

**Subaltern Educators Engaged in Empowerment of Minoritized Languages:  
A Case Study of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation and Turki**

by

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## **Abstract**

This case study examines the underground linguistic, cultural, and educational activism of Turk educators in Iranian Azerbaijan during the 1990s and 2000s in Tabriz and their continued activism in exile. Faced with the denial of linguistic and cultural education in their minoritized language and socio-political suppression, they turned to underground spaces and created their pedagogies and resources for mother-tongue-based education. Once persecuted by the government due to their activism and confronted with severe challenges, they were forced to leave the country into exile. From that time forward, they have continued their efforts, and since 2020, they have been operating virtually as an educational platform under the Azerbaijani Civic Nation in Toronto, Canada. The study's subaltern theoretical framework provides a critical lens for grasping the power dynamics and contextual relations influencing these educators' approaches, resources, and strategies. Moreover, a case study methodology offers rich, in-depth, and contextual insights with data collected through multiple sources, including in-depth interviews with the co-founders of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, alongside related documents, materials, publications, social media content, etc. This thesis greatly contributes to the discourse, promotion, planning, and pedagogy of minoritized languages, focusing on the role of subaltern educators who, in the face of all challenges, engaged in language as a means of education and a base for social solidarity, resistance, and change. The findings reveal the transformative power of alternative language pedagogies, particularly for marginalized groups, through their bottom-up, organic, collective, and intersectional approach. In doing so, they challenge established social norms and amplify non-dominant voices. Lastly, the study addresses overlooked literature on linguistically marginalized communities in Iran, focusing on activist Turk educators, and extends knowledge of activist-based education beyond the country to various marginalized communities.

## **Abbrégé**

Cette étude de cas examine l'activisme linguistique, culturel et éducatif clandestin des éducateurs turcs en Azerbaïdjan iranien au cours des années 1990 et 2000 à Tabriz et leur activisme continu en exil. Confrontés au refus de l'éducation linguistique et culturelle dans leur langue minoritaire et à la répression sociopolitique, ils se sont tournés vers des espaces souterrains et ont créé leurs pédagogies et ressources pour l'éducation basée sur la langue maternelle. Une fois persécutés par le gouvernement en raison de leur activisme et confrontés à de graves difficultés, ils ont été contraints de quitter le pays et de s'exiler. Depuis lors, ils ont poursuivi leurs efforts et depuis 2020, ils fonctionnent virtuellement comme une plate-forme éducative sous la Nation civique azerbaïdjanaise à Toronto, au Canada. Le cadre théorique subalterne de l'étude fournit une perspective critique pour saisir la dynamique du pouvoir et les relations contextuelles qui influencent les approches, les ressources et les stratégies de ces éducateurs. De plus, une méthodologie d'étude de cas offre des informations riches, approfondies et contextuelles avec des données collectées via de multiples sources, y compris des entretiens approfondis avec les cofondateurs de la Nation civique azerbaïdjanaise, ainsi que des documents, matériels, publications et contenus de médias sociaux connexes., etc. Cette thèse contribue grandement au discours, à la promotion, à la planification et à la pédagogie des langues minoritaires, en se concentrant sur le rôle des éducateurs subalternes qui, face à tous les défis, se sont engagés dans la langue comme moyen d'éducation et base de développement social. solidarité, résistance et changement. Les résultats révèlent le pouvoir transformateur des pédagogies linguistiques alternatives, en particulier pour les groupes marginalisés, grâce à leur approche ascendante, organique, collective et intersectionnelle. Ce faisant, ils remettent en question les normes sociales établies et amplifient les voix non dominantes. Enfin, l'étude aborde la littérature

négligée sur les communautés linguistiquement marginalisées en Iran, en se concentrant sur les éducateurs turcs militants, et étend les connaissances sur l'éducation militante au-delà du pays à diverses communautés marginalisées.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Diverse languages and ethnicities characterize Iran, with over half of the population speaking languages other than Farsi, the country's sole official language and recognized medium of education (Kalan, 2016). However, this linguistic diversity faces challenges within the sociopolitical and ideological framework, where the dominant ideology perceives it as a threat to the established monolingual nation-state paradigm. This perception has been used to justify the systematic marginalization and repression of diverse languages and communities and the persecution of activists advocating for them. This policy of marginalization and repression has persisted since the early 20th century with the emergence of the modern Iranian nation-state and is carried out through systematic institutional mechanisms and strategic discursive approaches (Asgharzadeh, 2007, 2015; Mohammadpour & Soleimani, 2021; Rashidi, 2019; Sheyholislami, 2012; Soleimani & Mohammadpour, 2019).

Despite challenges, marginalized linguistic communities resist dominant language and culture hegemony, striving to enhance their linguistic, cultural, educational, and social standing through grassroots efforts and resilient resistance. They attempt dismantling the power dynamics and frameworks perpetuating their marginalization and suppression (Amnesty International, 2011, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021; Asgharzadeh, 2007, 2015; Qarabagli, 2022a, 2023; Rashidi, 2019).

This case study examines the context, challenges encountered, and the resources and strategies employed by subaltern educators as they navigate and overcome the obstacles within

marginalized, politically oppressive, and sensitive environments. Specifically, it studies the activism of Turk educators within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, an educational platform based in Canada, which was established by educators compelled to leave Iran due to government-perpetrated persecutions.

In the 1990s, Lale Javanshir and Samad Pourmusavi, originally from Iran's Azerbaijan region, were part of underground cultural gatherings in Tabriz, organized by cultural activists in the city as safe havens for practicing language, music, and cultural activities in defiance of government bans and exclusions. These experiences inspired them to become community educators, offering secret Turki (Azerbaijani Turkish) language, dance, and music classes despite government pressure and persecution. Through these underground educational programs, they provided informal instruction in the Turki language, culture, dance, music, literature, and history to the children of their community in Tabriz, Iranian Azerbaijan. They continued their underground educational efforts for about eight to nine years before leaving Iran in the early 2000s as political exiles due to ongoing persecution and eventually settled in Canada in 2005.

In Toronto, Lale and Samad established themselves as prominent community activists and educators, celebrating and promoting their language, music, and dance as a form of cultural activism. They organized workshops on music and dance and performed at various community events and festivals (Az Civic Nation, 2019; “Successful participation,” 2009). In 2020, they founded the Azerbaijani Civic Nation in Toronto, an online platform dedicated to advocating for their marginalized language and community empowerment through informal education (Qarabagli, 2023).

## **Contextualizing Monolingualism and Linguistic Marginalization in Iran**

The 19th-century rise of modern nation-states in Europe popularized the nationalist notion of “one nation-one language,” leading countries like France, Italy, Spain, and Germany to enforce single-language policies for administration and education. These policies aimed to promote linguistic and cultural homogeneity while viewing diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups as potential threats to notions such as “national unity” (Kalan, 2016, 2024; Mac Giolla Chríost, 2003). This construction of a single “official” and “national” language fueled assimilation efforts, ethnic homogenization, and the marginalization of linguistic diversity. It perpetuated a historical and contemporary pattern of stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion of minoritized languages and their speakers, driven by top-down state and elite policies and ideologies in processes like nation-state building and colonialism (Bourdieu, 1991; Kalan, 2016; Kymlicka & Straehle, 1999; Mac Giolla Chríost, 2003; May, 2012a, 2012b).

The influence of European linguistic nationalism extended to other nation-state projects, such as Iran. The Berlin Circle, including intellectuals like Hasan Taqizadeh, Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranshahr, Mahmud Afshar, and Taqi Arani, drew extensively from European nationalist discourses. Educated in the West during the early 20th century, they laid the ideological foundation for Iran’s Farsi-centric and centralist nation-state, advocating for a unified language and nationality in alignment with European sentiments. In their perception, linguistic diversity and regional autonomy were synonymous with “oriental inefficiency” and “administrative anarchy.” This viewpoint further entrenched and evolved into both policy and ideological guidance with the establishment of the modern nation-state of Iran in 1925 under the Pahlavi regime (Asgharzadeh, 2007; Elling, 2013; Matin-Asgari, 2018; Siavoshi, 2014). Farsi was declared the sole official language and exclusive medium of instruction, resulting in

assertive linguistic assimilation policies that suppressed and marginalized minoritized languages. This was done to establish a “unified nation” by prioritizing the Farsi language, literature, and history as the “authentic identity” of Iranians, the aim of establishing homogenization and hegemony (Asgharzadeh, 2007; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2003; Sheyholislami, 2012; Siavoshi, 2014).

The imposition of Farsi hegemony in Iran marginalized diverse linguistic groups by categorizing languages such as Kurdish, Luri, Baluchi, Bakhtiyari, and Gileki as mere “dialects,” while Turki and Arabic were denigrated as “non-Iranian foreign languages” (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2003). This perpetuated an exclusionary nationalist ideology that denied the country's multiethnic reality, stigmatized minoritized languages such as Turki, Kurdi, Baluchi, Arabic, and others as inferior, and justified Farsization policies, reinforcing a Farsi-centric perspective for Iranian state-nationalism (Asgharzadeh, 2007; Fazeli, 2006; Elling, 2013). The promotion of Farsi as a pillar of Iranian national identity established an ethnic hierarchy, elevating Farsi as superior and marginalizing languages like Turki, perpetuating ethnic and linguistic stereotypes, particularly constructing a dominant view of “Turki inferiority” and “Farsi superiority” within both minoritized and majoritized communities (Asgharzadeh, 2007; Nercissians, 2001; Saleh, 2013).

Farsi's hegemony as a language of power and prestige in Iran has marginalized minoritized languages, influencing current government attitudes and policies and shaping contemporary societal struggles (Asgharzadeh, 2007, 2015; Kalan, 2016; Mohammadpour & Soleimani, 2021; Rashidi, 2019). Despite the paradoxical acknowledgment of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic rights after the 1979 Islamic revolution and the adoption of a new constitution, the Iranian state continues to solely uphold Farsi as the official language in institutional domains

such as education, media, and government. The institutional and discursive reinforcement of Farsi as Iran's sole “official” and “educational” language perpetuates the marginalization and stigmatization of minoritized languages and communities, exacerbating their categorization as “local” and “ethnic” while undermining linguistic diversity and legitimacy (Cabi, 2021; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2003; Mirvahedi, 2019; Soleimani & Osmanzadeh, 2022). This perpetuation of linguistic hierarchy, coupled with ongoing exclusion, suppresses linguistic communities, leading to their otherization and the misrepresentation of both their languages' social significance and their speakers' social statuses (Asgharzadeh, 2007; Elling, 2012; Jafari, 2019; Mirhosseini & Abazari, 2016; Mirvahedi, 2016, 2019, 2021; Sheyholislami, 2012). Dei et al. (2006) argue that language superiority is a societal construct dependent on resource allocation and institutional support, exalting specific languages while marginalizing and stigmatizing others. Against this backdrop, studying grassroots efforts and their navigation of the oppressive monolingual education system and exclusivist social policies is needed (Asgharzadeh, 2015). This study focuses on examining the efforts of Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators as a case study, particularly through their underground, exile-based, and informal education of Turki as a minoritized language within the context of Iran.

### **The Azerbaijani Civic Nation**

This case study traces the journey of educators who initiated underground classes in 1990s Tabriz and are currently involved in online activism with the Azerbaijani Civic Nation in exile. It explores the dynamic of their marginalized language and cultural education efforts in politically hostile Iran, discussing challenges, resources, strategies, and goals.

In the early 1990s in Tabriz, educators, and activists like Lale and Samad engaged in an underground mission to counter language education exclusion, bans, and cultural assimilation policies imposed by the Iranian government (Qarabagli, 2023). Underground education, born from community practice and a network of secret cultural events, served as a platform for promoting education, practicing culture, and resisting suppression (Mosaïque Network, 2023; Quluncu, 2023). Engaged in arts-integrated language, cultural, and community education, these educators fluidly incorporated language, folklore, history, dance, and music into their teaching, offering children opportunities to learn literacy in their language. They created an underground children's magazine and showcased their students' music, dance, art, and poetry talents during family celebrations and monthly underground cultural events. Regardless of political constraints, they led the establishment of underground learning spaces for children across various cities in Azerbaijan, using their networks, skills, and training. Meanwhile, they advocated for cultural and musical performance venues for semi-official and public events. They dedicated efforts to achieving writing and publishing goals, which included producing a university literary journal in Turki, contributing to local weeklies, and actively participating in discussions on culture, literature, language, and writing.

Despite labelling their activities as “cultural” to evade government punishment, authorities still targeted and persecuted the educators, which shows how their cautious approach failed to shield them from government scrutiny. Samad's arrest, imprisonment, interrogations, continuous summons by security forces, and physical attacks by plainclothes individuals, assumed to be associated with the regime's pressure body, along with a stabbing incident in 2001, made it impossible for him to continue his work as before. In the same period, due to her activism, Lale faced similar experiences in Tabriz, confronting targeted harassment, sexual and



gendered slurs, and attacks, which led her to leave for Ankara, Türkiye<sup>1</sup>, for university education in 2001. Fearing for his life, Samad was also forced into exile, seeking refuge initially in Baku, Azerbaijan, and later relocating with Lale to Canada in 2005 as political exiles.

In exile, they continued their activism by promoting Azerbaijani Turki dance and music, primarily participating in cultural initiatives for years through workshops, community events, and performances. By 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, and with the rise of virtual public education through online spaces and platforms like Zoom for learning, they shifted their focus to engage in minoritized language promotion. This led to the establishment of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation platform, aiming to educate and engage the minoritized Turk community in Iranian Azerbaijan and the diaspora through various means such as language courses, lectures, critical discourse engagement, and virtual events. Their work with the Azerbaijani Civic Nation continues their activism in Tabriz, but this time in exile, publicly and virtually (Qarabagli, 2023).

The organization provides online social spaces and resources, offering virtual Turki language courses for adults from Iranian Azerbaijan and the diaspora and educational lecture series covering a range of social, political, educational, and environmental issues in Turki. It fulfills its mission by relying on volunteer instructors for courses and advancing public education through weekly Zoom lectures in Turki, inviting academics and graduate students from diverse backgrounds. This initiative provides a rare platform for open exploration of essential subjects and challenging topics, promoting intellectual discourse and collaboration through lectures and seminars. In doing so, aiming to empower the Turki language,

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I use the name “Türkiye” following its official change from “Turkey” to “Türkiye” at the United Nations (“Turkey’s name changed to Türkiye,” 2022).

contributing to community building and sense of resistance among Turks in Iranian Azerbaijan, broader Iran, and the diaspora (Qarabagli, 2023).

In this thesis, the term “Turk” is utilized as an adjective to signify the ethnic identity specific to the Turk community in Iran, diverging from its common usage as a noun in English. The term “Turki,” on the other hand, is used to refer to the language spoken by this ethnic group. This terminological distinction aligns with the local context of Iranian Azerbaijan and broader Iran, and reflecting the self-identification of its people (Kalan, 2016; Shaffer, 2022).

## **Research Questions**

The questions that have guided this project are as follows:

1. How do subaltern educators describe their activities and struggles to empower their oppressed language and its learners and perceive their impact, as exemplified within the context of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation?
2. What resources, strategies, networks, and spaces do subaltern educators utilize to effect change, such as those in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation in Iran?
3. What are some of the sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and power-relational contexts of subaltern educators' activities regarding promoting minoritized languages in underground educational settings?

The first research question examines subaltern educators' perspectives on navigating power dynamics and their role in empowering minoritized language communities. It explores their perceptions of these power relations, values based on their activism and education, and the strategies they employ to effect change. The aim is to understand the experiences of subaltern educators in dealing with systematic oppression and persecution, particularly in contexts like

Iran, where language activists face state-sanctioned silencing for their work (Amnesty International, 2011, 2019; Rashidi, 2019).

