

The Role of Identity and Ethnicity in Interaction between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Shiites Community of Russia

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Abstract

The number of Shiites in Russia is estimated from 3% percent (six hundred thousand people) of the country's Muslim population to about three million people (15%). So far, no comprehensive study has been done on the details of Shiites life and the quality of the Russian Shiites society. This paper's questions are: how do Shiites live in Russia, their central communities and organizations and what kind of relationship they have with the I.R. Iran. In this article, I deal with the quantity and the number of Shiites populations in Russia. I also mention how they enter the areas where they live. Then I will talk about the quality of life of Shiites in Moscow, especially their jobs and living conditions and their organizational groups. In the end, the type of relationship between Shiites and Russians and non-Shiites society and the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards them are discussed.

Keywords: Azerbaijanis, Iranian Foreign Policy, Iran, Shiites.

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Introduction

Historically, the late presence of Muslims in Russia dates back to the time of the Mongols (13th century AD). After the conquest of China, the Mongols entered the steppes of Russia. After defeating the Muslim nomadic tribes, they settled in Tatarstan in the 14th century and converted to Islam at the same time. With the capture of Moscow and the two centuries of Tatar rule in Russia, a page was turned in the history of Russia that the Russians and Slavs never forgot: the Mongol invasion and the capture of Moscow as the base of Orthodox Christianity by Muslim nations and the formation of a qualitative government for two centuries. After that, Islam entered the history of Russia and in the following centuries, Muslims, as the largest minority in Russia (especially after the Iran-Russia wars in the beginning of the 19th century and conquering of Caucasus and the annexation of the Muslim-populated areas of Central Asia to the Russian land) played an important role in the social structure of Russian state.

There are many studies of Muslim Russians, but few studies of their tribes, ethnic backgrounds, organizations, and factions. This is why this paper focuses on Russian Shiites.

The questions of this article are how Shiites in Russia live in their communities and central organizations and what kind of relationship they have with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

To answer these questions, I have first talked about the quantity and number of Shiites populations in Russia. Then I brought the theories related to identity, ethnicity and nationality to the Russian Shiites community. I have also mentioned how they enter the areas where they live. Then I talked about the quality of life of Shiites in Moscow, especially their jobs, living conditions, and organizational groups. In the end, the type of relationship between Shiites with Russian and non-Shiites society and the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards them have been discussed.

Shiites make up about 15% of the world's Muslims. In Russia, the followers of this religion are Azerbaijani, Lezgi, Dargin, Tat and some other ethnic groups whose exact number is not available. (Akhmetova, 2016) and (Antúnez, 2016).

Historically, large groups of the population of Dagestan and the banks of the Volga River, as well as most of the representatives of the Azerbaijani ethnicities who settled in Russia during the Soviet Union and after its collapse, are Shiites. A minority of Yazidi Kurds (Izadi), with about ten thousand people, should be added to this number. (Goli Zavareh, 1994: 179); (Yemlianova, 2009: 122).

According to different sources, 1.5-2 million Azerbaijanis are legally or illegally living in Russia as the most prominent Russian Shias community (Prazauskas, 2022: 4) and (Goble, 2010). Some other sources say the legal number is 600.000 (Malashenko, 2013) and (Rustamov, 2012). According to the World Assembly of Ahl al-Bayt, there are 165,000 Shiites in the whole of Russia, which means that less than one percent of Russian Muslims are Shiites. (www.ahl-ul-bayt.org, 2020). Iran's Cultural Attaché has announced that the approximate number of Shiites is 3% of the Muslim population. (Ebrahimi Turkman, 2008, 39-41) Russian Shiites sources have announced the number of Shiites to be around three million and they have probably taken the upper hand.

Azerbaijani sources have not announced the exact number of Azerbaijanis in Russia; because most of them live in Russia illegally. According to the preliminary results of the 2010 general census in Russia, 603.070 Azerbaijani lived in Russia, which has doubled since 1989 (335.9 thousand people) (Демоскоп, 2022). If temporary Azerbaijani immigrants are also considered, their total number will exceed two million people.

