e-Nov* and argues that the majority of the content of the newspaper was written by him. Abrahamian also introduces the newspaper as the official bulletin and party organ of the Democrat Party, emphasizing its large audience and impact on Iranian society.[34]

b. Iran-e-Nov, Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh's legacy in Iran

One of the major sources for the study of Rasulzadeh's political life is the *Iran-e-Nov* newspaper. The newspaper started its life in 1909 in Tehran as the official bulletin of the Iran Democrat Party and was published for two years. The newspaper is the first professionally edited and printed periodical that was on newsstands on a regular basis. Many well-known figures of Iran of 1909 authored articles for the newspaper and made it an important bulletin for the revolutionaries. The director of the newspaper was Abulziya Shabistari and it was financed by an Armenian merchant named Joseph Basil. The editor-in-chief of the newspaper was Rasulzadeh, until he was expelled from Iran. Despite its

important role in laying the ideological foundation of modern Iran, *Iran-e-Nov* is a neglected source in writing the history of the Constitutional Revolution.

Rasulzadeh, one of the founding members of the Democrat Party and the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, was the editor-in-chief of *Iran-e-Nov* from the beginning and most of the pieces written outlining the doctrine of the paper and its ideological path were written either by him or under his supervision. Rasulzadeh's own pieces were written under the pen name of *Nish* (*Sting*) in a number of issues. He kept this position in the newspaper for the years he was in Tehran engaged in Iranian politics. However, his interest in the political affairs of the Qajar State had started several years earlier.

Rasulzadeh's awareness of the sociopolitical dynamics of Qajar State and world politics is evident throughout the newspaper, as he wrote multiple editorials and articles on these issues. But most importantly, his literary skills in Farsi were also unique. The very first article he wrote in *Iran-e-Nov* was a long piece on world politics titled *Spain and Morocco, War and Revolution*, signed with the abbreviation of his name, M. Amin. In this article, he extensively dealt with the ongoing aggression of the Spanish forces against the Moroccans. Criticizing the Spanish aggression as an unjustifiable, unequal war on a defenseless nation, Rasulzadeh also complained about a lack of awareness among Iranians about such important global events.[35]

After the first issue of *Iran-e-Nov*, Rasulzadeh regularly published short and long pieces, usually twice a week, analyzing current events all around the world. In the following issues of the newspaper, under the titles of *Current World Affairs*, *The Situation in Sweden*, *Muhammad Ali Shah*, and *Truth or Dream*, Rasulzadeh dealt with a number of current world issues and the crisis after the victory of the Constitutional Revolution. Surprisingly, however, after these

editorial pieces, Rasulzadeh did not publish any material with his name, but most probably continued to contribute to the content of the newspaper as the editor-in-chief. After his initials were absent from the newspaper for a few months, he came back on the scene with the pen name *Nish* and wrote a two and half pages long article in the 61th issue of the newspaper in late 1909.

On November 8, 1909, Rasulzadeh devoted a two and half pages long article of *Iran-e-Nov* to criticism of what he believed to be a "shallow, misleading interpretation of the situation in Iran" written by an author using the pseudonym *Safvat Beg*[36] in another periodicals. The tone of the article and its length shows that Safvat Beg made Rasulzadeh furious because Safvat Beg allegedly suspected the Democrat Party of being puppets of the English government. Rejecting the accusations from the author he was attacking, Rasulzadeh defended his respected party and argued that they were the voice of local Iranians: "Even though we reject what Safvat has said, we also do not say that our path is completely correct and we have no problems. We have a lot of problems and shortcomings but at least we view our internal affairs from a local perspective and in view of Iranian realities!"[37]

A few weeks later, on the day of the re-opening of the national congress,[38] *Iran-e-Nov* was on newsstands with a special edition celebrating this historical day. Rasulzadeh published a long piece on the importance of the parliament and indicated this day as a sign of what he described as an "era of reformation in the Orient." What makes the article important, however, is the last paragraph where he sets five priorities for the agenda of the parliament members. This is particularly important since some of his party members also were among those elected to parliament. According to Rasulzadeh, the new parliament should solve financial difficulties, create an organized army, deport Russian troops, revise cultural policies, and reform the state bureaucracy by

employing foreign experts.[39]