The second research question investigates how Azerbaijani Civic Nation's subaltern educators empower marginalized languages and communities. It focuses on their resources, including establishing opportunities, social spaces, and networks to navigate challenges and oppression. For instance, they have used underground spaces for language education back home and, within the diaspora, have utilized diaspora spaces, online, and social media platforms for community education and advocacy (Qarabagli, 2023).

The third research question examines the sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and power-relational contexts influencing the activities of subaltern educators in promoting minoritized languages as demonstrated in the case of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators. In the face of the Iranian government's persecution of educators supporting minoritized language education (Amnesty International, 2019, 2021), it is necessary to comprehend the constraints they face within the existing institutional and discursive power context. Additionally, insight into their strategies for navigating these challenges is valuable. Social constructs and practices, including education, language, and activism, are products of contextual power dynamics that influence the experiences and approaches of marginalized educators (Cummins, 2000; Dei, 2006; Kalan, 2021a). Grasping educators' initiatives for minoritized language education involves recognizing their context, including governmental and dominant group perceptions, and their relationship with dominant and alternative discourses, resistance movements, and emerging activism (Asgharzadeh, 2015).

## **Significance of the Study**

This project is significant for several reasons. Recent research in education, sociolinguistics, sociology, and social movements has revealed a need to examine the political aspects embedded in activism for minoritized languages, as Heidemann (2012, 2014) and Urla (2012) drew attention to. The educators' experiences offer valuable insights into the dynamics of oppression and resistance in minoritized communities, as well as the role of subaltern educators in navigating such contexts despite political challenges, stigmatization, and their positions of marginality (Brodsky et al., 2012; Fluri, 2008; Gagne et al., 2022; Heidemann, 2014; Rostami Povey, 2003). Furthermore, the study sheds light on the ongoing efforts of subaltern educators in the diaspora, using available resources, tools, and spaces to address sociolinguistic and educational concerns in their marginalized communities (Akin, 2011; Clothey, 2022; Yilmaz, 2018). In other words, the study examines strategies for advocating minoritized languages and education in politically oppressive contexts such as Iran, using the Azerbaijani Civic Nation as a case study to illustrate the dynamics of underground and exile-based educators' initiatives. In doing so, these insights carry significant weight for marginalized communities facing similar challenges, providing a framework for further research in subaltern studies, informal education, and promoting diversity in politically hostile contexts, especially regarding minoritized language education, both domestically and in exile.

## **Thesis Overview**

Right after this introductory chapter, Chapter two explores the theoretical framework of the thesis, incorporating theoretical concepts from Gramsci, Guha's critique of elitist historiography, and Spivak's postcolonial perspective. The aim is to examine how power relations and contextual factors influence the approach and experiences of subaltern educators in

oppressive contexts. Chapter three is the literature review section. It reviews relevant empirical studies on minoritized language education and grassroots activism, establishes the theoretical and methodological framework for the case study on Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators, and identifies research gaps on minoritized language activism's political aspects. Chapter four discusses the methodology employed.

Chapter five explores the findings through five themes. The first theme explores how underground spaces empower marginalized educators in oppressive political contexts. The second theme focuses on a network-driven collaborative framework for subaltern education. The third theme examines alternative pedagogies and creative approaches in underground classes. The fourth theme discusses transformative minoritized language education and social empowerment. Lastly, the fifth theme discusses the practice of academic language revitalization through writing, discourse, and the role and responsibility of organic intellectuals in this process. In Chapter Six, the discussion section explores key conceptualizations and addresses the study's contributions, limitations, implications, future research directions, and conclusion.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Framework

This thesis adopts postcolonial and subaltern theoretical perspectives in examining the educational and linguistic initiatives of educators from Iran's marginalized Turk community. Operating underground within the country and continuing in exile as the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, these educators are dedicated to advocating for the Turki language and resisting marginalization and hegemony in Iran (Qarabagli, 2023; Quluncu, 2023). In applying this theoretical framework, the ideas of several prominent scholars, including Antonio Gramsci, Ranajit Guha, and Gayatri Spivak, are discussed, as they have made great contributions to the study of the experiences and struggles of subaltern groups, and these ideas are valuable in the context of this case study. Drawing on their work, this research aims to provide an in-depth insight into the challenges faced, and strategies utilized by subaltern educators within the context of the linguistically minoritized Turk community of Azerbaijan in Iran as one example of activities of what I call "subaltern language educators."

#### **Gramsci's Concepts of Hegemony, Subalternity, Organic Intellectuals, and Transformative Education**

Antonio Gramsci's work, particularly his *Prison Notes* (1971), has profoundly impacted Political Science, Anthropology, Philosophy, Sociology, Postcolonial Studies, Literary Theory, Education Studies, History, and Cultural Studies. Concepts like hegemony and subalternity, introduced in his imprisonment writings from 1929 to 1935, are central to make sense of power dynamics, ideology, and civil society's role in shaping societal changes (Hall, 1986; Mayo, 2015).

Gramsci stated that dominant groups maintain control through an interplay of “civil society” (private spheres like family, education, media) and the “State” (government and coercive mechanisms). This dynamic, termed the “integral state,” forms a mutually reinforcing system where the ruling class justifies dominance. The distinction between political and civil society is methodological, not organic, with coercion and hegemony supporting each other. The state uses legal measures to uphold ruling interests, a mechanism that itself shows a close relationship between the state and hegemonic groups, perpetuating oppression, and suppressing resistance (Gramsci, 2000; Green, 2002; Holst & Brookfield, 2017).

According to Gramsci, dominant groups control the state by influencing civil society through education, ideology, and cultural values. By promoting their values as societal norms, dominant groups shape experiences and present norms as “neutral” and “universal.” Hegemony's effectiveness lies in internalizing ruling ideologies, providing a non-coercive means of social control. Securing consent through ideological persuasion is essential for maintaining control, as subaltern acceptance of the dominant ideology perpetuates social inequality and marginalization (Apple & Buras, 2013; Blackledge, 2005; Green, 2002; Ricento, 2000).

Gramsci's concept of hegemony is linked to the term “subaltern,” referring to groups marginalized by the dominant social class. It encompasses rural labourers, peasants, industrial workers, and marginalized individuals based on region, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, and race. Hegemony involves the control and oppression of these groups during sociohistorical processes within a nation or globally. Gramsci illustrates subalternity in the North-South Italy dynamic, where the dominant Northern bourgeoisie exploits the South, perpetuating regional inequalities, controlling resources and labour, and creating stigmatization and racialization, portraying Southern Italians as inferior (Asgharzadeh, 2015; Frétigné, 2022; Hall, 1986).

In Gramsci's concept of hegemony, education is a strategic tool for ruling elites to subtly shape the values of subordinate groups, without requiring the use of force or relying solely on coercive measures. This creates a battleground where power is contested, as subalterns can challenge these dynamics through alternative education and worldviews (Apple & Buras, 2013). In Gramsci's view, education is inherently political and ideological, and “Every relationship of ‘hegemony’ is necessarily an educational relationship” (Mayo, 2015, p. 45). Thus, if hegemony is seen as educational, it implies it is acquired or learned; this contested nature opens avenues for change by developing critical consciousness. Marginalized groups can challenge dominant ideologies by creating alternative educational spaces that promote critical thinking (Apple & Buras, 2013; Pizzolato & Holst, 2017; Reed, 2013).

Guided by this worldview, Gramsci, a dedicated educator and socialist, co-founded the journal “L'Ordine Nuovo” in Turin, organized study circles, and contributed to the Factory Council Movement before his arrest (Apple & Buras, 2013). Even awaiting trial on the prison island of Ustica, Gramsci committed to education and co-founded a school with fellow detainees, where he taught, learned from others, and championed active participation and task-based learning. His work stressed the significance of critical and collective education, prioritizing the empowerment of marginalized groups through collaborative efforts rather than focusing on individual social mobility in a bourgeois education model (Mayo, 2017).

In counter-hegemonic education, the focus shifts from imposing fixed knowledge to engaging students intellectually, promoting critical thinking, and raising awareness of social positions. This approach acknowledges students as active participants in the learning process. The teacher-student dynamic is envisioned based on a passionate and meaningful connection, where the goal is to empower human agency for societal transformation (Reed, 2013; Pizzolato



& Holst, 2007). This is important in Gramsci's theory of hegemony because, for him, “hegemony is not primarily economic but mainly cultural and educational” (Pagano, 2017, p. 57). Therefore, “to create a new culture means to create a new education and to aspire to cultural/educational hegemony” (p. 57). Gramsci advocated a “war of position” for subaltern groups to challenge dominant values by promoting alternatives. This involves building sociocultural forces, providing leadership, forming alliances, and seeking autonomy, ultimately transforming the state into an “ethical State” (Apple & Buras, 2013; Green, 2002; Reed, 2013).

Gramsci argued that counter-hegemony, in resistance to dominant ideologies, should organically emerge from grassroots movements, recognizing subaltern cultural practices as a robust foundation. He advocated a transformative approach integrating ordinary perspectives with new theories, shaping collective consciousness within specific historical contexts through the dynamic interplay of old and new elements involving ordinary individuals and organic intellectuals. Change involves critically engaging with existing cultural practices, allowing for the emergence of alternative worldviews (Hall, 1986; Reed, 2013). Gramsci's concept of the “educational relationship” defines intellectuals as both learners and educators, embodying a dynamic where “every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher” (Reed, 2013, p. 572). Connecting with ordinary and suppressed people is the essential “terrain on which [individuals] move, acquire consciousness of their position, [and] struggle” for change (p. 567).

Gramsci identified the centrality of intellectuals in their engagement in constructing hegemony for the dominant group, mediating in civil society, and integrating the masses into cultural norms. Advocating for subaltern autonomy, he advocated the development of “organic intellectuals” from marginalized groups to prevent manipulation and push for a counter-hegemonic struggle. He stressed the critical contribution of intellectuals in counter-hegemonic

movements. This involves immersion in subaltern experiences, organizing efforts, and pedagogy that prioritizes subaltern interests, aiming to challenge and transform societal norms, structures, and education systems (Fusaro, 2017; Gramsci, 2000; Green, 2002; Pizzolato & Holst, 2007).

Gramsci argued for the necessity of active involvement by the “infinite masses of people” in the social and political transformative process (Green, 2002, p. 22). Inclusive and collective education involves the masses through collaborative learning, facilitating a deep examination of socio-political and economic realities. The masses must passionately identify with the struggle, making it their own rather than accepting abstract intellectual impositions. Collaboration between the masses and organic intellectuals ensures that the movement reflects subaltern interests and engages in truly empowering and inclusive societal change (Fusaro, 2017; Green, 2002; Pizzolato & Holst, 2017; Reed, 2013).

Gramsci categorized intellectuals into “traditional” and “organic.” Traditional intellectuals gain status through professional positions, lacking direct ties to social groups. In contrast, organic intellectuals are embedded in specific social classes, influencing culture and advocating for their group's interests. Engaging in a broader context, they shape public opinion and challenge or uphold the social order. Regardless of profession, be it teachers, journalists, or managers, they use diverse methods like adult education and media to fulfill their role. Gramsci argued that anyone, beyond their profession, can be an organic intellectual by contributing to culture and social relations, a framework in which he sought to bring attention to the transformative potential of those connected to their communities (Apple & Buras, 2013; Kupfer, 2015; Pizzolato & Holst, 2017; Tarlau, 2017).

Organic intellectuals, tied to specific social groups, profoundly understand marginalized communities' challenges and needs. Their leadership and intellectual capacity empower them to

address issues from a bottom-up perspective, developing strategies rooted in community-centric approaches. These intellectuals actively shape and organize their social groups, serving as “constructors, organizers, and ‘permanent persuaders’” rather than mere preachers (Tarlau, 2017, p. 112).

Establishing autonomous organizing bodies is essential for subalterns to gain hegemonic power and reshape societal dynamics, eliminating subordination. As part of this, Gramsci stressed the interconnected relationship between political independence, activism, organization, and intellectuals by saying that “a human mass... does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals” (Holst & Brookfield, 2017, p. 212). In this process, he pointed out that subaltern intellectuals operate under restricted and oppressive social conditions. Therefore, the development and engagement of organic intellectuals with their social base is “long, difficult, full of contradictions, advances, and retreats” (p. 212).

### **Ranajit Guha's Challenge to Elitist Historiography and Call for Alternative Discourses**

Influenced and inspired by Antonio Gramsci's ideas, Ranajit Guha, a critical intellectual among the founders of the Subaltern Studies group of South Asia in the early 1980s, criticized the historiography of Indian nationalism, stating, “The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism - colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism.” He argued that these perspectives, originating during British rule, endured beyond independence, assimilating into “neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist forms of discourse in Britain and India, respectively” (Guha, 1988, p.37). Guha shows how historical narratives, influenced by colonists and nationalist elites, shape the Indian nation's conceptualization, marginalize indigenous

perspectives, perpetuate prejudice, and align with authoritative interests, ultimately neglecting societal diversity.

Guha (1988) challenges the elitist historiography of Indian nationalism, which “represents Indian nationalism as primarily an idealist venture in which indigenous elite led the people from subjugation to freedom” (p. 38). However, he argues that this perspective misrepresents Indian nationalist history as it fails to acknowledge “the contribution made by the people, *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and development of this nationalism” (p. 39). Guha argues that mainstream historical narratives overlook the political agency of ordinary people and their contributions. He, states:

For parallel to the domain of elite politics, there existed throughout the colonial period another part of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country - that is, the people. (Guha, 1988, p. 40)

Guha (1988) argued that subaltern politics arise from their experience of exploitation, shaping distinct approaches. He explained, “The experience of exploitation and labor endowed this politics with many idioms, norms, and values which put it in a category apart from elite politics” (p. 41). Questioning the Indian bourgeoisie's narrative control, he deemed it “the *failure ...to speak for the nation*” (p. 40). He problematized narrative practices for silencing subaltern voices, arguing that the bourgeoisie's historical dominance overlooks the nation's complexities, leaving “vast areas... never integrated into their hegemony” (pp. 41-42). He argued against elitist historiography and advocated for an alternative discourse that rejects the oversimplified

view of Indian nationalism, based on “the recognition of the co-existence and interaction of the elite and subaltern domains of politics” (p. 43).

Guha deems elitist perspectives in Indian Nationalism historiography “an oppressive fact,” urging a shift towards inclusivity. He explained, “Our purpose in making our own views known is to promote such a convergence” (Guha, 1988, p. 43). In embracing inclusivity for subaltern perspectives, he rejects the pursuit of absolute truth, stating, “We claim no more than to try and indicate an orientation and hope to demonstrate in practice that this is feasible” (p. 43).

### **Gayatri Spivak's Critique of Subaltern Representation and Call for Decolonizing Knowledge Production**

Gayatri Spivak, a postcolonial theorist, engaged with Gramsci's “subaltern” concept within the Subaltern Studies group, challenging the erasure of marginalized voices by dominant nationalist and colonialist elites in Indian history. Spivak, while recognizing the significance of figures like Ranajit Guha in Subaltern Studies, critiqued aspects of their approach, especially regarding the reclamation of subaltern voices. In her influential work “Can the Subaltern Speak?” she raised the silencing of marginalized groups in postcolonial contexts, stressing the challenges faced by those socially positioned as “the other.”