Theoretical Framework

The article looks at Shiites based on their ethnicity (being non-Russian and generally Azeri), their identity (Shiites and non-Russian cultural identity), and their relationship with the government (the Russian government and their view of Iran). Therefore, in the following, I have examined the theories of identity, ethnicity, and nationality as the cultural, local, and country format in which Russian Shiites live to use them to study the situation of Russian Shiites and their interaction with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Identity theories are divided into four categories: modernism, socialism (communalism, socialism, Marxism, and so on), post-

structuralism and postmodern and symbolic sociology (which uses post-structuralism to break down the cultural, symbolic, and semantic components of identity). These four approaches have four complementary attitudes towards identity. If we make the four general approaches smaller, three general approaches can be extracted from these approaches:

1. An approach that recognizes the eternal and immortal features of identity.
2. An approach that defines identity according to situational and case elements.
3. The approach in the middle of these two accepts both eternal and situational characteristics of identity and defines identity accordingly.

Three generations of identity theorists have presented these theories (four approaches and three attitudes):

The first generation of psychologists whose theories are individualistic and there are even some references to the theories of identity and political identity in their works.

The second generation were sociologists who wrote the social aspects of identity theories and contributed to the transition from individualism to collectivism. Just as political psychologists have emphasized the role of personality in forming identity and defining political identity, sociologists have emphasized the role of social and environmental factors.

The third generation is political science theorists who, by combining the above two theoretical categories, tried for the first time to go beyond the level of referring to the theory of political identity and enumerate the characteristics of political identity in the form of theories of political culture. Each of the three generations of political psychologists, sociologists, and political science thinkers presented their theories with a tendency toward one of the general approaches (modernism, post-structuralism/post-modernism, socialism, and symbolic sociology) and one of the general approaches of antiquity or objectivism was more prominent in his theories.

Suppose we want to comprehensively define a social group's identity (ethnic, national, religious, ritual, occupational, etc.). In that case, it should be based on the elements that define the identity, i.e., place (geography), religion, race, language, traditions, history, and

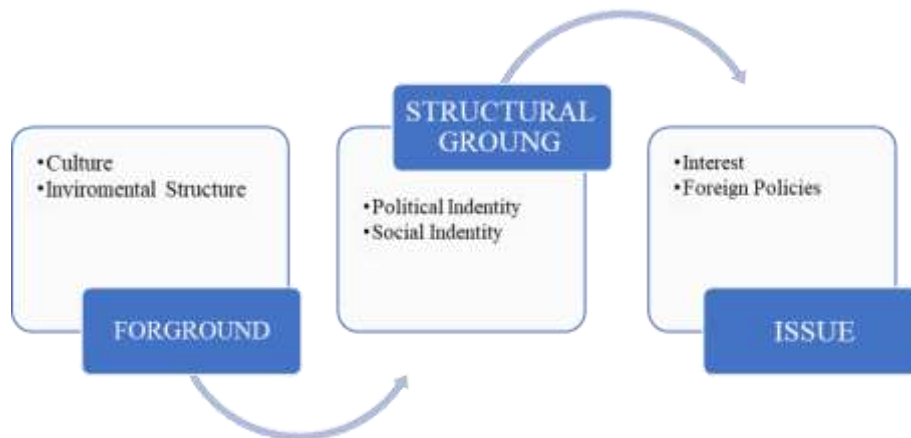
culture. Identity divides into individual and collective identities, so political identity is the type of person's relationship with the political system (government). What kind of image does a person have of the government, the political space, the role of himself and other members of the society (friends, family, and others) in the political society, and what are his political ideals. Geography and history have a previous and hereditary effect on building this identity. Political culture, social space, and political system impose the constitutional notions of time and place on these geographical-political inherited histories, and the person in the socio-political space and the process of social, cultural, and political socialization, the type of political identity (or identity cap) accepts and defines his active, semi-active or passive role. The economy and beliefs arising from culture and traditions affect a person's political ideals (Hosseyni, 2012: 88).