ایران نو

رجب ۱۳۲۷

افتتاح دارالشورای ملی ایران

تجدد حقیقی وطن عزیز ما

روز تاریخی

Figure 1: Iran-e-Nov 15 Nov 1909

Rasulzadeh's fame in Iran continued for the next year as *Iran-e-Nov* became a well-established newspaper and a reference point for other periodicals and publications inside and outside the country. These activities disturbed many people outside and inside of Iran and eventually forced him to leave the country in May 1911. In his last piece published in *Iran-e-Nov*, Rasulzadeh wrote his letter of resignation and apologized both to the director of the newspaper and its readership and indicated that he "had to" take a break from his journalism and leave Iran.[40] The main reason for his resignation is believed to be pressure from Russian authorities on the Iranian government. Even though this marks the end of Rasulzadeh's presence in Iran as the chief editor of the most prestigious newspaper in the country, it did not put an end to his engagement with Iranian politics.

c. The years of exile, revising the past

Spending two years in Iran made Rasulzadeh a better journalist, provided him an opportunity to interact with many well-known political figures and more importantly, enabled him

to gain first-hand experience of Iranian society. What he wrote after his exile from Iran reflects an intimate knowledge of Iran. This is a period where he mostly theorizes his experiences of Iran and prefers to write longer and more opinion pieces rather than reports. Most of these works are gathered in a booklet by Yadigar Türkel which consists of two series of long pieces published in Ottoman periodicals *Türk Yurdu* and *Sebilülreşad*. Published between 1911 and 1912, in the first series Rasulzadeh evaluates the Turks of Iran and in the latter he writes a brief history of the Constitutional Revolution. Even though both of these series are unique pieces that include valuable details, they have not been inspected by historians of contemporary Iran.

In addition to the pieces published in the Ottoman press, Rasulzadeh authored a booklet around the same time that he left Iran. In this booklet, Rasulzadeh extensively deals with the establishment of the *Itidaliyyun* Party,[41] the moderates, and harshly criticizes their political attitude and party politics. For a very long time Rasulzadeh maintained good relations with the majority of his former colleagues and, among them, Seyyed Hasan Taghizade, a prominent figure in contemporary Iran, stands out. Taghizade was a Tabriz-born revolutionary whose long political career inside and outside Iran made him a leading figure in the formation of modern Iran. In his memoir, Taghizade mentions some interactions he had with Rasulzadeh as they were roommates in Istanbul and also met in Berlin and Moscow at different times. Taghizade described Rasulzadeh as an "Azerbaijani prophet" and a "Gandhi-like figure," indicating their good relations.[42]

4. Conclusion

National histories have been dominant in the historiographical tradition for almost a century. National histories take nation-states as units of analysis of the past and often

struggle to project national continuity. Intellectuals of the Muslim world are often the subjects of these struggles as different national narratives either make claim to them or disown them. The histories of Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan also struggle with this phenomenon and the many intellectuals that were active in multiple territories and contributed to the formation of these nations. As these national movements often evolved in hostility to each other, many of the intellectuals that simultaneously contributed to their formation are cherished in one national context and despised in the other.

Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh, with his life and political activities, is a perfect example of these intellectuals that respectively contributed to Iranian, Azerbaijani, and Turkish nationalism. Rasulzadeh is often cherished as a national hero in one context while he is absent in writing the modern history of Iran. This article was an attempt to show how figures like Rasulzadeh can be discussed in light of new developments in history writing. The first section of the article discussed the major problems of national historiographies and the misconceptions, limitations, and errors it causes in history writing. The second section discussed some of the recent theoretical and methodological alternatives, often products or by-products of global history, that enable historians to rethink the life of ıntellectuals like Rasulzadeh in an entangled context. Finally, the third section discusses some of Rasulzadeh’s contributions to the formation of new Iran throughout his political career that are often intentionally or unintentionally left out of Iranian history books. Hopefully, this article will be a contribution to the available literature and initiate further research on related topics.

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