Spivak argued that marginalized groups, particularly women in the global south, are turned voiceless. Silenced by layers of severe oppression that deny them a voice and space for expression, their voices are unlikely to be acknowledged no matter how hard they strive to speak up and make themselves heard (Asgharzadeh, 2008, 2015; Spivak, 1992). This voicelessness signifies the status of the subaltern “as an oppressed subject who cannot speak because the structures of oppression neither permit these voices to be heard nor provide a space for their articulation” (Kilomba, 2010, p. 26). Spivak's contribution challenges conventional ideas of

speaking or voice, arguing that the subaltern cannot speak not due to a lack of ability but because of systemic oppression. She calls attention to the challenges faced by marginalized groups in expressing their perspectives within intersecting oppressive structures of colonialism, racism, and sexism (Kilomba, 2010).

Spivak challenges the idea of privileged groups representing the “voiceless” in oppressive situations and questions assumptions about the right to speak for others. She examined power dynamics across historical, political, social, economic, and psychological realms, arguing about the complexities of speaking on behalf of marginalized groups. More precisely, Spivak challenged and problematized the practice of Western intellectuals engaging in the articulation of conditions of historically marginalized, oppressed, and silenced groups, namely women in the global south.

Spivak questions the legitimacy of outsider intellectuals representing subaltern groups, urging the overcoming of colonial archives and oppression by local elites. Even after overcoming obstacles, one faces exclusionary practices within the subaltern community, challenging representation (Asgharzadeh, 2008). In Spivak's view, subordinate scholars often depend on British, nationalist, and colonialist records to conduct research and validate their studies. The problem with this is that the existence of the subaltern is primarily neglected or rendered invisible within the historical narratives constructed by the colonial elite. The subaltern, when represented, is often viewed through the lens of “otherness” within the elite's dominant ideology. They remain voiceless as their portrayal is confined within the dominant discourse, leading to epistemic violence that suppresses and silences their perspectives, prioritizing the elite narrative over their own (Green, 2002; Radhakrishnan, 2008).

She challenges the assumption that intellectual capabilities alone grant insight into the subaltern perspective. The exclusion of subaltern voices from elite discourses reflects a systemic disregard, portraying them as insignificant and unworthy of attention. This exclusion hinders a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. How can one genuinely claim to represent the experiences of marginalized groups in contexts where the subalterns struggle to express themselves? The challenge involves grasping marginalized groups' consciousness and effectively communicating that knowledge. This intersects with power dynamics, highlighting the obstacles subaltern representation faces in a world shaped by hegemony (Beverley, 1999; Green, 2002; Kapoor, 2004; Kilomba, 2010).

Spivak argues that intellectuals, especially in the global North, must confront oppressive conditions silencing subaltern women in postcolonial settings. This involves recognizing social positions, analyzing power dynamics, and acknowledging the influence of knowledge systems and geopolitical contexts on perceptions. Such examination is necessary for those claiming a progressive stance, especially within academic circles. Recognizing our role as products of diverse influences, the call is to challenge existing power dynamics by critically examining biases. This approach addresses social issues within specific power contexts, reducing the risk of perpetuating dominant relations in marginalized communities (Kapoor, 2004).

Spivak's work in subaltern studies highlights the inherent bias in knowledge production, shaped by socio-historical contexts and ideologies. Gaining insight into marginalized groups' experiences requires a nuanced approach, considering intersecting forces, power dynamics, and privilege. Engaging with diverse perspectives, particularly those of subaltern women, is a way to avoid oversimplification. Spivak calls for critical reflection on methods and power dynamics, urging us to recognize and address the complexities of experiences across geographies and

historical contexts. We can challenge oppressive dynamics and combat epistemic violence by acknowledging our biases, unlearning dominant knowledge systems, and promoting transformative perspectives (Beverley, 1999; Kapoor, 2004; Spivak, 1992).

### **Subaltern Studies in Iran's Context and the Azerbaijani Civic Nation**

In the Iranian context, scholars focused on minoritized communities have employed the subaltern framework to examine power dynamics, linguistic hegemony, and resistance. They revealed that Farsi's dominance marginalizes these groups, subjecting them to various linguistic oppressions and systematically suppressing their voices of resistance (Asgharzadeh, 2008, 2015; Mohammadpour & Soleimani, 2021; Rashidi, 2019; Soleimani & Mohammadpour, 2019; Soleimani & Osmanzadeh, 2022).

In his article “The Return of the Subaltern: International Education and Politics of Voice,” Asgharzadeh (2008) discusses issues such as linguistic suppression and dominance in both a global context and Iran. In reflecting on oppressive circumstances, he questions the possibilities of change beyond critical engagement, arguing that “maintaining a critical hope seems to be the only healthy option” for those with silenced voices (p. 353). According to Asgharzadeh, a fulfilling education requires questioning ideas, critiquing ideologies, and challenging social injustices through critical dialogue, as “Without critical dialogue, there can be no transformative education, no critical hope, and by extension, no liberation” (pp. 335-336).

According to Asgharzadeh (2008), the official state-sponsored linguistic/dialogical processes within the banking model of education “cannot offer any hope of transforming either the individual or the world” (p. 349). He explains that “A transformative dialogue can take place when one has a genuine voice, one’s own voice, to articulate one’s condition within the environment where one lives” (pp. 349-350). Asgharzadeh argues, “Although emphasizing the



centrality of one's natural mother tongue as the most appropriate medium of learning, this emphasis on voice also entails notions of *creativity*, *self-definition*, *self-expression*, and *self-identification*" (p. 350).

The subaltern theoretical framework, championed by intellectuals like Gramsci, Guha, Spivak, and Asgharzadeh, offers a valuable lens for exploring the experiences of subaltern educators not only in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation engaged in minoritized language education within the oppressive Iranian context but also among other marginalized educators working to empower diverse communities and address their concerns in similar contexts. Their insights reveal how historical, political, and cultural processes have marginalized certain groups. They elaborate on the need for critical examination, making oppressive structures visible, and transforming them, and amplifying subaltern voices through alternative knowledge production and education.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Literature Review**

The current research within education, sociolinguistics, sociology, and social movements reveals a noticeable gap in exploring the political dimensions inherent in minoritized language education and activism (Heidemann, 2012, 2014; Urla, 2012). Existing literature predominantly examines minoritized language activism, education, and advocacy efforts within settings where issues of minoritization are not subjected to securitization or are not framed within the context of subalternity. In politically sensitive contexts like Iran, where concerns related to minoritized languages are often perceived as potential “security” threats, leading to persecution, the situation serves as a harsh example of the persistent oppression experienced by grassroots efforts in minoritized language education and activism (Amnesty International, 2019, 2021; Asgharzadeh, 2015; Rashidi, 2019). This study examines how subaltern educators navigate linguistic and educational oppression in politically hostile environments like Iran, focusing on the Azerbaijani Civic Nation as a case study to shed light on underground minoritized language education and its intersection with subaltern theory within nation-states.

In the absence of empirical studies on minoritized language activism and education in politically hostile contexts and how activists and educators navigate such contexts, this literature review examines a set of similar projects to gain insight into marginalized language education initiatives both within a minoritized community's home context and within the context of diasporic communities. Additionally, this review expands beyond linguistic groups to include diverse subaltern communities such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, environmentalism, and diasporic politics. It examines the grassroots efforts of marginalized groups, detailing their

challenges and strategies in confronting socio-political oppression domestically and internationally. Moreover, this examination looks at the methodologies and methods utilized, the research questions posed, the theoretical frameworks applied, as well as the findings, discussions, conclusions, and limitations discussed within these studies.

### **Negotiating Minoritized Language Education and Revitalization: Case Studies from Subaltern Communities**

Empirical studies have explored diverse aspects of minoritized language activism and education, including diaspora contexts, identity negotiations, and community-driven strategies. These studies reveal the multilayered dynamics and power struggles within these communities as they engage in the practice of language empowerment, education, and advocacy in various contexts (Akin, 2011; Chandras, 2019; Clothey, 2022; Heidemann, 2014; Kalan et al., 2019; Leinonen, 2022; Yilmaz, 2018). Heidemann (2014) conducted a case study to investigate the negotiation strategies and discourses used by Basque language activists in France from 1975 to 1981 in the face of a limited and unaccommodating political landscape for minoritized languages in the education system. The study reveals how state power, policies, and political opposition influenced the mobilization dynamics of the *ikastola* initiative, a minoritized language education effort in the French Basque Country employing dual-language bilingual education with Basque as the primary medium of instruction. The case study draws on two qualitative sets of data: semi-structured interviews conducted with 14 activists (eight women and six men) who were part of the *ikastola* model of bilingual education from 1975–1981 and an analysis of 31 organizational texts published by Seaska (the network of Basque- operating schools) between the same period. The study focuses on the movement's early stage, showing that despite ideological, discursive, and institutional challenges that complicated and constrained the activists' efforts,

they paradoxically forged a stronger strategic solidarity among Basque language advocates. This strategic solidarity is defined as “empowering forms of intersubjective unity and commitment through which Basque activists worked to realize objectives and overcome obstacles” (p. 54). The activists strategically constructed a narrative of socio-historical marginalization and oppression perpetuated by the French state's nationalist policies. This narrative provided a legitimate foundation for nurturing solidarity and mounting resistance in the face of formidable state-level impediments.

Clothey's (2022) study examined non-formal education initiatives within the Uyghur exiled community in Istanbul, Türkiye, employing ethnographic research methods to explore their contributions to Uyghur language and culture preservation and to uncover the ideological frameworks shaping Uyghur identity in the diaspora. Focusing on a religious school and a weekend Uyghur language program devoid of religious instruction, the research conducted 12 months of fieldwork, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, classroom observations, event participation, and volunteering at a Uyghur NGO. The study's findings reveal ideological stances countering the dominant Chinese government discourse, hostile policies and promoting Uyghur language, culture, and resistance. The curricular differences between the two initiatives showcase the impact of group perspective, resources, and funding on the conveyed vision of Uyghur cultural identity. Moreover, the research situates these initiatives in global and local contexts, exposing the urgency to preserve the Uyghur language in the face of persecution in China and demonstrating the potential of diasporic spaces for independent and alternative educational programs for cultural preservation and identity negotiation.

Akin's (2011) study examined language planning and revitalization efforts within the Kurdish diaspora, focusing on the activities of the Committee for Standardization of the Kurdish

Kurmanji dialect. This committee was established by Kurdish intellectuals and researchers in exile in 1987 in response to the lack of official recognition, status, and education for the Kurmanji dialect in countries such as Türkiye, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. Comprising bilingual or multilingual members from diverse backgrounds, including teachers, journalists, writers, and language and political activists, the committee aims to standardize and revitalize Kurmanji without government support. Its efforts involve creating a dictionary, modernizing Kurdish literacy, standardizing spelling, and grammar, and developing a modern writing system for Kurmanji. The research adopted a qualitative methodology, conducting a detailed examination of the committee's publications, activities, and initiatives. This included a thorough review and an analysis of how vocabularies were collected, and new terms were introduced within diverse scientific fields. By examining these efforts, the study sought to assess the impact of the committee's work on the development and revitalization of the Kurmanji dialect. The study examined the Committee for Standardization of the Kurdish Kurmanji dialect's leading role in preserving and revitalizing the language within the diaspora, considering broader contextual factors affecting the committee's language planning efforts. Despite facing geographical remoteness and limited opportunities for direct intervention in language use, the committee's bottom-up language planning initiatives greatly contribute to language revitalization. Creating a dictionary, modern literacy resources, and standardized writing practices work in parallel to “re-create” Kurmanji as a contemporary language. However, the study also points out limitations in the committee's efforts to promote the daily use of Kurmanji, as it is excluded from education, economic markets, and socio-political activities, with these challenges attributed to broader socio-ideological, political, economic, and institutional conditions. Akin's study shows that the absence of primary literacy education in the mother tongue for most Kurds is a consequence of

linguistic policies restricting linguistic development and education. The committee's efforts also demonstrate the potential of migration to facilitate the survival and revitalization of a minority language. Still, the study acknowledges that their impact is contingent upon more prominent societal and structural factors that shape language education and use.

Leinonen (2022) researched the development of the Kurdish language education policy in Türkiye from 2004 to 2020. This study employed qualitative analysis to assess the impact of community-initiated educational activities, including adult education language courses and university-level Kurdish studies, on reversing the language shift from Kurdish to Turkish. The research findings reveal that while community-initiated educational activities, including adult education language courses and university-level Kurdish studies, have had a major impact on elite and academic levels, they have not been able to effectively change the daily language practices of the masses. Despite the emergence of a committed community of language activists and an elite group proficient in Kurdish reading and writing, the language shift from Kurdish to Turkish persists. The study insists that these efforts alone are insufficient to reverse the language shift and stresses the importance of “state support, affirmative action, and strong language policy” (p. 22) to empower the Kurdish language in Türkiye. Leinonen's research exposes the limitations of community-based language revitalization in the Kurdish language education context in Türkiye. It shows the challenge of transforming educational initiatives into widespread revitalization and the need for state intervention and organized language policies to achieve real linguistic change.

Yilmaz (2018) used linguistic ethnography to examine how Kurdish “academic” language learners in London-based schools construct discourse on identity and negotiate language ideologies, particularly regarding Kurdish-Kurmanji in the Bohtan and Maraş regions

of Türkiye. The research aimed to understand classroom language settings and participants' discourses in the construction and negotiation of identity and linguistic norms and ideologies. These students, primarily political activists, enrolled in language classes to gain literacy skills in a language they could not learn in Türkiye due to oppressive linguistic policies. The research collected data through participant observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews with 39 participants, and audio recordings from two language classes conducted weekly over three semesters. The linguistic ethnography approach enabled examining interactions, discourses, and dynamics around linguistic differences and identity construction. The study applied the semiotic processes of iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure to analyze themes derived from the data. The study reveals that the participants ascribe varying values to different dialects of Kurmanji spoken in Türkiye, particularly the Bohtan and Maraş regions. The students consider Kurmanji from the Bohtan region as “good Kurmanji,” contrasting it with the “bad Kurmanji” from the Maraş region. Despite the absence of a nation-state-imposed definition of “standard Kurmanji,” the participants in the study construct their notion of a “standard” by referring to Bohtan Kurmanji. This construction is influenced by the authoritative position and setting of the language learning schools. For the participants, language classes provide an avenue to navigate through linguistic experiences that had previously diminished their agency. Learning their heritage language becomes essential for their ethnic subjectivity and to resist linguistic oppression. The research reveals that perceptions of language and identity are not uniform or fixed but are shaped by participants' social positions and are subject to discursive construction, negotiation, and even resistance. Even as activists for the Kurdish language and movement, these participants paradoxically promote ideas of linguistic superiority and normality, exposing the

power dynamics of linguistic marginalization and the persistence of language stigmatization in different contexts and spaces.

The case study conducted by Chandras (2019) investigated how Abhivyakti and Aapanach, two non-governmental organizations in Pune, Maharashtra, India, addressed language shift and preservation among Marathi speakers while examining the values assigned to languages based on identity categories like caste, gender, and socioeconomic class. The researcher used participatory observation and interviews to collect relevant data. Through participatory observation, the researcher engaged in the activities, projects, and operations of the NGOs, gaining direct insights into their methodologies. Additionally, interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data so the researcher could gain access to the perspectives and motivations of the NGO members. The study has shown how language ideologies influence how language activism and activities of these NGOs are conducted, with a distinct reinforcement of hierarchical social relations based on class, caste, and gender through class-driven linguistic expectations and practices. Notably, the lower socioeconomic class students were assigned “the tasks of linguistic and cultural preservation and maintenance while encouraging higher-caste students to use Marathi in cultural and creative arts” (p. 2). The study shows the connection between language ideologies, identity categories, and language revitalization efforts, drawing attention to the impact of language activism on various aspects of identity and social hierarchies.