Identity, like all cultural elements, has a transpersonal existence, is dependent on the people who carry it, and this itself differentiates people and groups (us-them) from each other. Ethnic and national identities in multi-ethnic societies are both different individuals and groups and connect them. In contrast, ethnicity is an old phenomenon and nationality is a new phenomenon, and different nations have followed different paths to reach their national identity. It should be noted that the interested people manipulate the national and ethnic identities in some cases, such that these identities have a suitable theme with a specific benefit. Foreign interventions, in many cases with the aim of confronting ethnic identities with national identity, are of the type that pushes the definitions of identity to extremes or dilutes them (Yousefi and Asgharpour Masuleh, 2012: 5-9) and (Burton, 2012: 234-242)

In international relations, the influence of identity on foreign policy is one of the issues that constructivists pay attention. The perception and behavior of the government and violent internal fields, such as ethnic and religious challenges that have been formed in the process and historical course of state-building, are effective in the behavioral patterns of foreign policy and the interaction of the government with other governments and how to deal with regional security arrangements. Therefore, according to its identity principles, a government with particular behavior with a specific ethnic group

within its borders follows the same behavior with similar cases outside and at the regional level. In fact, it cannot be expected that following divergent behavior and imposition of a dominant identity discourse on ethnic-religious minorities inside and convergent behavior will occur with the following of that ethnic-religious group abroad. However, the opposite of this situation can be imagined if the approach of identity pluralism is adopted and the internal convergent approach is followed (Haqqanah, 2011: 85-86).

Identity formation in the theory of constructivism is a cultural-social process that affects the international system. Identities form the discourse processes that when one of them becomes paradigmatic, the atmosphere of dominant discourse(s) in the global system change and the ground is provided for the emergence of cultural-social wills under the guidance of superior powers (Moshirzadeh, 2013: Chapter 5) and (Wendt, 2014: 136 & 491). The elements of the international system are based on the theory of constructivism specified in the diagram below. Based on this, the identity is created and emerged from the society and has a cultural background that is used in the international system based on national interests and has its own impact.



In multi-ethnic societies, ethnicity is considered an element aligned with identity; among ethnic groups, identities come from ethnic foundations, and the subcultures of ethnic communities are derived from their ethnic identities. However, ethnocentrism and nationalism

are opposites. Ethnicism was criticized during the heyday of nation-states, but the rise of globalization strengthened it under the name of localization. Today, nationalities; are considered democratic if they respect the set of ethnic rights. Here, there is an interaction between ethnicity, nation, and state concepts, and countries' social policy is the result of these interactions. Usually, an ideology is the guide of their interaction space. (Burton, 2012: 99, 143, 217, 242) while in ethnic culture, symbolic interaction is the mainlink of cultural relations. In the government system, structures and institutions are the central focus of action. At the same time,national actions and relations are performed by resorting to functions, structures, cultural actions, symbols, and a set of ethnic, governmental, cultural,and institutional elements. Also, the role of elites, elite culture, and elite symbols have a prominent role (Melshevich, 2012: 209).

The History of the Shiites in Russia

The first and maybe old section of Shiites in the Caucasus and Russia is what an Iranian researcher calls "Mystical Shiites".In the sense that although they are not called Shia in name and outwardly, in terms of belief in the governorship of Imam Ali and the friendship of Ahlul-Bayt and even belief in the Ghadeer Khom incident, they should be called Shia because they inwardly believe in Shia's concepts. Like other Muslim sects in the Caucasus, these Shiites have been identified in the relatively closed groups of Qaderi or Naqshbandi Sufis (Miri, 2013: 52-53).

The second part is about Azerbaijani Shiites who immigrated to Russia during the time of Tsarist Russia, but this process gained wide dimensions during the Soviet era. Several stages of immigration can be identified during the Soviet era and after the collapse of the Soviet Union:

The first stage occurred in the years after the end of World War II, which was related to the settlement policy of Siberia and the Far East. This phase started in the late 1940s and early 1950s and included the extensive migration of Azerbaijan's oil industry experts to Western and Eastern Siberia during the 1960s. Many famous Azerbaijanis, such as Sabet Orujev, the Soviet Minister of Gas Industry from 1972-1981, and Farman Salmanov, the Soviet Minister of Geology and an

associate member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, were the founders of the oil industry of the Soviet Union and built the modern oil and gas infrastructure of Russia.

