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Brenda Shaffer. *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002. xiii + 248 pp. $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-262-69277-9; $62.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-262-19477-8.

Reviewed by Camron Michael Amin (Department of History, University of Michigan–Dearborn)

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Over Borders, Daughters and Sons

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For those of us who locate our research agenda within the increasingly diverse enterprise of "Iranian Studies" (as I do), the most arresting revelation in Brenda Shaffer's book is that there is a reality in which the Safavids are a central element of Azerbaijani history and modern identity. It is surprising to hear that the term *qizilbash* held a martial romance for desperate Azerbaijani militiamen in Ngorno-Karabakh in the 1980s and 1990s, similar to the term *samurai* for post-Meiji Imperial Japanese troops.

In Iranian nationalist historiography, the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722) is problematic precisely because Turkish was spoken at court and because the thirteenth-century Safavid mystical order was only able to become a "royal house" with the aid of Turkish tribes known collectively as the *qizilbash* (and by marrying into the previous Turkish dynasty to rule in Iran, the Aq-Quyunlu). The Safavids were crucial in making Twelver Shiism a part of modern Iranian national identity and they did the same for the construction of modern Azerbaijani identity. For Iranians, the treaties of Gulestan (1813) and Turcomanchai (1828) severed northern Azerbaijan from an Iranian homeland. For Azebaijani nationalists, the Araz River is more akin to the DMZ in Korea or the Berlin Wall–dividing a once-united Azerbaijani polity. The division of Azerbaijan into Imperial Russian/Soviet/Russian Federal and Imperial Iranian/Islamic Republican spheres adds another layer of national tragedy, akin to the Kurdish experience. And that is just some of the food for thought in chapter 1.

Using a combination of press sources, interviews, and secondary research by Russian, Azerbaijani, and Iranian scholars, Shaffer's book devotes the bulk of its attention to the twentieth-century experience of Azerbaijanis on both sides of the Araz. At its best (as in the account of the fall of Ayatollah Shariatmadari in the early days of the Islamic Republic), Shaffer's narrative is a mix of compelling journalism and Rankean rigor. The complexity of the subject and the many trends in Azerbaijani political culture occasionally overwhelm Shaffer's ability to impose interpretive coherence, but that does not diminish the scholarly achievement here. Indeed, Shaffer's effort to forge a coherent modern history of the Azerbaijani people is especially impressive when one considers

the absence of certain sources: Iranian, Russian/Soviet, and Azerbaijani archival material and, as detailed in her appendix, precise demographic or socio-economic data on Azerbaijanis. Area specialists in all disciplines, policy researchers, students, and the general public will benefit from studying this work.

One interesting nugget (and fly in the ointment of Azerbaijani nationalist progress) is the cultural influence of the Turkish Republic on Azerbaijani culture through satellite TV, with Azerbaijanis adopting the Western Turkish *evet* instead of *bali* for "yes" (p. 164). Fans of John McWhorter's *The Power of Babel* will appreciate that the linguistic distinctiveness of Azerbaijani is changing, as all languages do. This inevitable process of change may undermine any grand projects to reconstitute Azerbaijani national unity as much as any of the geo-political pressures to preserve the political status quo. Furthermore, there remains the fact that a unified Azerbaijani state would be no less multi-ethnic (Kurds, Persians, Armenians) or multi-confessional than Iran, Iraq, or Turkey.

Perhaps the most important contributions of Shaffer's book are the many avenues it suggests for further research. For example, if the Safavids serve as an important part of modern Azerbaijani national myth-making, what about the Qajars (1797-1925), a former *qizilbash* tribe whose efforts to reconstruct Safavid domains led to wars with Russia and the treaties of 1813 and 1828? Are the Qajars imagined as "Iranian" by Azerbaijanis during the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1906 and the Khiyabani Revolt of 1920? Interesting (and ironic) if so, because the Qajars, even more so than the Safavids, styled themselves as Iranian shahs and the legitimate heirs to pre-Islamic Persian traditions of kingship. At the same time, more chauvinist Iranian nationalists reviled the Qajars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries precisely because of their Turkish origins.

One could explore similar ironies in the area of gender studies: the cartoons of *Molla Nasredin* clearly informed "the woman question" in Iran even as progressive Iranian nationalists railed against the Qajars for failing to protect "the daughters of Quchan" from "barbaric" Turcoman raiders during and after the Constitutional Revolution. Demographic research and, if possible, socio-political surveys are urgently needed to understand the contemporary dynamics of Azerbaijani identity. Even the most basic (and likely correct) of Shaffer's conclusions–for example, her assertion that "most of Iran's Azerbaijanis do not view Baku as the capital, but consider Tabriz the historical center of their people" (p. 215)–would be well-served by such research.

Shaffer has captured the complicated cultural trends in modern Azerbaijani society on both sides of the Araz and offered an excellent framework in which to interpret those trends. And, as is the case with all the best pioneering efforts, she has also created a promising point of departure for further inquiry.