In the discussed studies, researchers applied case study methodologies, focusing on specific schools, organizations, or groups within contexts, and employed qualitative data collection methods, namely interviews, ethnographic observations, and document analysis. They investigated various aspects of these communities, including their experiences, perceptions, challenges, approaches, strategies, values, and norms. They illustrate how linguistically



marginalized communities, whether in the diaspora or their home country, educate and revitalize their languages while dealing with challenges like dominant linguistic policies, political oppression, power dynamics, language ideologies, and internal diversity.

The empirical studies offer insights into the Azerbaijani Civic Nation case study, exploring underground and exile linguistic and educational practices in the context of marginalization and oppression. They deepen the analysis by revealing how linguistically marginalized communities navigate agency through alternative educational spaces to construct and empower their language and subjectivity against unequal power relations and sociohistorical oppression.

### **Activism Beyond Borders**

Studies have explored diaspora activism, including minoritized language education, women's rights, LGBTQ+ issues, online education, and environmental causes, where communities are engaged in activism and resistance away from their countries of origin. They contribute to our awareness of activist groups' adaptability in addressing concerns and driving positive change despite limitations (Akin, 2011; Clothey, 2022; Henry & Plantan, 2022; Kalan, 2021b; Kjaran, 2020; Malekpour, 2021; Rahimi, 2020; Yilmaz, 2018). However, a significant gap exists in examining minoritized language educators' underground and community-based activism within politically sensitive contexts, enduring persecution, and continuing such activism in exile. This aspect reveals the critical need for additional research to study their unique experiences, the transition from underground to exile, and the knowledge and expertise they carry forward. This study can shed light on the challenges they face and their contributions in educational, linguistic, and community change within marginalized communities.

The case study by Henry and Plantan (2022) explored the experiences of Russian environmental activists forced into exile due to political persecution. The researcher sought to understand the factors leading to activists leaving their home country, the challenges and opportunities presented by exile for their continued activism, and how those who chose to remain in Russia navigated their activism under repression. The study labelled those environmental activists as “activists-in-exile,” who had engaged in activism in Russia and were targeted by the regime for their actions and were forced to flee their country to avoid political persecution. The selection criteria for these activists were their prominence, engagement in environmental causes, and status as some of the most well-known cases of environmental activists in exile. To explore the experiences of these activists, the researcher employed a qualitative case study approach and conducted in-depth interviews with eight participants. Six of them were activists-in-exile who had left Russia, while the remaining two faced similar pressures but chose to stay in the country. These interviews provided insights into the activists' motivations for going or staying, their strategies for continuing their activism, and their challenges. To enhance the validity of the case study, the researcher triangulated the interview data with secondary sources, including English- and Russian-language news reports. This approach facilitated gaining knowledge of the activists' situations and their efforts to continue their activism from abroad. The study revealed that the decision to leave Russia and enter exile did not mean the end of activism for these environmentalists. The activists-in-exile utilized their new circumstances as opportunities to amplify their voices and advocate for their causes internationally. They established connections with international NGOs and media organizations, providing them opportunities to raise awareness about issues in their home country. Activists in exile also explored innovative strategies and digital platforms to assist their Russian counterparts. Yet, the study revealed that

those who stayed in Russia retained access to important on-ground activism channels, allowing them to continue their efforts in the face of potential repression.

Rahimi (2020) conducted a study on Tavaana, an E-Learning Institute for Iranian Civil Society, examining its genesis, emergence, and impact in addressing internet constraints and promoting “democratic values” in Iran through cross-border and diaspora-driven digital advocacy while empowering civil society participants to counter media and internet constraints within the nation. In this sense, Tavaana is framed as a success story for being the first online e-learning website, the most civic-minded and interactive Farsi language platform, and the most accessible and visited network, which brings like-minded activists and specialists together and creates conditions for collaboration and exchange and increase their social capital. The author also identifies specific limitations regarding Tavaana’s activism. That is, framed itself in the discourse of civil and human rights, it focuses on middle-class and liberal-oriented individuals rather than people from diverse social and ideological backgrounds and opportunities online.

Akin (2011), Clothey (2022), Henry and Plantan (2022), Rahimi (2020), and Yilmaz (2018) show how marginalized exile communities utilize exile, diaspora, and digital spaces for activism despite their exile status. Thus, they offer a perspective in studying the case of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, an organization based in exile and virtual spaces dedicated to minoritized language education and social empowerment, as well as the methodologies used to examine it. The studies employ qualitative case study approaches, including interviews and triangulation with secondary sources, establishing methodological similarities with the approach adopted in the case study of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, which, in addition to interviews, carried out the examination of various data sources for the purpose of data triangulation.

Although discussions on grass-roots activism in the diaspora exist, there is limited literature on subaltern language educators engaged in underground and informal education of minoritized languages in politically hostile contexts, such as Iran, where their work has compelled them to continue in exile. The Azerbaijani Civic Nation Case study seeks to fill this gap by examining the dynamics of language and cultural education within such repressive environments. This case study also examines how these efforts continue even after educators are forced into exile due to persecution. In this regard, the notion of “activism-in-exile” in the Russian environmental activist's case and the Azerbaijani Civic Nation's case provides valuable insight into how these activists navigate their new international contexts to continue their advocacy efforts and collaborative works. In both the cases of Russian environmental activists and the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, they confronted oppressive conditions in their home countries due to political oppression and authoritarian rule, prompting them to seek avenues for activism within diaspora spaces. Moreover, the examination of Tavaana, the online platform established by Iranian activists, draws comparisons to the potential of digital arenas for activism. This relates to the Azerbaijani Civic Nation's activism in creating language programs, public education, and advocacy works, demonstrating how exile-rooted collectives can utilize digital platforms to advocate their causes. Furthermore, the exile of Azerbaijani Civic Nation and Tavaana activists from Iran reflects their dedication to activist-driven alternative education. Distinct differences emerge, with the Azerbaijani Civic Nation operating with a personal commitment to raising issues for a minoritized community. At the same time, Tavaana, a more mainstream initiative, is supported by the US State Department, implying foreign state interests and policies.

## **Navigating Activism in Politically Hostile Contexts: Resilience and Adaptation**

In diverse contexts, empirical case studies reveal activism and education within challenging political environments. Buyantueva (2018) examined the influence of homophobia and conservative trends in Russia in connection with the activism of LGBT individuals, investigating their motivations, experiences, and responses to challenges in a hostile political and social environment. The study employed qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 29 activists from different backgrounds across eight Russian regions. Snowball sampling was used to select participants. The data collected through interviews were subjected to narrative analysis so the researcher could make sense of the activists' perspectives and experiences. The research focused on studying the motivations, opportunities, challenges, and perceptions of the activists taking part in LGBT rights advocacy. The study also investigated public attitudes and perceptions of homophobia through narrative analysis of various media sources, including online articles, interviews, and social media posts. This analysis aimed to gain deeper insights into public attitudes, homophobia, and how activists perceived these issues. Legislative acts, public opinion polls, and reports from local and international organizations were also analyzed to provide a broader context for learning the challenges LGBT activists face in Russia. The study's primary finding was that Russian LGBT rights activism struggled within a hostile political environment characterized by legal changes, bureaucratic obstacles, violence, and public intolerance. These challenges hinder the development of LGBT rights activism and result in the migration of many activists from the country. The environment's threat of violence deters many LGBT individuals from activism, but they employ effective internet and social network strategies for survival. Platforms like Vkontakte and Facebook allowed LGBT individuals to connect, discuss important topics, share knowledge and experiences, learn about events and

organizations, and communicate with fellow activists. The internet provided a safer space for activism in the face of increasing police violence and pressure from groups targeting the LGBT community during street protests.

Kjaran's (2020) study examined underground gay activism in Iran, a country with a hostile political environment and institutionalized homophobia. It aimed to document the strategies of Iranian gay activists in building a community of resistance and solidarity and their resilience within the context of societal and legal oppression against non-heteronormative identities. The study employed qualitative research with a multifaceted approach to collect data and apply analytical frameworks for interpreting findings. Field notes, interviews, a research diary, and online sources were used to gather detailed insights into the participants' experiences. Field trips were conducted to Iran, primarily to Tehran, between 2014 and 2016. Interviews were undertaken mainly in Tehran, except for one interview conducted with an Iranian gay refugee in Istanbul, Türkiye, who had fled Iran due to his sexuality and activism. Participants were recruited through critical informants and snowball sampling. They were gay-identifying men aged 23 to 30 with varying educational backgrounds and social classes. The interviews aimed to explore their experiences related to their sexuality, past school experiences, and their activism. The analysis of the data utilized “Foucault’s analytic perspectives on power, self-knowledge, and the ethical relations of subjectification, as well as ethics of being” (p. 142), serving as a theoretical framework for interpreting the gathered data and deriving insights into the experiences and strategies of the Iranian gay activists. The study revealed that Iranian gay activists in Tehran engaged in both online and in-person small gatherings to educate and raise awareness about LGBTQ+ issues in a context where schools do not provide any platform for education on homosexuality. The activists sought to create a community of resistance, learning,

and support in a society that rejected and criminalized their identities. They used social media platforms like Facebook and blogs to build virtual communities and enhance visibility. Through these online platforms, they challenged their marginalization, shared information about LGBTQ+ realities, and offered support and counselling for young queer Iranians. Additionally, the underground gay community of Tehran engaged in a discursive subject formation process by producing their own discourses. They influenced and challenged the dominant discourse on sexuality, and made a positive change towards a more complex and multifaceted perception of LGBTQ+ identities and rights in Iran.

Through qualitative research methods, Koo (2016), Tahmasebi-Birgani (2017), and Malekpour (2021) examined how social media empowers women's pursuit of gender justice in Iran's politically constrained context to voice opinions, share experiences, and strategize both online and offline against government censorship and expression limitations. These studies focused on the case of the “My Stealthy Freedom” campaign, which emerged in 2014 as an online platform on Facebook. Initiated by Masih Ali-Nejad, an exiled Iranian journalist, the campaign aimed to protest the compulsory veiling law in Iran. It called on Iranian women, particularly those within the country, to join the movement by sharing photos of themselves without the hijab and with captions that raised awareness about gender issues and shared personal experiences. The studies found that within Iran's restrictive political environment, social media platforms like “My Stealthy Freedom” have become vital spaces for generating discourse and mobilizing against mandatory hijab and other forms of gender and political oppression. Despite attempts by the Iranian regime to control internet access and silence dissenting voices, the campaign provided a platform for Iranian women to voice their opinions, challenge norms, and share their stories without fear of direct repercussions. The significance of this initiative

within the oppressive political system of Iran lies in its ability to create alternative spaces for activism, engagement, and discourse. The platform has empowered women to engage in conversations, connect with like-minded individuals, and bypass government censorship. It has involved ordinary women in various forms of protest and activism and provided them with spaces to be part of social movements and challenge the dominant male-dominated structures. Moreover, the studies acknowledged the potential of the diaspora in supporting activism from abroad. “My Stealthy Freedom” demonstrated how activists in exile could effectively promote change in their home country despite existing limitations. The platform facilitated dialogue and collaboration between activists within Iran and those in exile, showcasing the global nature of the movement and its impact. However, a fundamental limitation in these studies was the omission of a discussion regarding the diverse experiences and social contexts of women in Iran. Ethnicity, religion, language, region, and class could influence women's campaign experiences differently. Yet, the studies did not explore how these factors intersected with online activism or whether the platform effectively addressed the unique needs of various women's groups.

Alsahi's (2018) study examined a Twitter campaign initiated in July 2016 to end the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia, aiming to understand social activism dynamics in non-democratic, restrictive political contexts. The case study examined the @FreeKsaWomen Twitter account associated with the campaign. It sought to uncover how it offered an alternative structure for women's mobilization efforts and claims within the constraints of a restrictive political climate. The research employed Social Network Analysis (SNA) to understand the overall network structure, ties, and relationships within the Twitter campaign. At the same time, Content Analysis allowed for examining the content shared and the discourse surrounding the campaign. The study challenged the traditional notion of abeyance structures, which suggests that social



movements in hostile political climates remain silenced until a more receptive environment emerges. Instead, Alsahi's study found that the @FreeKsaWomen Twitter campaign established an alternative structure in an unsupportive political environment, empowering Saudi women to advocate gender-based demands, push social reforms and challenge the dominant norms. In the face of obstacles to women-led NGO formation, Saudi women utilized social networking platforms, particularly Twitter, to form informal networks for activism and advocacy, expanding their reach beyond traditional organizational structures. The study found that the core of activism shifted from centralized, long-term committed groups to the cyber sphere, where networked exchanges sustained gender-related discourses and claims. This has implications for the adaptability and effectiveness of social activism in challenging political environments, with relevance to language revitalization and minoritized language education initiatives and activism.

Fluri's (2008) study examined the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), an independent feminist-nationalist organization that practiced resistance in challenging social and political environments. RAWA originated in Afghanistan in 1977 and later relocated to Pakistan due to threats and violence, with a particular focus on micro-level community and family contexts. The study used a mixed-method qualitative approach to explore RAWA's activism, including its political ideology, strategies for resistance and mobilization, and role within a hostile context in empowering Afghan women. Data collection included email communication with RAWA, content analysis of their materials, field visits to RAWA's facilities and refugee camps in Pakistan from 2003 to 2005, and interviews with various individuals, including RAWA members, male supporters, women connected to RAWA, and those linked to the refugee camp. In exile, RAWA established underground schools, literacy programs, orphanages, and health clinics. It took measures to protect members' identities through

pseudonyms, veiling, and other security measures. RAWA adopted an exclusionary membership policy to maintain political independence and integrity, partnering strategically with men as feminist supporters to challenge patriarchal norms within Afghan society. The organization utilized the internet to build a transnational support network and engage in advocacy work. The study revealed RAWA's contribution to empowering Afghan women by creating spaces for feminist activism and education within a challenging environment. It demonstrated how RAWA constructed a feminist subjectivity through educational activities and negotiations of gender norms, empowerment, and leadership opportunities. This approach enabled both male and female graduates of RAWA to articulate alternative politics within Afghan society. By exploring the dynamics, Fluri's research deepens the realization of micro-level activism's impact on marginalized groups within broader contexts of oppression and bottom-up struggles, and the possibility of negotiating challenges to pursue change. Nevertheless, RAWA's construction of a “national identity” based on specific dominant languages (Dari Farsi and Pashto) demonstrated how counter-hegemonic groups might reinforce exclusivist and nationalist language ideologies, potentially further marginalizing disadvantaged groups. This necessitates a critical analysis of power and exclusion within societal and educational contexts and the construction and practice of dominant subjectivities, ideologies, and practices from top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

Brodsky et al.'s (2012) article examined the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) as a model for community-based education and critical consciousness-raising, drawing on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. The study shows how RAWA's informal educational approach goes beyond traditional classroom-based learning and focuses on critical thinking, empowerment, and shared community. RAWA employs feminist education to address the unique needs of the organization and Afghan society, aiming to challenge oppressive norms

and ideologies. By providing opportunities for women and children to engage in activities that were traditionally excluded from them, RAWA seeks to empower them as agents of social change. RAWA's education programs not only train participants but also serve as a means of attracting like-minded members and supporters who resonate with the organization's values and vision for change. The educational activities are designed to equip individuals to return to their communities as advocates of RAWA's principles and create a broader community of like-minded individuals committed to social transformation. RAWA's education differs from the formal, classroom-based Western approaches by being contextually grounded and centred on practical needs, with a primary goal of nurturing knowledge, self-worth, and a sense of community among its learners. This educational framework empowers individuals in oppressive situations, promoting critical thinking, self and social empowerment, and facilitating collective action for social inclusion.