The second wave of immigration lasted from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. This phase of migration was mainly economic and irregular. Students and intellectuals traveled between Baku and Moscow. At the same time, a group of private employers came into existence. Although private employers were prohibited in the Soviet Union and caused criminal prosecution, the activity of the so-called shadow employers (owners of illegitimate workshops, currency brokers, wholesale and retail traders, flower trade activists, as well as managers who created parallel production structures) was an independent phenomenon within the framework of the country's planned economy. It was considered natural for Soviet society (Morgonev et al., 2019: 93-97).

Most of the Azerbaijanis who were not born in Russia, but managed to reach high positions in big business, science and art, had entered Russia during the Soviet era. Doctors, teachers, university professors, factory managers and big business people form the elite part of these immigrants. Azerbaijani's capital also has a significant presence in Russian banks. Russia is a point of attraction for active and talented Azerbaijanis. During the collapse of the Soviet Union, the following factors had a profound impact on the Azerbaijani population of Russia:

1. The severe economic crisis of the early 1990s in Azerbaijan;
2. Severing economic relations with the central and western regions of the Soviet Union;
3. Reduction of job opportunities;
4. The loss of nearly 20% of Azerbaijan's land, occupied by Armenians, became the basis for the appearance of many refugees (782 thousand people). For this reason, the migration expanded from Azerbaijan to Russia (IRAS, 2007).

Russian Shiites after the Collapse of the Soviet Union

In the era after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new wave of immigrants took place, which included two main groups. That is the residents of Baku, who mostly left the republic until the mid-1990s,

and the representatives of the agricultural sector of Azerbaijan. The last group faces the same problems of adapting to life in the big city that all rural immigrants have in the city. They usually have a lower level of education than the general urban population and also have to help their rural relatives.

Azerbaijanis who entered Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union are very different from the immigrants of the previous stages. In the framework of the research project "Socio-Ethnic Development of Greater Moscow" conducted by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the All-Russia Azerbaijani Congress, 47% of Azerbaijanis who have been living in Moscow for a long time have higher education. While this number among new immigrants did not exceed 25%, it is natural that their social status also differs. 48% of new immigrants are active in trade and services, and their income is not very high, while the number of Azerbaijani actors, writers, and painters is gradually decreasing (Mohedinev et.al, 2019: 30, 31, 94, 97).

A) Shiites Community of Moscow

The Muslim community of Moscow alone is estimated to be around 2 million (about 20 percent of the total) (Akhmetova, 2016). The exact number of Shiites in Moscow in recent years is not precise. According to the 1989 census, 20,727 Azerbaijanis, 2,434 Lezgis, and 1,292 Tats lived in Moscow. Because most Azerbaijanis are Shiites, based on the government's official statistics, on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, 20-24 thousand Shiites lived in Moscow. According to the same statistics, in 2000, the number of Shiites in Moscow reached eight hundred thousand people, while Shiites leaders estimated the number of Shiites in Moscow to be one million (Muhiadinev et.al, 2019: 52-53, 116-118). According to the statistics of the managers of Shia associations in Moscow, 90% of Muslims living in Moscow are Shia; because this ritual is prevalent among new Muslims (Karami, 2013: 150).

The Russian Shia community's management method is one factor that attracts Shiites. The high education of the Russian Shias, their flexibility in socio-political activities, and the high level of their beliefs in comparison with the Shiites of other nations, which is

evident and apparent, are also among the factors that attract Russians and new Muslims to the Shiites religion. Russian Shiites first formed an organization in Moscow called "Moscow Shiites Theological Center," which had a close relationship with Iranian Shiites. The Shiites Analysis and Coordination Center has made "acquainting a wide spectrum of different social classes of Russia with the scientific, philosophical schools and the cultural heritage of Shiites" as one of its goals. Both centers closely cooperate with official Shia organizations in the country and other parts of the world. The managers of the Moscovit Shiites associations maintain their extensive informational, cultural, ideological, legal-divine and educational connections with Iranian religious centers, including the "World Assembly of Ahlul-Bayt"(Ebrahimi Turkman, 2008: 39-41).

b) Shiites Community of St. Petersburg

Saint-Petersburg is the center of the everyday life of local groups of Muslim peoples and various regions of the Russian Empire and other countries. According to the US Ministry of Defense report, the number of Muslims in this city and its suburbs is 250,000 (Smith, 2006, 7).