Brodsky et al.'s (2011) study aimed to understand the resilience processes at both individual and organizational/community levels within the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), examining how RAWA's members and the organization have endured risks, secrecy, and hardship during more than 30 years of operation in a war-torn and oppressive context. The study utilized qualitative mixed methods, including field notes, semi-structured individual and group interviews, participant observation, and archival document review. Participants in the survey included Afghan women, children, and men who had connections to RAWA in various capacities. The data collected were analyzed using an open and recursive coding system to identify themes, content, and mechanisms relevant to the processes of resilience. The study showed the interconnection between individual and organizational resilience within RAWA and how this is essential for empowerment efforts, particularly in risky

and challenging circumstances. It revealed that personal resilience is not only vital for organizational stability but is also nurtured and augmented by the organizational strength of RAWA. The research identified five functional components of the resilience process: awareness, intention, action, reflection, and maintenance. These elements work together interactively at individual and organizational levels to develop, promote, and protect resilience processes. The awareness of gender oppression in Afghanistan and RAWA's focus on combating it leads to the intention to be part of the movement for change. This intention translates into actions, as members actively participate in RAWA's work despite the emotional and physical challenges associated with its underground and risky nature. Reflection on success stories and community empowerment is the fourth element of resilience. Members of RAWA draw strength from the positive impact they've made, which motivates them to continue their efforts. Lastly, there is a sense of responsibility to protect and maintain the organization's work and the achievements of its members. The authors acknowledge the study's limitations due to the unique and extreme context of RAWA's operations and their focus on a single organization. However, they argue that the findings and the resilience model derived from the analysis have broader applications beyond Afghanistan and RAWA. The study suggests that insights into resilience processes and mechanisms can have implications for grasping and supporting resilience efforts in various contexts and among different groups of individuals.

Rostami Povey's (2003) study researched the coping strategies of Afghan women and women's networks during the Taliban's oppressive rule in Afghanistan, aiming to understand how they pursued women's empowerment despite the challenges imposed by the regime. The study utilized a qualitative participatory approach, involving six days of detailed observations and 126 interviews, which included 11 individual interviews with women leaders of

organizations and eight group interviews with 123 women and three men in Kabul, Afghanistan. The research showcased the resilience and determination of Afghan women and women's networks during Taliban rule, where with the ban on women's education, many took serious risks by establishing covert home-based schools for girls and women. These secret schools educated thousands of women and girls in various subjects, like reading, math, language, and crafts. Despite the constant threat of Taliban punishment, these women stayed committed to empowering women. In the face of difficulties, these experiences developed a strong sense of togetherness and trust among the women, validating their efforts, offering social and cultural support, providing financial aid and job opportunities, and raising awareness about gender-related issues. The study's findings on the impact of grassroots movements, particularly the case of Afghan women's networks promoting empowerment, support, and resistance, are relevant for researching marginalized communities, including language revitalization efforts in politically sensitive and criminalized contexts like Iran.

Although not focused on language, the discussed body of empirical research also demonstrates that in politically hostile contexts characterized by government suppression and limited freedom of expression, digital platforms and online activism have emerged as powerful instruments. They offer opportunities for marginalized communities to voice their concerns, share insights, encourage civic engagement, and build supportive networks in the face of repression. The works of Koo (2016), Tahmasebi-Birgani (2017), and Malekpour (2021) analyze Iran's "My Stealthy Freedom" feminist movement, demonstrating how digital platforms offer alternate spaces for activism, promoting connections, shared experiences, and mobilization for change, with diaspora participation manifesting the global impact of online activism. Alsahi's (2018) research on the @FreeKsaWomen Twitter campaign in Saudi Arabia shows how digital

platforms provide alternative avenues for activism in non-democratic contexts, exemplified by Saudi women using social media to amplify gender-related issues. It also exposes the flexibility of online spaces for discourse and mobilization. Kjaran's (2020) study on underground gay activism in Iran shows how online platforms served as virtual spaces for Iranian gay activists to form supportive communities of resistance and the effectiveness of digital media in promoting solidarity and networking among marginalized groups, mainly when physical gatherings are risky. Similarly, Buyantueva's (2018) study on LGBT rights activism in Russia shows how digital platforms, especially social media, provide a secure space for activists to connect, share experiences, and organize. This enables them to overcome physical threats and legal limitations, showcasing the digital domain as a relatively safe place for marginalized groups in the face of repression. These findings offer insights into the significance of digital platforms, online activism, and informal education in politically hostile environments.

The studies analyzed activism and empowerment in challenging political environments, showing how marginalized groups promote their causes through grassroots efforts, even in oppressive contexts. In doing so, they contributed to our understanding of activists' strategies and experiences. Moreover, they added to knowledge regarding the impact of online platforms on subaltern educators and activist initiatives, particularly in politically challenging contexts. They offer insights into challenges faced by Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators in underground activism or exile, focusing on linguistic marginalization and empowerment in repressive political environments to address context-specific challenges and avoid generalizations.

## **Conclusion**

The studies on minoritized language education and activism efforts in marginalized communities reveal how community initiatives, both in the homeland and diaspora, empower

minoritized languages while resisting linguistic marginalization against dominant ideologies; some studies also show instances of reinforcing those norms (Akin, 2011; Chandras, 2019; Clothey, 2022; Leinonen, 2022; Yilmaz, 2018).

Beyond minoritized language focus, other empirical studies on grassroots activism in challenging political environments provide valuable insights into activists' strategies, resilience, discourses, experiences, and contributions (Alsahi, 2018; Brodsky et al., 2011; Buyantueva, 2018; Fluri, 2008; Heidemann, 2014; Henry & Plantan, 2022; Kjaran, 2020; Koo, 2016; Malekpour, 2021; Rahimi, 2020; Rostami Povey, 2003). These studies reveal factors such as the promotion of community resistance and the establishment of learning spaces in marginalized communities and groups facing political suppression (Brodsky et al., 2012; Buyantueva, 2018; Fluri, 2008; Heidemann, 2014; Kjaran, 2020; Rahimi, 2020; Rostami Povey, 2003). For instance, Henry and Plantan's (2022) examination of Russian environmental activism, using the concept of "activism-in-exile," reveals how marginalized activists adapt in exile. Examining these studies also reveals that in politically hostile environments characterized by government suppression and exile, digital platforms and online activism have become instrumental tools for marginalized communities, offering opportunities to voice concerns, share insights, promote civic engagement, and build supportive networks amid repression (Alsahi, 2018; Buyantueva, 2018; Kjaran, 2020; Koo, 2016; Malekpour, 2021; Rahimi, 2020; Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2017). These findings contribute to our research on subaltern language educators, such as those in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation case study, who are engaged in informal language education and the creation of alternative learning spaces and practices, both domestically and in exile (Qarabagli, 2023).

Moreover, this research, building upon the empirical studies discussed above, adopts a case study methodology to investigate a specific social phenomenon within a particular context,

seeking a nuanced view of it (Cohen et al., 2018). Like the discussed studies, the research employs a triangulation approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary data source to explore educators' experiences and perceptions in marginalized communities. Additionally, it incorporates document analysis of publications, organizational documents, and online sources to achieve a deeper knowledge of the socio-political landscape in the examined case (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018).



## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design and Questions**

As previously stated, this case study examines the perceptions of subaltern educators regarding their involvement in minoritized language education through underground and exile-based informal education. It analyzes the spaces, strategies, and resources utilized to promote linguistic and community education within marginalized contexts, particularly in politically hostile environments such as Iran, where grassroots educators encounter suspicion, suppression, and limited tolerance (Amnesty International, 2019, 2021). The study also explores how socio-historical contexts and power relations shape the experiences of subaltern educators engaged in such practices in oppressive contexts. These questions are addressed through the case study of Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators' underground engagement within the context of Iran during the 1990s to 2000s, as well as their recent efforts in exile-based informal and virtual language education since 2020 in Toronto, Canada (Qarabagli, 2023). Studying this case provides valuable insights into how grassroots educators navigate challenges like oppression and marginalization, as well as their experiences, contexts, and strategies (Brodsky et al., 2012; Fluri, 2008; Gagne et al., 2022; Rostami Povey, 2003). The key questions guiding this inquiry are:

1. How do subaltern educators describe their activities and struggles to empower their oppressed language and its learners and perceive their impact, as exemplified within the context of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation?
2. What resources, strategies, networks, and spaces do subaltern educators utilize to effect change, such as those in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation in Iran?

3. What are some of the sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and power-relational contexts of subaltern educators' activities regarding promoting minoritized languages in underground educational settings?

This study employs the case study research methodology, well-suited for investigating complex social phenomena and addressing “how” or “why” questions (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018). It examines the efforts, obstacles, and influence of subaltern educators within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation. The goal is to provide a holistic, context-rich depiction of this case within its domestic and exiled real-world contexts. Case studies, a dynamic and context-sensitive research methodology, investigate contemporary phenomena within their natural settings, recognizing context in shaping causes and effects (Cohen et al., 2018). They facilitate the exploration, description, and explanation of complex phenomena within their contextual frameworks, with considerations like history, geography, social dynamics, politics, and economics (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018). This approach, as discussed by Yin (2018), is precious when dealing with complex social contexts where researchers have limited control over events, as is the case in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation. The “case” examined in this study is the activities of subaltern educators who have dedicated three decades to educational efforts as they confront external constraints stemming from the Iranian political regime and geographic factors while advocating for their marginalized linguistic community in their homeland and in exile while facing a complex web of contextual influences. The study covers a range of dimensions, including strategies, challenges, motivations, and impacts, all of which are influenced by contextual factors.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) characterize a case study as an in-depth examination of a bounded system, with the case itself as the primary focus, thus the importance of explicit

definition and boundary-setting, an aspect also highlighted by Stake (2006) and Cohen et al. (2018) to ensure research clarity. Utilizing Stake's (2006) concepts of “boundedness,” “contexts,” and “experience,” this study centers on subaltern educators within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, establishing the parameters of their case and ensuring that their efforts, strategies, challenges, and the empowerment of the Turki linguistic community in Iran and the diaspora are the central focus. Following Yin's (2018) perspective on case study methodology, the study ensures clarity by differentiating the specific phenomenon of linguistic marginalization and social resistance from its broader context within Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators' efforts. Research questions and data collection methods, such as interviews, articles, and online sources, help clarify the study's scope and enable a thorough exploration of subaltern educators' strategies, challenges, and impacts.

In the Azerbaijani Civic Nation study, a single-case approach was chosen for its focused investigation due to project time constraints, adopting a qualitative method to study deeply the contextual dynamics of linguistic and educational activism within a marginalized community in the face of Iran's politically hostile context (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) suggests a range of data collection sources for case study research, including documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, and participant observation. In this case study, data is collected through interviews, articles, organizational documents, and social media platforms to allow a nuanced exploration of educators' experiences, challenges, and strategies. Additionally, Yin (2018) insists on the importance of “data triangulation,” a process that involves comparing findings from multiple sources to enhance the credibility and validity of the study's results. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that thorough case investigations require various data collection tools and sources, especially for complex social phenomena with numerous variables. Similarly, Cohen et

al. (2018) discuss the importance of recognizing multiple variables in case studies and that using diverse methods and evidence sources enhances validity. In the Azerbaijani Civic Nation case study, where linguistic and community empowerment, informal education, and social change efforts are interlinked, gathering data from various sources ensures a comprehensive comprehension of these activities and their contextual factors, thus increasing the reliability of the findings.

Using a single-case study approach aligns with Yin's (2018) view that case studies are valuable for exploring complex social phenomena in a real-world context. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) point out that a single-case study is chosen when the goal is to thoroughly explore a specific case, not generalizing about a larger population, a point reinforced by Stake (1995), who underlines the importance of prioritizing comprehension of the particular instance before seeking comparisons. Yin (2018) further argues that a single case study can significantly contribute to theoretical concepts, either confirming, challenging, or extending existing theories. The primary goal of this study is to comprehensively examine the forces and processes behind the formation and sociolinguistic empowerment efforts of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators, both within their country and in the diaspora, and in doing so reveal the dynamics of grassroots activism and language education in a challenging sociopolitical environment. This study explores bottom-up activism against top-down linguistic policies, analyzing the organization's evolution from Iran to exile and virtual realms to understand adaptability in minoritized language education efforts. It contributes to theoretical frameworks and provides empirical insights into alternative linguistic and educational efforts within subaltern and marginalized conditions.

Scholars classify case studies into categories based on their objectives (Cohen et al., 2018). Yin (2018) distinguishes them as exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory, with

exploratory studies building conceptual frameworks, descriptive studies providing detailed real-world accounts, and explanatory studies examining causal relationships. Stake (1995) offers an alternative categorization: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic studies focus on deepening knowledge of a specific case. In contrast, instrumental studies extend beyond the case to understand theories or issues, and collaborative studies examine multiple cases to enhance performance. This case study adopts an exploratory and descriptive approach to investigate the role of subaltern educators' linguistic initiatives, aiming to provide a rich account of educators' activities, contextual elements, historical factors, political influences, and challenges, while seeking a conceptual framework and deeper insight.

### **Data Collection**

In this case study, diverse data collection methods, including open-ended interviews, images, journals, content from social media platforms (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube), and online resources like media interviews and articles, were utilized to gain a detailed and context-specific view of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation. Through the incorporation of these diverse data sources and the embrace of a data triangulation approach, the study provides a rich and nuanced depiction of the organization's evolution, encountered challenges, and its impact on the linguistic community it serves (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

### **Interviews**

This study employed semi-structured group interviews with two key figures from the Azerbaijani Civic Nation to explore their group's formation, approach, activities, and challenges in informal minoritized language education. Interviews are a vital data source in case study research for explaining noteworthy events, answering “how” and “why” questions, and capturing

participants' perspectives and insights on complex issues. Semi-structured interviews, while following a consistent line of inquiry, with their fluidity, flexibility, and open-ended nature, promote open interaction, with the possibility of follow-up questions and the gaining of critical insights and perspectives (Cohen et al., 2018; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 2018). Conducting two 4.25-hour in-depth group sessions while accommodating interviewee convenience ensured thorough data collection and nuanced comprehension of the case context. In-depth interviews with key informants provide invaluable insights and may offer suggestions for additional interviewees and data sources (Yin, 2018). With the participants' consent, interviews were recorded and later transcribed for in-depth analysis. Zoom, a virtual platform, was used to facilitate interactive engagement, recognizing the increasing importance of such media in educational research (Johnson & Christensen, 2019).

## **Documents**

The study widely analyzed diverse documents and content to understand the case within its contextual background, including course materials, promotion texts, lectures, articles, journals, social media content, images from underground classes, and online student reflections. Written, visual, and audio materials, including lecture series, articles, posts, and videos shared on the Azerbaijani Civic Nation's or its members' public social media accounts (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc.), were analyzed for corroboration with interview data. Additionally, images from underground classes in Tabriz and events, as well as the participation and performance of students and educators, provided visual insights into the teaching and learning processes. In addition, the analysis of visual and textual materials, including articles, media interviews, and social media posts by the Az Civic Nation and its members on case-related

issues, validated the information gathered from interviews, further enhancing the comprehension of the studied case.

### **Research Setting**

The research setting for this study was virtual, in alignment with the research design and the case's context, chosen for its appropriateness, accessibility, and the integral use of the Internet in modern research and data collection (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). The study collected data through virtual interviews, documents, and online content from digital spaces relevant to the Azerbaijani Civic Nation's activities, with an in-depth examination of the context and practices of the case. The study used emails, WhatsApp, and virtual meetings (Zoom) to interact with research participants, contextualizing the case's online activism within its real-world environment.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this case study employs a thematic analysis strategy chosen for its suitability in capturing recurrent patterns, themes, or categories within the collected information (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Thematic analysis involves a repetitive and ongoing data review, categorizing it into articles that emerge based on the research questions. This process demands generating answers to the research questions based on the information, classifying these answers into pieces, and developing these themes by reviewing and comparing all available data. The thematic analysis approach is beneficial for novice researchers. It requires systematically identifying and categorizing articles within data, creating meaningful findings that accurately represent the case study's outcomes and contributing to a deeper sense while meeting study objectives (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

## Participants

The research participants for this study, Lale Javanshir and Samad Pourmusavi, are two critical educators heavily invested in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation. In 2020, they formed the exile organization with this name, drawing from their activism and extensive experiences dating back to the 1990s in Tabriz, where they engaged in underground and community-based education. Their participation holds the potential to provide firsthand and contextual insights that are crucial for gaining a thorough sense of the case (Yin, 2018).

### Participant 1: Lale



Figure 1<sup>2</sup>: Lale's Turki Poetry & Samad's *Saz* - 1998 Babek Castle

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<sup>2</sup> All photos reproduced in this thesis are used with the permission of Lale and Samad and can also be found and accessed by the public on the Instagram page @az.civic.nation of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation.



Lale Javanshir, an activist, educator, and writer, left Iran in the early 2000s to study in Türkiye and later relocated to Canada in 2005, where she continued her education and has been living ever since. She holds a bachelor's degree in Turkish Language and Literature from Ghazi University in Ankara and earned her master's and doctoral degrees in Turkology at the University of Toronto, where she currently works as an instructor, alongside her educational and leadership position in running the Azerbaijani Civic Nation projects.

During her upbringing within her family, Lale's formative years became closely linked to her language and cultural heritage as she engaged with her grandmother's oral stories and witnessed other family members' involvement in underground Turki literary activities. This early exposure connected her to a network of underground community gatherings celebrating the Turki language and culture, which served as alternative spaces for linguistic and cultural celebrations. At home and in these home-based underground spaces, she acquired skills in reading and writing her language, poetry, dancing, and singing. Surrounded by the support and encouragement of community members, she solidified her connection to her heritage, developed her identity, and gained empowerment, even starting to write and publish poetry in Turki as young as 12 in local journals (Lale Javanshir Qocabəyli, 2021).

During this time, Lale's involvement in underground cultural and literary circles, where she developed her love for literature and cultural activities, formed the basis for her mid-1990s activism as an undergraduate student in Tabriz. She joined fellow underground educators within the same circles, participating in efforts to teach Turki language and culture, including literature, dance, and music, to children primarily from underground communities through home-based children's classes.

Lale's position as a woman within a marginalized community has given her a deep understanding of how various forms of marginalization, including gender, language, ethnicity, and class, influence people's experiences, which informs her advocacy efforts to address community challenges. She has been actively involved in various forms of activism within the Turk community of Azerbaijan in Iran, both domestically and abroad. This involvement includes leading as an educator in underground spaces, publishing a literary journal, advocating for women's and human rights, as well as minoritized language issues through writing and interviews. Additionally, she leads dance and music workshops and performs at events (Aliyarli, 2022; Javanshir, 2023a, 2023b; Qarabagli, 2023; Quluncu, 2022a).

In Figure 1, she recites Turki poetry while Samad plays the *saz* at the 1998 Babek Castle Assembly, which evolved into a resistance platform, challenging government restrictions and contributing to the formation of a new Turk-Azerbaijani struggle (Atabaki, 2014). In 2020, Lale and Samad co-founded the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, aiming to virtually teach their marginalized language within the diaspora while promoting knowledge exchange and community interaction.

## Participant 2: Samad



**Figure 2: Samad's involvement in home-based informal teaching, Tabriz 1996**

Samad Pourmusavi, a veteran activist, educator, and artist from Tabriz, East Azerbaijan province in Iran, emerged as a student and cultural activist in the 1990s through involvement in underground spaces, engaging in both clandestine and public activism. After facing arrest, imprisonment, and torture due to his years-long activism, he sought refuge in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan, in 2003. Since 2005, he has been living in Toronto, working as an architect while maintaining his identity as an activist in exile through his cultural, community, intellectual, and educational engagement, and activities (Quluncu, 2023).

Samad's resilience and devotion, shaped by childhood experiences of linguistic and cultural oppression and inspired by the family's and community's resistance through underground cultural spaces, inspired him to join a collective and community effort in creating learning opportunities for community members, especially the younger generation. He witnessed community leaders and educators' determination and resistance in creating spaces to teach Turki

language, culture, and history, not only educating individuals like him but also showing the importance of alternative and informal learning spaces in constructing a sense of belonging and identity despite bans and hostilities (Mosaïque Network, 2023; Quluncu, 2023, 2022b).

In the early 1990s, his commitment to accessible youth education led to his involvement in organizing underground language and culture classes for children in collaboration with fellow educators (Qarabagli, 2023). This initiative persisted for several years, as evidenced by his presence in Figure 2, where he is seen teaching a small group of engaged students during one of those underground classes in Tabriz in 1996.

In exile, Samad continues his activist journey, engaging in cultural, musical, and dance education, contributing articles and interviews, and participating in panels and intellectual discussions on the Turk community and civil rights movement of Azerbaijan in Iran, addressing issues concerning the region (Mosaïque Network, 2023; Quluncu, 2023, 2022b). He also continues to collaborate with Lale as a co-founder of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation (Qarabagli, 2023).

### **Researcher Positionality**

As Said (2007) points out, knowledge finds meaning within the context of existing scholarship, societal realities, and power dynamics. Similarly, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) argue that a critical social justice framework necessitates an awareness of how personal identity and social group affiliations shape perspectives. Embracing the notion that research is deeply influenced by socio-political factors, I agree with Sensoy and DiAngelo's (2017) claim that “knowledge reflects the values and interests of those who produce it” (p. 53). My dedication to studying language, power, and resistance has been greatly influenced by my experiences within a linguistically minoritized Turk community in Iran's Azerbaijan region, driving my commitment

to critically examining the complex dynamics of these issues. Growing up as a member of a Turk linguistic minoritized community in a small border village in Ardabil province, Azerbaijan region of Iran, I witnessed firsthand from a young age the dichotomy between the cultural and linguistic expressions of my community and the exclusionary education system. My family's nurturing of my mother tongue through poems and folktales instilled a sense of self-assurance. At the same time, my formal education in the dominant Farsi language felt alienating and dismissive of my language, culture, and identity. As a high school student, my participation in a petition for linguistic justice at age 17 deepened my realization of language's role in exclusion, exposing me to institutional power, stigma, and state interrogations, providing insights into linguistic securitization and power dynamics.

My background as a marginalized individual of Turk descent from Iran's Azerbaijan region and as a language and human rights advocate shape my research framework, influencing every aspect from theory to data analysis in studying language resistance and empowerment within minoritized communities. Thus, my research on minoritized language education and activism, focusing on the Turk community's language issues, is informed by my insider perspective as a minoritized Turk from Iranian Azerbaijan with a background in language activism. Meanwhile, as a graduate student conducting research within the Canadian educational system without direct organizational involvement, I maintain an outsider perspective. This approach and recognition enable me to conscientiously reduce biases and misrepresentations in my study, shaping my exploration of these critical themes through my unique combination of subjectivity, privileges, and responsibilities.

While my use of terms like “triangulation,” “generalizability,” and “bias” may imply positivist tendencies, it is not necessarily the intended stance of the thesis. Instead, these terms

are employed in reference to their usage within case study research methodology. I approach these concepts critically and with awareness, aligning with the theoretical approach of my thesis.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Findings**

This section responds to my three central research questions regarding subaltern educators within the context of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation. Firstly, it explores how these educators articulate their activities and struggles in empowering oppressed languages and learners. Secondly, it investigates the resources, strategies, networks, and spaces that subaltern educators utilize to effect change. Lastly, it examines the sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and power-relational contexts shaping the activities of subaltern educators in promoting minoritized languages within underground educational settings.

Examining these questions has revealed five key findings about subaltern educators, particularly within politically oppressive contexts, exemplified through the case of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation. The first theme explores the role of underground spaces for marginalized educators in navigating oppressive political contexts, discussing the challenges they face, and the strategies employed to overcome them. The second theme focuses on a network-driven collaborative framework for subaltern education, highlighting the significance of social and cultural capital utilized and sustained within this approach. The third theme examines alternative and creative pedagogies in underground classes, discussing their positive impact on students engaged in minoritized education. The fourth theme explores transformative minoritized language education and its role in enabling social empowerment and a sense of agency through engagement with questions of language, identity, and inclusion/exclusion. Lastly, the fifth theme discusses the practice of academic language revitalization through writing, discourse, and the role and responsibility of organic intellectuals in this process.

## **The Role of Underground Cultural Spaces in Oppressive Contexts**

In response to RQ2, this section explores the specific spaces, resources, strategies, leveraged by subaltern educators to drive change, discussing examples from the Azerbaijani Civic Nation in Iran. Also, addressing RQ3, it examines the sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and power-relational contexts that shape the activities of subaltern educators, especially in their efforts to promote minoritized languages within underground educational settings. The findings reveal the instrumental function of underground spaces in contributing to the rise of activist marginalized educators as they navigate challenges and political hostilities in oppressive environments.

In the context of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, underground spaces facilitated the conditions necessary for the emergence and practice of informal education. These alternative spaces, organized and hosted in homes by individuals from diverse backgrounds such as musicians, poets, teachers, historians, prose writers, and cultural enthusiasts, collectively referred to as *Eldars*. Eldars, whose name is related to *El* in Turki, meaning a community, were respected for their active engagement in community affairs and needs. They were known for their warmth, generosity, and committed support in both good and bad times, irrespective of their financial status. As a teenager growing up in Tabriz in the 1980s, witnessing the early emergence of underground spaces, Samad, perceives them as symbolizing “solidarity and civil resistance” against cultural oppression and restrictions.

An example of such cultural restrictions was the limitation on music. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, music was stigmatized, leading to raids, confiscation, and destruction of instruments, coupled with a strict prohibition on its performance. Musicians were interrogated, arrested by authorities, and some died in prison (Youssefzadeh, 2000). Samad, recounts, for



instance, how, in response to the government's prohibition of traditional Turki musicians known as *Ashiqs* from performing their music following the revolution and their stigmatization, these gatherings became essential social, moral, and financial support for the folk musicians.

The celebrated Turki folk performers, known as *Ashiqs* in Azerbaijan, have cultivated a profound bond with their community for generations, skillfully blending poetry, storytelling, dance, and musical artistry and employing instruments like the *Saz*, which is a stringed musical instrument, commonly used in Turki music. As living embodiments of their rich culture, *Ashiqs* actively engage in a diverse array of events, ranging from weddings to cultural gatherings, with their central mission focused on the preservation of ancestral heritage, the nurturing of cultural knowledge, the promotion of social and community unity, and the illumination of the wisdom and traditions of their people (Nikaeen & Oldfield, 2020). The term *Ashiq* itself, derived from Arabic roots meaning “one who is in love” (Levin, 1996, p. 175). Thus, the community wholeheartedly rallied behind them, offering solidarity during times of oppression, and actively organizing music learning sessions where *Ashiqs* were invited to teach them how to play the *saz*, with Samad benefiting from this opportunity.

The underground community leaders utilized music as a foundation and a means of extending invitations for regular community gatherings, known as *Yığva* in the local Turki dialect, which means gatherings. By leveraging existing social and cultural capital and desire, they created a vibrant sense of community and participation among attendees. These underground gatherings often transformed into lively home concerts, drawing in large crowds, and nurturing a rich environment for participating in cultural exchanges, creating an engaging atmosphere filled with Turki poetry and music-related literature, and even leading weddings to transcend their traditional nature and turn into festive celebrations enriched with rich literary

expressions. As described by Samad, “It seemed as though every musician had been given a platform for free expression, while poets found ample opportunities to recite their verses.” A secret choir group comprised of both men and women, emerged in post-revolution Tabriz, the capital of East Azerbaijan Province in northwestern Iran, singing Turki anthems despite limited resources. Samad, described, “They spent a year tirelessly practicing and recording songs at home.” Similarly, reflecting on the musical environments and dance within these underground spaces, Lale, shared, “I fulfilled all my desires in Tabriz, learning to dance and later teaching what I had learned.”

The underground spaces extended beyond music, art, and literature gatherings, and served as powerful vehicles to overcome various forms of oppression. They nurtured an inclusive atmosphere, drawing individuals from diverse backgrounds and political affiliations to come together. As, Samad, nostalgically recalled, during these gatherings, symbolic occasions were excitedly celebrated, drawing crowds of 80 to 300 people: “For instance, on International Women's Day, which falls on March 8th, in Tabriz alone, around 10 households would organize dedicated programs to honour the day. These events were magnificent, featuring music, poetry, literature, and historical discussions.” In other words, these gatherings offered a secure and alternative space for marginalized groups, including various identities such as gender, language, and culture, to engage in and resist dominant norms and restrictions through cultural practices and diverse forms of participation.

The activities in these underground spaces enabled community resistance and the celebration of diverse identities such as gender, language, art, and class, inspiring Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators to organize language and culture classes for children and contribute to community cultural practices (Quluncu, 2023). Samad, said: “It was a banned culture and

language.” Families recognized the absence of formal learning opportunities due to these restrictions, making the underground classes a rare chance to learn their culture. Thus, the underground children's classes organically emerged within existing underground social spaces, “cultural resistance” practices, and community needs, starting with families who shared a cultural bond and a commitment to education. Samad, explained, “When we began the first children's class, we started with people we already knew well, and, in fact, all their children were already raised in a cultural [context that included elements such as dance, music, and literature]; it was not like we taught them.”

Moreover, recognizing the community's need for education in minoritized languages and cultures created trust among families and educators. According to Lale, this trust enabled classes to expand, as families not only brought their own children but also introduced the children of their friends or relatives. Lale, stated, “They trusted us, and the children were under our responsibility.” This trust was evident during events like the Azerbaijan Symposium, organized by the University of Tabriz in December 1998, which centered on the exploration and discussion of topics related to Azerbaijani literature, language, and history (Az Civic Nation, 2022a). Families participated by responding to Lale's call, “Come, get your kids from school, we will take your child to the Symposium in Sharafkhane [88 km from Tabriz],” ensuring their children's involvement. Further emphasizing trust between educators and families, Lale, stated, “We also took them to an event in Tehran and stayed overnight there.”

Another way in which underground community support facilitated the formation and continuation of these classes was through active participation in organizing the classes, with community members offering their homes as venues for weekly sessions. Lale, stated, “We never specified the next class location; someone volunteered.” Families intuitively determined the

platform, often discussing it amongst themselves and even approaching organizers, expressing their willingness to host the next class, as Lale, stated: “Sometimes, a family would approach us and say, ‘Let's hold the class at our house next week.’” The community provided spaces for classes, but accommodating large groups posed challenges. Samad explained, “No limit on the number of people. Some days, the house was small with many guests, so we would divide into three rooms, go to the yard, and form another group,” pushing them to prioritize houses with larger rooms.

The underground spaces also supported classes by enabling children to showcase their talents during gatherings, creating opportunities for students. Samad described, “The children would perform and execute what they had learned in front of their families, relatives, and neighbours.” He further elaborated on the connection between the underground classes and the house gatherings:

If someone in today's Tabriz, for instance, wishes to learn a skill like dance or singing, they would typically attend their lessons individually and then return home. However, in our classes, the children would come and learn there, and we would showcase the best in gatherings or ceremonies. If someone had a talent for singing, they would perform at these gatherings. Those kids enjoyed these opportunities.