It can be said that Iran was the first country to open its embassy by 1711 in St. Petersburg, then the capital of Russia. From 1892-1915, the embassy and consulate of Iran were managed by Mirza Mohammad Khan, the powerful ambassador of Iran, and his secretaries, Mirza Eshaq Khan, and Mirza Ali Akbar Khan. By 1832, there were twelve Iranian government employees in St. Petersburg. By 1869, their number reached twenty people (fifteen men and five women). This number increased to 107 people (a hundred men and seven women) by 1881, their number decreased to 56 people (40 men and 16 women) by 1897, and by 1919 the number of government employees increased to 260.

By 1841, the Shiites living in close groups in this city demanded a different place next to the Muslim cemetery (Novo-volkovski: Tatar cemetery) to bury their dead. Saint Petersburg authorities accepted this request. At the beginning of the 18th century, Iranian merchants lived near Troitski Square, considered the city's central square at that time.

Before Russia started its trade relations with Central Asia and China, Iran was considered the leading trading partner of Russia in the

East. These trade relations continued in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. After conquering the northern lands of Iran by the 18th century, Russia reached Central Asia, and government employees from the newly conquered lands of Russia came to Petersburg, including Azerbaijani Shiites. These Shiites also existed in military universities and among the soldiers. A Shia Muslim company was added to the Russian army in the Caucasus by 1839; by 1842, clerics also served in this company. Shiites living in Petersburg during this period were primarily students or merchants.

By the 19th century, most of the Shiites in Petersburg were Iranians. By 1869, their number reached fifty people (48 men and two women), some of whom declared their origin as Iranian and a few as Afghan during the census. The rapid industrial growth at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century caused the number of Azerbaijanis in St. Petersburg to increase. By the 19th century, the number of government representatives across the river also increased. (Ebrahimi Turkman, 2008: 129-131)

According to the 2010 census of all of Russia, St 'Petersburg's Muslim population is approximately 700,000 (out of a population of about 4.78 million) (Akhmetova, 2016). Most of Peterburgian Shias are Azerbaijanis who said they are less or more than 300.000 people (Kheyradinev et al., 2016: 48-49).

C) Dagestan Shiites community

Most of the Shiites of the Republic of Dagestan are considered survivors of Derbent Persians or Azeri or some Lezgi under the influence of Azerbaijan in Dagestan. Iranians, Shahsavans, and Taleshis are among other Shia ethnic groups (Akiner, 1988: 320). In addition to the ancient city of Derbent, several Shiites of Iranian descent also live in the city of "Vladikavkaz," the capital city of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, and has a large old mosque (Amir Ahmadian, 2007: 37). Several small Shia groups are also among the Dargins (Akiner, 1988: 162). They hold their rituals, the most prominent of which is the Muharram mourning ceremony. This ceremony will be held in "Buinask" in Derbent and "Magal" mosque. Muharram chaining ceremony is held in Azari villages, including "Jalgan (Dzhalgan)" (300 households) and "Arablinka (Arablinskoe)"

(200 households). "Miskindzha" is the only Lezgi village (200 households) where the ceremony is held. After these areas stood against the Soviet Union and hundreds of people who were martyred during the declaration of independence of Azerbaijan from the Soviet Union in 1990, this ceremony has a unique color and smell, and most people in South Dagestan/North Azerbaijan pay attention to it (Chenciner, 1997: 213).

Mosques

In Moscow, there are about six mosques and several prayer halls, three of which are Shiites (Smith, 2006: 2). These include "Memorial Mosque" and "Cathedral Mosque" that Yuri Luzhkov helped to build and expand; Historical Mosque; "Safar" prayer hall at "Domodedovo" airport; "Inam" and "Yardam" mosques at the religious education complex in "Otradnoye District (raion)" (northeast of Moscow), which was built in the late 1990s by the Tatar businessman "Ryashit Bayazitov". The Taj Al-Din Spiritual Administration (TsDUM) manages the "Domo Dedovo" prayer hall and the "Inam" and "Yardam" mosques; the Iranian embassy mosque on Navatorov Street; Afghan Mosque in Hotel Sevastopolrun by an Afghan business center (March 2009, p.89). Most of the worshipers of Shia mosques are Azerbaijani. Today, there are efforts to build Shiites mosques in other cities of Russia (Dannreuther and March, 2010: 90) and (Muhiadinev et.al, 2019: 150, 256& 610).

Russian Shia Organizations

In Russia, two organizations, "Central Administration of Muslim Clergy of Russia" headed by Mufti Talgat Tajuddin and "Council of Muftis of Russia" headed by Mufti Ravil Gainudtin, are in charge of managing the affairs of Muslims (Hosseyini, 2009). These two organizations work for Sunni Muslims and do not show much desire to cooperate with Shiites (Jafarev, 2008). In particular, Gainudtin's organization and he was accused of aligning with some Salafist and fundamentalist currents, primarily due to government propaganda against him. Due to its more tolerant approach, Tajuddin is closer to religious minorities, and, as mentioned, it is the preferred choice of non-Sunni Muslims. Together with the Muftis of the North Caucasus, who are united under the banner of the Cooperation Center of the Spiritual

Administrations of the North Caucasus, they have repeatedly refused to sign statements against Talgat Tajuddin. Gainudtin's organizations have written most of these statements (Hunter, et al., 2011: 115).

It cannot be said that the ritual confrontation between Shias and Sunnis, as in the Middle East, does not exist in Russia; the difference between Shia and Sunni in this geography is marginal and acceptable. The Sunni muftis of Russia do not deal with the Shiites' issues because of hatred, stubbornness, or fundamentalist beliefs. Instead, they are relatively careless to every other minority groups (Marechal and Zemni, 2013: 190-200). Since many neo-Muslims of Russian descent are Shiites, especially in Moscow, organizations of neo-Muslim Russians such as "The Straight Way (Pryamoy Put)" formed by Ali Polosin, a neo-Islam priest, and "organization National Muslim Russians" (National Organization of Russian Muslims (NORM)), have very moderate tendencies towards the world religions (eternal wisdom) (Engelhardt, 2005: 5). This trend ignores the minimal difference between Islamic religions and the difference between even monotheistic religions.

There are three kinds of Russian Shiites organizations. First, organizations near the Iranian state and its financial supports base their activities. The second organizations are Azerbaijani, established by Azerbaijanis or Azerbaijani state fellows. The third organizations are Russian fellows, which Russian Shias established:

1. Iranian Fellow Organizations

A. Governmental organizations: The critical organization of the first group is the Shia Muslim Association, established in 1996, called "Ahlul-Bayt" under the management of M. Gurbanov was established. "Sahibul Zaman" Association and "Fateme Zahra" Women's Association are two organizations affiliated with Ahlul-Bayt. These associations carry out social-religious and religious-intellectual activities in the capital of Russia (Lisnyansky, 2009). By 2007, the regional branch of this organization was established in the Caucasus under the name "Ahlul-Bayt Research Center" in the Autonomous Republic of Dagestan at Makhachkala, the capital. Research on Islamic issues, such as the religious approach to art, Islamic culture and history, Islamic economy, religious politics, and especially Islam

in Russia, is one of the priorities of this center. Also, implementing cultural-research programs, translating texts from Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and English into Russian, holding training courses, printing magazines and newspapers, setting up internet sites and libraries, and holding scientific-cultural competitions, are other activities of this center. The head of Ahlul-Bayt Center of Dagestan is Dr. Nouri Mohammadzadeh from Russia (Amir Ahmadian, 2007: 47-48). The cognitive-religious monthly *Kausar*, printed in one thousand copies, is published by the Dagestan Ahlul-Bayt Research Center with the support of the Islamic Studies Foundation in Moscow and is distributed in the Shiites religious centers of Dagestan, Chechnya, and Stavropol region. Also, many of these publications are sent to some schools and public libraries (Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, 2010) and (Всемирная ассамблея Ахль аль-Байт (мир им), Газета Кавказ, 2022).