The nature of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators' underground language and culture classes in Tabriz reveals the context of existing underground spaces and cultural gatherings, formed in response to broader power-imposed limitations and restrictions. This case sheds light on the context, formation, experiences, resources, and strategies of subaltern educators in similar underground scenarios. It aligns with other underground educational and activist initiatives in politically repressive settings, as seen in Buyantueva's (2018) study on LGBTQ+ rights activism

in Russia, Kjaran's (2020) research on underground gay activism in Iran, and Fluri's (2008) examination of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). Particularly in the Iranian context, post-1979 regime change, underground spaces played an important role in sustaining the cultural, literary, intellectual, and political activism of dissenters (Baraheni, 1998; Shaffer, 2002).

### **A Network-Driven Collaborative Framework for Subaltern Education**

As discussed in the previous section, in the face of political and socio-cultural restrictions, an underground cultural movement emerged in Tabriz, uniting diverse groups in covert, home-based spaces. Motivated and supported by the principles of “solidarity,” “cultural and civil resistance,” and “awareness-raising activities,” within this secret spaces, Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators organized classes for children, thereby contributing to the expansion of underground community culture, language practices, and education (Az Civic Nation, 2021d; Mosaique Network, 2023; Quluncu, 2023).

In light of the demonstrated importance of underground spaces and resistance in facilitating subaltern education, this section will explore RQ2 to investigate the resources, strategies, and networks utilized by subaltern educators, as exemplified in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation case study in Iran, to promote change within the context of subaltern education. The experiences of Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators in Tabriz and their activism in exile showcase the effectiveness of a network-driven collaborative framework for subaltern education. Cultivating connections with cultural activists, musicians, writers, historians, and publishers not only enriched their underground pedagogical practices but also expanded their linguistic and cultural activism into the public domain. Furthermore, it enabled the formation of underground educational initiatives beyond Tabriz, reaching various cities in Azerbaijan. This collaborative

approach also persists in Samad and Lale’s activities in exile as they actively engage with activist groups, academics, and media platforms. Figure 3 visually outlines the collaborative network of Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators, depicting their connections in cultural networks, media engagement, expansion to other cities, exile networks, and collaborative projects in their collective effort to support subaltern education.



**Figure 3: Azerbaijani Civic Nation Educators' Network**

The underground education of Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators was largely enriched by existing networks and collaborations. According to Lale, “Support and solidarity within our circle were constant, reflecting the value placed on our efforts.” Samad, touched on the diverse social capital they possessed, recognizing the distinctive support of intellectuals: “Even in well-equipped schools worldwide, you will not find language professors, history experts, or authors with a large number of publications. But we had them—they enriched our classes with knowledge and experience.” Moreover, on close ties with intellectuals, Samad shared, “We

invited experts in music or history to share knowledge with the children.” He discussed the consideration of inviting individuals “who could connect with the children, not just those who were knowledgeable” to make the learning process engaging and enriching. He emphasized this interconnectedness by stating, “We had support from influential Tabriz newspaper publishers, using these connections to publish children's creative works in magazines like ‘Mahde Azadi’ or ‘Adineh,’ providing a unique opportunity for their creations to reach ‘serious’ individuals” adding that “even in modern schools, publishing students' work in newspapers is uncommon.” Hence, the success of minoritized language education in Tabriz is attributed to a well-established network shaped by the unique underground context, facilitating efficient resource utilization. However, in the absence of such networks and collaborations, Samad discussed limitations in cities like Urmia or Ardabil, where “a single individual managed all the behind-the-scenes aspects of language classes.”

In response to challenges in other cities, they expanded efforts beyond Tabriz, helping and collaborating to organize underground classes for children across various cities in Azerbaijan. Lale, explained their engagement in Urmia, stating, “We had children come to our class from Urmia before. Then, when some of our people went to the University in Urmia, they started children's classes there, and they brought teachers from Tabriz.” Lale also shared her experience of cross-city collaboration, saying, “At first, I learned some dance in Tabriz, and I went to Urmia to teach them to dance. I stayed overnight at the dormitory. The musicians also came from Tabriz.” Samad, discussed the support provided by educators from Tabriz, stating, “Groups from Tabriz supported these people until they found their own way, meaning Tabriz provided the logistics and support for these activities, and these classes were held weekly.”

Regarding this collaboration, he further stated, “We not only organized classes but also invited children from Urmia to join us in Tabriz for joint gatherings.”

The subaltern educators within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, leveraging their networks with cultural activist groups, extended collaboration into public spaces and expanded the promotion of Turki as a marginalized language and culture beyond underground spaces and gatherings. Samad discussed how strong connections and recognition within cultural networks created opportunities for their children's groups. These opportunities facilitated performances at events like those organized by the non-governmental cultural organization “Chichekler” in Tehran in 1997 and the government-sponsored academic symposium on Azerbaijan Studies in December 1998. Samad shared that, during the symposium, the students' “exceptional reading and dance abilities” earned them a standing ovation, given the uncommon and unprecedented nature of such performances by children in Turki within the Iranian context (Az Civic Nation, 2022a).

Forced into exile in the early 2000s, educators Lale and Samad continued their collaborative, network-driven approach, leveraging social networks and human capital beyond their home country's borders. Samad, reflecting on his two-year stay in the Republic of Azerbaijan between 2003-2005, overflowed with nostalgia and affection as he recounted, “We lived in Baku, Azerbaijan, for two years, establishing connections with musicians, writers, and politicians, and everything went smoothly as we had well-established networks, building close friendships.” In Baku, Lale and Samad collaborated with the local young literary circle to publish a special issue in “Alatoran” magazine on modern Turki literature in South/Iranian Azerbaijan. Samad talked about the project's importance in connecting young writers from both Azerbaijan. He mentioned, “We invited poets and writers from South Azerbaijan to Baku, and they covered



their own expenses.” He proudly shared, “Through our networks, we introduced them to renowned writers in Baku.” As pointed out by Samad, the special issue, featuring 54 Turki writers from Iranian Azerbaijan, forged lasting connections and interaction within the literary community of Azerbaijan from both sides, creating valuable new relationships and contacts.

Since their 2005 exile to Toronto, Canada, Lale and Samad have persistently continued their collaborative and network-based activism, forming a dance and music group with fellow diaspora artists and community members. In 2020, during pandemic lockdowns, they initiated the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, a virtual educational project aiming to promote minoritized language and community education. This endeavor involves collaboration with academics and activists to address the marginalization of the Turki language and community in Iran (Qarabagli, 2023).

Within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, they invite scholars, Turk academics, graduate students, and others to present on academic topics in Turki, offering English or Farsi options for non-fluent speakers. Lale discussed the significance of community engagement, stating, “We have advanced our work due to growing student interest in our issues.” She stressed the importance of community members in social sciences and humanities as people with cultural capital, and the need for a collaborative platform for young academics to contribute to Turki language and community education. Lale stressed the necessity for continual contributor engagement in diverse projects, ensuring active participation and consistent utilization of their expertise, going beyond a singular presentation or involvement. As an example, Ramin Jabbarli, a community member and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Washington, voluntarily led the “Sociology of Social Movements” virtual course.

Furthermore, Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators, in their pursuit of subaltern education, engage in network-driven collaborations with various activist and media groups. One noteworthy collaboration is with the diaspora intersectional feminist group “Azad Qadın” (Free Women). In a podcast collaboration, Lale discussed challenges for marginalized Turk women in Iran using Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought*, and the importance of an intersectional framework for recognizing the struggles of minoritized women in Iran (Azad Qadın, 2023). Another example of network-driven collaboration is illustrated by the October 2022 launch of the *Monologue* project in collaboration with “Etekyazi,” a diaspora-based Turki language online media outlet focusing on socio-cultural and political issues in Iranian Azerbaijan. The initiative involved interviewing Turk activists from the diaspora, focusing on the September 2022 protests in Iran that erupted after Mahsa Amini's death under custody, arrested for allegedly violating the so-called “hijab law” (Qarabagli, 2022c). These discussions specifically explored the perspectives of the marginalized Turk community in Iranian Azerbaijan, addressing activist debates on the protests (Aliyarli, 2022; Qarabagli, 2022c; Tara NJ. 2023).

The network-driven collaborative approach in subaltern education, exemplified by the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, involves community members in challenging hegemonic structures. Rooted in grassroots activism, it harnesses diverse networks to enrich and sustain minoritized language and education. This reveals the importance of community engagement for its continuation and sustaining, both locally and in the diaspora. This aspect is evident in various studies, such as those on Basque language activists in France (Heidemann, 2014), Kurdish communities and initiatives (Akin, 2011), the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) (Brodsky et al., 2012; Fluri, 2008), coping strategies of Afghan women during the Taliban's oppressive rule (Rostami Povey, 2003), underground gay activism in Iran

(Kjaran, 2020), Russian environmental activists in exile (Henry & Plantan, 2022), and the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement, also known as the MST (Tarlau, 2017, 2019). These studies also highlight the importance of community-based networks and collaborative efforts in the educational and advocacy struggles of marginalized communities, particularly when faced with oppressive contexts.

### **Alternative and Creative Pedagogies in Underground Classes**

As discussed in the two previous sections, in response to government restrictions and the absence of multilingual-mother-tongue-based education, Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators in Tabriz organized covert language and cultural classes for children. Drawing inspiration and support from underground resistance practices, this grassroots initiative provided alternative, safe educational spaces for marginalized communities at home and continues to do so in exile through community networks and collaborations.

This section addresses RQ1 and RQ3. Firstly, it examines how subaltern educators describe their pedagogical approaches in empowering their oppressed language and its learners, with a specific focus on the context of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation. Secondly, what is the impact of sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and power-relational contexts on the pedagogical strategies employed by subaltern educators in promoting minoritized languages within underground educational settings. It is revealed that educators, shaped by their unique contexts, have embraced alternative, and creative approaches. These approaches empower students to actively engage in education, encouraging self-assurance and encouraging them to contribute to language and cultural revitalization through community-driven practices.

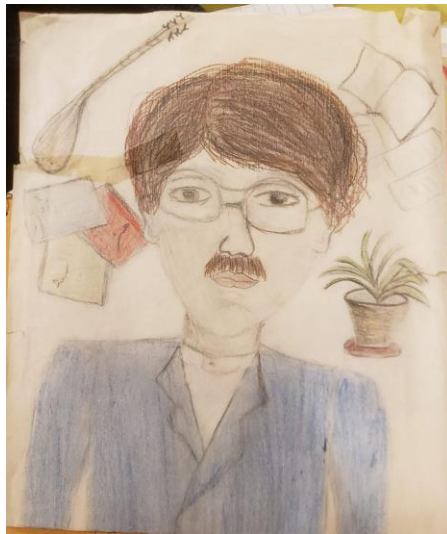
One particularly creative and alternative approach practiced in underground education was organization of outdoor activities such as outdoor activities and cultural celebrations. Samad

discussed the significance of their purposeful activities, stating, “Picnics were planned with care,” despite facing numerous challenges and difficulties. Lale mentioned of both indoor and outdoor celebrations of Azerbaijan's cultural days, stating, “We celebrated various holidays on Azerbaijan's calendar, like Samad Behrangi's birthday.” Samad Behrangi (1939–1968) was an Azerbaijani-Turk schoolteacher, known for his impactful teaching, innovative curricula, and significant contributions to critical and literary work in Iranian society during the 20th century (Asgharzadeh, 2007). Lale elaborated on their practices of organizing outdoor activities beyond home-based settings, stating, “We went on picnics to places like Babek Castle and held classes at the foothills of the Mishu mountains.” She nostalgically remembered families bringing and sharing meals and playing folkloric games like *Qurd*, *Quzuc*, *Bənövşə* [Wolf, Lamb, Flower] with their children, reviving oral traditions that were hard to replicate at home.

Another alternative approach in the pedagogy of Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators was integrating arts into their underground language and cultural classes. Figure 4 exemplifies this approach with a student playing the *kamāncha* in the background during classes. This innovative method added a unique and enriching dimension to students' educational experiences. The educational impact of integrating arts into the curriculum is evident in the artworks created by students, as illustrated in Figure 5, which depicts a student's drawing of their instructor, Samad, with a *Saz*, a traditional Turk-Azerbaijani musical instrument. Certainly, the significance of an arts-based approach also lies in the reality of everyday cultural minoritization, particularly with Azerbaijani Turk music labelled as “undesirable” (Qarabagli, 2022b). It can be perceived as a form of “cultural resistance” cultivated in underground gatherings and spaces in Tabriz, as outlined in the first section.



**Figure 4: Art-integrated and culturally empowering education**



**Figure 5: A Student Painting of Samad**

In fact, this approach was shaped at the micro level through connections to underground cultural gatherings and spaces where music, dance, and entertainment played roles. Samad discussed that skills gained through arts-integrated education held significant value in those gatherings, allowing students to showcase their talents. He stated: “Children would come and learn [dance] there, and we would showcase the best ones in gatherings or ceremonies.” In other

words, integrated arts education was shaped and linked students to unique and real-world underground cultural spaces, offering a stage for them to exhibit their learned skills. It facilitated the validation and appreciation of culture and education, promoting community engagement and leading to positive impacts on students' experiences, creativity, and identity.

The educators focused on creativity, abstract thinking, and self-expression to enrich students' imagination and encourage unrestrained free expression. Lale described this approach, stating, “I would present small children with five suggestive words, such as “Bird,” “Tree” and “Wind.” Then, I would encourage them to envision these elements and craft poems inspired by them.” Reflecting on their teaching style, Samad said, “Our class was not just about dry language and history. We took a unique and creative approach, not even realizing how unconventional it was. In retrospect, one can see that our method was truly exceptional.” He added, “During painting classes, we would not tell the children to draw a home. We would tell them to paint affection.” This approach encouraged students to think abstractly and engage in thought-provoking discussions.

The educators developed this approach after observing how family and school systems limited students' self-expression. Samad discussed the restricted opportunities for children to express themselves openly, stating, “their worlds turned black and white, became too logical.” Their underground classes aimed at giving freedom and self-assurance, with Samad encouraging children to let their imaginations run wild. To counteract feelings of oppression, he introduced abstract topics like “I wish I had a flying horse,” encouraging students to explore their imaginative capabilities. Similarly, Lale aimed to create an environment where students could freely explore their ideas. She mentioned, “The children's minds were liberated, and they were not limited,” highlighting that the students experienced mental freedom to generate their own

ideas in class. Lale recounted an instance when a student suggested, “Imagine this room as the sea, and we are fish,” showcasing how the imaginative setting allowed children to explore endless possibilities with their thoughts and creativity.

Lale, explained their approach, where students explored specific topics and expressed themselves through various forms of communication, including drawing, saying, “We encouraged children to imagine and express themselves through drawing.” Moreover, they immersed children in interactive storytelling; as Lale explained, “we would start a sentence from a child's poem and ask them to continue the story,” encouraging them to share their creative ideas. She talked about the importance of oral literature, especially for younger children who did not need written material, stating, “Oral material was strong in our system.” Children expressed their reactions through writing or drawing, forming the foundation for their educational journal; as Lale, stated, “There was an opportunity to transition oral material into written form.”

To encourage active and interactive learning, Turki folk tales were woven into the curriculum, promoting critical thinking and engagement with culturally relevant material. Samad detailed how students imagined figures from Turki folklore like *Deli Dumrul*, *Koroglu*, and *Qachaq Nebi* visiting their homes. In this way connecting the lessons to their cultural heritage and inspiring students to develop their own creative ideas. Lale further explained their flexible approach, and the use of oral storytelling for young children. She stated, “We would narrate the folk story of ‘Malik Mammad’ and ask students what they would do if they were in his place.” According to Lale, this method encouraged imaginative thinking, facilitated active participation, and heightened student engagement.

To further allow creative learning, students’ works were published in the class journal or local weeklies, offering a platform for recognition and a sense of accomplishment. Samad

observed, “Having their work in a newspaper brought the children immense joy and a deep sense of achievement... They beamed with happiness, proudly sharing their achievements.”