There are other assemblies called Ahlul-Bayt. One of them is the "Cultural and National Centre of Ahlul-Bayt, for Azerbaijani Muslims in Saint Petersburg and some other parts of Russia (Kheyradinev et al., 2016: 50) and (Balci, 2018: 99).

B. Semi- governmental organizations: By 2004, "Famil Jafarev" formed the "Religious-Islamic Center of Shiites Muslims." He was born in the Republic of Azerbaijan and studied at Imam Khomeini college of Qom Seminary. In addition to establishing a religious center, a magazine, and an active website, he works as the head of the "Moscow Shiites Muslim Religious Organization". This organization carries out various religious activities, including "Islamic Enlightenment, "publishing the *Iman* newspaper, and updating the website www.al-shia.ru. According to the law of the Russian Federation, this organization has built its mosque, which provides education in the field of Shiites. This organization is the only officially registered Shiites institution (Jafarev, 2008).

2. Azerbaijan Republic Fellow (Non-Iranian) Organizations

A. In Russia, 150 Azerbaijani social organizations have been officially registered, of which 100-110 are active. Fifty Azerbaijani social organizations registered in Russia established the "Congress of Azerbaijanis of All Russia" by 2000. Heydar Aliyev, the former

president of Azerbaijan, participated in the first Congress held in 2000. The Congress includes more than seventy Azerbaijani social organizations, including regional branches in 58 regions of the Russian Federation. The aim of this social organization is to preserve and propagate the national traditions, language, and culture of Azerbaijan and fight for the rights of the Azerbaijani immigrant population (Abdullayeva, 2016).

The Congress tries to establish stable relations with the federal and regional authorities while forming the population of Azerbaijan living in Russia and helping the Azerbaijanis adapt to the situation in Russian society. The presidency of the Congress has close relations with the authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This Congress is the primary communication structure between the government officials of Baku and the Azerbaijanis living in Russia, which makes the Congress establish contact with the political and government figures of Russia and carry out news work in the mass media of Russia. Sometimes nationalist content is included in these media (World Azerbaijani Congress, 2022: Visions of Azerbaijan) and (Azərbaycan Respublikasının Diasporla İş Üzrə Dövlət Komitəsi, 2022).

B. Other organizations of Azerbaijanis living in Russia include the "National-Cultural Autonomy of Russian Azerbaijanis" and "Ojag" Association. The Congress of Azerbaijanis has branches in over seventy regions of Russia, and the Organization of Cultural Autonomy has opened offices in 24 regions. A group of big employers supports the Azerbaijani immigrant population. These people include Vagit Yusufovich Alekperov, Farhad Ahmadov, Israel Agalarov, Iskender Khalilov (former vice president of "Lukoil"), Telman Ismailov, and Elman Bayramov (IRAS, 2007) and (Starr and Cornell, 2014: 152-153) and (The activities of Diaspora, 2022) and (Muhiadinev, et.al, 2019: 32).

3. Russian Fellow Organizations

Maybe one important Russian fellow organization is the "Cooperation Center of North Caucasus Muslim Spiritual Authorities, "which is not a member of Sunni Muslim spiritual institutions but cooperates with them.

Allah Shakur Pashazadeh manages this center. He represents the interests of the Shiites of Dagestan and other republics (Hunter, 2011: 113).

Data Analyses by Theory

The ethnic nature of the interaction of the Muslim ethnic groups in Russia needs the Shiites' communication with other ethnic Muslims. For several reasons, ethnic ties are essential in people's communication in Russia. Muslims are in contrast with the Russian element and the dominant official culture because of the Islamic religion and culture, their non-Russian race and appearance, the conflicting history between Russians and Muslims/non-Russians, the fact that most Muslims are immigrants, and their lower financial and class positions. Other issues, such as government policies, the very traditional culture of Muslim areas that require them to observe specific customs and habits, and the cultural confrontations between Russian and non-Russian elements, are in a different situation from the official culture of Russia. Due to geographic, language, religion, and other cultural factors, Shiites have ethnic ties with their native ethnicities and have fewer ties with non-ethnic groups (Hosseyni, 2012).

On the other hand, many sources believe that the Russian state prefers to open Shias activities, because the state believes they are harmless, non-fundamentalist, avec adopting Russian state laws. Shias operate on the front of radicalistic Islam, especially Wahhabism and Salafism. So, Shias work freely in all Russian regions (Ahmadzadeh, 2020; Lisnyansky, 2009).

Culture is a central sign of foreign policy functions in today's societies, and in the Muslim society of Russia, identity is at the center of cultural discussions. Shia identity is considered one of the subsets of Islamic identity for the Shia community of Russia, and therefore, focusing on the surrounding signs of this identity allows the cultural and political policy-making apparatus to provide constructive and multi-faceted communication grounds concerning the infrastructure coordinates with the Russian Shias. So, this relationship is complementary to the relationship with the Russian Muslim community and the Russian society as a whole and does not have an

opposite or alternative state. In this case, foreign relations will be fundamentally contradictory and will be tense and harmful.

Because some of them are of Iranian origin and the other part of Azeri descent, which are in the cultural subgroup of Iranian Shia, the Russian Shia community has the capacity to build identities aligned with us. Still, the issue of ethnicity and the issue of international macro-identity should not be mentioned as constructivist. That is, the superior and successful identity is the one that should be in the subset of the international macro-identity and not face any of the macro-identity sets. The Islamic Republic of Iran tries to build an identity that is compatible and in line with the principles of Russian life and thought, giving the power of peaceful and dynamic existence to the Russian Shia community and cooperation with the resources of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Role of Ethnic Identity in the Interaction between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Shia Community

Iran's Middle Eastern foreign policy has little tendency to cover the news of non-Arab regions. Even in the cases where it takes policies in the regions, it has more of a political or religious aspect and pays less attention to ethnic communities. The lack of this structural-sociological view has led to less attention to constructive policies and attracting public opinion of Iran, and particular capitals for the Shia and similar sectors of Russian society, while these Shiites themselves do not interact with each other. They don't even have religious and social awareness. Also, the diversity and a small number of Russian Shia communities and their dissolution in a Sunni religious society and a Russian-Orthodox cultural society require policies that can gather maximum benefits for these groups.

Today, Iran's foreign policy tendencies in the Caucasus region and Russia are less ritualistic. It relies on macro commonalities in the form of cultural Iran. This issue provides a new basis for defining new identities and filling identity gaps. Relying on the Persian language and literature as the language of Shia, or the Cultural Attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran helps provide grounds for a shared cultural identity with a historical foundation.

Conclusion

The Muslim community of Russia in general and the Shiites community of this country in particular are a group of Turkic-speaking or Iranian-origin ethnic groups whose ethnic and identity foundations are the most critical factors in their sociology. Ethnicity is the central determining factor in the nature of Russian Shiites. Because most of them are Azeri and Caucasian, and therefore, they are different from other Muslim groups in Russia, including Tatars and Bashkirs (native Muslims of Russia), Dagestanis, Chechens, other Caucasians (non-indigenous Muslim peoples of Russia), Uzbeks, and other Muslim from Central Asia (immigrant Muslims of Russia).

Azeri immigrants, part of Lezgins and Dargins of Daghestan (Prazauskas, 2022: 5), Lacks and Tats are Shias. The difference between Russian Shias and other Russian Muslims is secondly in terms of identity: the identity of Shia Muslims differs from the identity of Christian and non-Christian Russians and Sunni Muslims. Of course, this difference in identity is a result of local traditions in which the Shia ethnicities have grown and developed.

The paper also discussed the attitude of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the Russian Shiites community and the actions of the responsible organizations there. It noted that the activity in the field of Russian Muslims is a cultural activity based on the idea of Great Iran. Using identity theories, I mentioned some tools about the function of Iranian-Islamic and Shia identity-oriented culture. Including the fact that cultural activity is a collaborative activity and cannot be aggressive toward minorities. In this context, using political tools and economic institutions complements cultural activities.

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