Additionally, the educators initiated an underground student magazine, “Qaranquş (Swallow),” combining visual and written elements to celebrate and recognize students' creative efforts.

Samad reflected on the evolution from distributing handouts to producing “Qaranquş,” noting, “Previously, we printed and handed out materials.” He elaborated, “We then decided to consolidate these, integrating educational content and students' creations in the magazine.” The regular publication of students' writings and drawings in this underground children's journal solidified their role as co-creators of knowledge. It provided them with a meaningful platform to actively contribute to educational materials, experiencing a deep sense of engagement, self-efficacy, and agency in their ongoing learning journey (Rivers & Willans, 2013).

The educators prioritized the importance of student subjectivity, needs, and engagement. Lale highlighted their teaching approach's dynamic, organic, and flexible nature; “It was very organic; there was no rigid program to follow.” She pointed out to the importance of observing students' needs, explaining, “We paid attention to their mood and adjusted activities accordingly.” She discussed the diverse activities: “Every week included music, dance, songs, and even learning musical instruments, but there was no fixed schedule.”

Different educators led age-based circles (ages 5-15), yet an inclusive and relaxed atmosphere encouraged children to explore interests and socialize freely. As can be seen in Figure 6, a photo from the underground class, Lale led one group of students, and Samad led another. The circle setup, without fixed seating as in a traditional classroom, enhanced the class dynamic, enabling students to explore other circles freely. Lale, stated, “We did not impose strict rules on children, like sitting in one place without moving.” She warmly recalled moments when



children freely interacted and pursued their interests, sharing, “You could observe a child from one group getting curious about something Samad was discussing in another, and we encouraged them to explore.” Lale talked about respecting individual preferences, saying, “While we designed materials for specific age groups, we allowed a 5-year-old to listen to a story intended for 10-year-olds if they were interested.” In this nurturing environment, strict boundaries were avoided, as she explained, “We did not say, ‘Where are you going? Sit in your place.’” The class celebrated children's autonomy, encouraging them to explore and learn at their own pace and according to their interests.

This flexible learning environment is aligned with the educators' vision of education as a joyful and playful process where entertainment enhances knowledge acquisition. Samad elaborated on the importance of a playful approach: “Things learned through play stay in a child’s brain.” He further stressed the value of a playful approach: “Children used to enjoy it without being afraid of teachers or parents.” He discussed how this method stimulated strong social connections and interactions, leading to rapid friendship formation among children playing together.



**Figure 6: In 1996, Small learning circles in Tabriz underground Turki language class with Lale and Samad as instructors**

Within their dynamic and flexible learning environment, the educators prioritized promoting leadership among students, enabling them to contribute ideas and skills. Lale specifically mentioned that experienced students, some as young as 12, took on mentorship roles, with her stating, “They were responsible for the younger ones; while they could not teach the language, they could teach the dance.” Moreover, students engaged in decision-making; as Lale, recalled, “Suggestions from the children were evaluated.” This subaltern education promotes leadership, collaboration, confidence, and responsibility to enhance students’ learning experiences.

Samad, discussed the class’s positive impact on students’ confidence and leadership, stating, “A significant sense of confidence and leadership has been nurtured.” He discussed the transformative nature of the class, where students later formed their classes, saying, “Some became exceptionally skilled.” The activist culture inspired students to take the initiative and

trust their abilities proactively; Samad stated, “They were encouraged to take ownership and visualize achieving their goals.” He added, “They set up music and Turki language classes, formed literary circles, and instilled leadership and confidence.” Samad stressed that “the confidence of these children was essential” in their education.

Samad shared how one of their students, Aydin, took on an early teaching role at 15-16 in their underground classroom, an experience believed to have positively impacted his later cultural activism. As a young adult, he assumed responsibility for a major bilingual journal publication, a testimony to cultivated courage and mental preparation. Lale's mention of a former student, “I saw his photo; he was imprisoned for his involvement in Azerbaijan's movement at such a young age,” pointed to early engagement in meaningful causes and active citizenship, believed to have been fostered by a grassroots activist-driven classroom environment that empowered confidence and leadership.

The student-centric education of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation’s underground class in Tabriz left a lasting impact, as former students still follow the organization’s activities on social media and engage with its works. In an Instagram post featuring 1996 underground class photos, numerous students nostalgically engaged in the comments section, sharing emotional sentiments in their mother tongue, Turki, and recalling cherished memories of their educational experiences. For instance, Amir Safari recalled those times as “beautiful days.” Arzu Golzar, while tagging Amir Safari, engaged in an exchange, asking, “Is that you in the second picture, the one in the white shirt?” Amir Safari confirmed with a reply, “Yes, it is me.” Parisa Shariati added an enthusiastic comment, expressing, “Ms. Lale, I am one of those girls on the first page whose pictures you shared... what beautiful childhood memories we had,” accompanied by a smiley emoji. Lale warmly responded, saying, “Teaching our mother tongue to your own children and

other kids will help preserve the sweetness of those childhood days and ensure our language continues to thrive.” Pariya Riyafathi expressed her admiration by commenting, “Long live our valued teacher.” Saba Farnoud wrote: “Ms. Lale, after closely examining these pictures, I just realized it is our house... Mom and Dad had my paintings hanging on the wall.” The Az Civic Nation responded by acknowledging the contribution of Farnoud’s family in hosting these classes and expressing gratitude for their unwavering support, stating, “Indeed, it is your house. There is even a photo where Mr. Gholamhossein Farnoud talks to the children. Let’s remember and honour dear Ms. Mehri and Mr. Farnoud. Their home was always a center for us, and they unconditionally supported our endeavors.” Also, many participants expressed affection and appreciation using emojis, including flowers, hearts, and applause (Az Civic Nation, 2021b). Reconnecting with the works of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation after more than two decades through social media reveals the lasting positive impact of these educational experiences on the lives and memories of the students involved.

In the Azerbaijani Civic Nation’s underground classes, innovative teaching methods were used to engage students actively. This alternative pedagogy, which viewed students as “partners” and “producers,” aimed to enhance students' engagement, confidence, and achievement, and left a lasting impression, as evident from their nostalgic social media posts. This approach is an alternative to practices and perceptions which perceive students as passive. Instead, with this model, students are encouraged and allowed to actively participate in curriculum development and their learning activities, a process where their contribution is recognized as valuable to the success of their education and their sense of themselves (Rivers & Willans, 2013).

The student engagement approach adopted by these educators in their undergraduate classes aligns with Trowler's (2010) notion of student engagement, which argues that “engagement is more than involvement or participation,” and “It requires feelings and sense-making as well as activity” (p. 5). Moreover, the significant positive impact of “active” learning approaches, prioritizing inquiry-based strategies and playful learning in education, has been found to improve engagement among elementary students in social studies courses (Hwang et al., 2015). Teachers' involvement in creating stimulating learning environments and underlining knowledge co-creation and creativity in playful learning can transform education and enrich students' learning experiences (Kangas et al., 2017; Kangas, 2010; Simon & Kalan, 2016; Trowler, 2010). This approach, as argued by Whitton (2018), also recognizes the value of promoting a positive attitude towards failure and a “lusory attitude” in playful learning. Furthermore, Lillard (2013) underline the importance of providing students with freedom and choice within active learning environments so their interests guide the learning agenda.

### **Transformative Minoritized Language Education and Social Empowerment**

As previously explored, educators within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation utilized non-traditional approaches in their underground classes. They focused on nurturing student engagement through arts-integrated education, community activities, flexible learning, leadership development, and promoting expressive and imaginative education. Building upon previously discussed findings, this section addresses three key research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3) by investigating the perspectives of subaltern educators on empowering and transforming oppressed language learners through minoritized language education, using the case of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation. It analyzes strategies for minoritized language education in underground spaces and exile, exploring how subaltern education is a counterforce against neglect and stigma

directed towards minoritized language speakers. Examining these empowerment and transformative dynamics for minoritized individuals and communities is contextualized within the sociohistorical and sociopolitical contexts of oppression and resistance. This in-depth examination shows that subaltern education is not merely a pedagogical approach but also a potential force for societal transformation and empowerment. As will be demonstrated, minoritized language education challenges hegemonic ideologies, raises social awareness, and contributes to positive change in the context of linguistic and political oppression, particularly in addressing issues such as identity, stigmatization, discrimination, and language.

In their pursuit of minoritized language education, Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators attempt to combat linguistic and identity stigmatization and discrimination and empower their subaltern community. They place an importance on teaching Turki as a minoritized language to counter discrimination, relying on knowledge as an empowering defense against negative assertions about their language and identity. Lale, stated, “I have never been ashamed of being Turk or speaking Turki, and that confidence comes from knowledge,” using it as an empowering tool to dismiss negative attitudes. Samad added that while knowledge cannot entirely shield individuals from oppression, it serves as a defense against feelings of “inferiority” and provides a strong foundation for pride and self-assurance: “If you experience the pride, you have your solid support behind you: knowledge, culture, they support you and make you proud of yourself.”

In Iran, the shame associated with being a non-Farsi speaker is driven by a monolingual education system and the exclusive status of Farsi as the official language that marginalizes and stigmatizes minoritized languages (Jafari, 2019; Mirhosseini & Abazari, 2016). These systemic biases, reinforced through education and media, perpetuate negative stereotypes about minoritized languages and cultures, portraying them as “ethnic” and “regional.” This reinforces

the perception that their speakers are “backward” and views their languages as barriers to modern knowledge acquisition, threatening notions of national identity and unity (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2003; Kalehsar & Andarab, 2013; Soleimani & Osmanzadeh, 2022). Furthermore, this perspective influences how both minoritized, and majoritized individuals perceive these languages, rationalizing their exclusion (“Are you ashamed to speak,” 2004; Jafari, 2019; Kalan, 2016; Mirhosseini & Abazari, 2016; Mirvahedi, 2016, 2021). Therefore, within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, educators are involved in their engagement in subaltern education and the teaching of a minoritized language as an empowering response to oppression and challenges against linguistic and social hierarchization. This practice aims to confront neglect and stigma within the formal education system and broader society.

Considering this context, Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators strive to address neglect and stigma within the formal education system and broader society by providing educational opportunities. An exemplifying instance of this effort was the advanced academic-level Turki language course, provided free of charge and conducted virtually in the fall of 2022. This course successfully engaged 100 students from Iranian Azerbaijan and the diaspora, with 40 participants ultimately earning certificates despite various challenges (Qarabagli, 2023). Dr. Toğrul Atabay, the course's instructor, discussed the transformative impact of using Turki for academic and complex subjects, stating, “In a society that had been crushed to such an extent that they [once] could not even believe that their language could be written, it deeply affected everyone to see that their native language could express the highest academic issues and delicate intellectual topics” (para. 6). The course went beyond language learning, creating public engagement, critical discourse and thinking, and community pride, evident in participants' social media posts proudly sharing their course completion certificates.

Exiled political activist Duman Radmehr in Sweden, on his Facebook page, wrote, “In this course, along with the language, I gained hope for the future and self-confidence.” He commended the Az Civic Nation collective, led by Dr. Lala Javanshir, for their exceptional and professional course delivery (Duman Sajjad Radmehr, 2023). Najaf Nemati, a course participant from inside the country, discussed how he began learning his mother tongue in middle school, facing challenges but persisting through home-based classes. Reflecting on the Azerbaijan Civic Nation course, he observed “majored differences”, praising its high academic standard and diverse international participants base, which made him “feel close” to people from all over the world despite not seeing or knowing many of them (Najaf Nemati, 2023).

Rubab Mahmudi's course participation prompted self-reflection, addressing past shame from Farsi-only schools, as shared on her Instagram page. A transformative moment occurred during a Turki book reading session when a fellow participant praised her language skills, transporting her back to the fourth grade. This experience stood in stark contrast to hurtful remarks she had endured about her language and accent, with someone once questioning, “Why do you speak like peasants?” The Azerbaijani Civic Nation's language course marked a turning point for Rubab, as reflected in her deep love for her mother tongue, where she embraces its diverse dialects. She wrote, “Now, I speak peasant, urban, Baku, whatever, from my father's Qaradag dialect to the language taught by my mother; I love this language very much.” Rubab also compared Lala Javanshir's efforts to those of two prominent figures in the linguistic revitalization movements of the Turki language in Iran during the 20th century, namely Samad Behrangi and Professor Mohammed Taqi Zehtabi and expressed deep gratitude, stating, “She ended [my] longing to learn and write Turki. I am very grateful to her” (Robab Mah, 2023).



Rubab's participation in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation's language course exposed the contrast between her past oppressive school environments, where her accent was stigmatized, and the inclusive course that embraced her language. Echoing Cummins (2000), such environments where linguistic and cultural identities are devalued can lead to “many resisting further devaluations of their identities by mentally withdrawing from participation in the life of the school” (p. 246). Yet, against such a backdrop, this experience showcases how education in minoritized languages can empower linguistically oppressed individuals, challenging the stigmatization and feelings of inferiority associated with their language.

This empowerment is further evidenced in Hadi Sattari's reflections, where he questions the lack of opportunities for mother tongue education and points out the government's fear and historical discrimination towards the Turki language and identity. He argued, “The center has always tried to weaken and eliminate our language and identity with the idea of ‘one language, one nation.’” Sattari, through his critical reflection shared on his Instagram page, aimed to expose unjust discrimination against Turks in Iran, while advocating for continuous discussions on social positionalities and linguistic challenges (Hadi Sattari, 2023).

This sense of empowerment and voice can extend beyond language, engaging with intersectional issues, as exemplified by Maryam Noorollahy's post on her Facebook page. Her engagement with the course exposed the complex interplay of oppressive power dynamics, raising a critical question: “Are there equal opportunities for women to learn their mother tongue?” Maryam, encountering Turki literacy through friends and Dr. Lala Javanshir's recorded classes online, shared, “I first learned from Dr. Lala Javanshir's recorded basic Turki language lessons.” Yet, aiming for advanced proficiency faced challenges, especially the high cost of online classes, leaving her at times “heartbroken.” Her family's restrictions on her employment

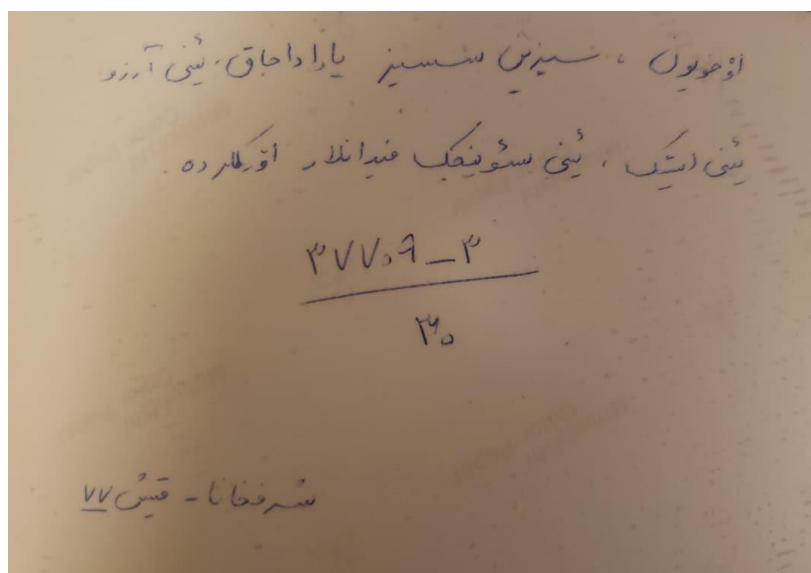
as a woman also added to the challenge. Despite these challenges, she remained committed, continuing her journey to learn Turki by reading novels and books. Her enthusiasm was reignited when the Azerbaijan Civic Nation announced the launch of academic Turki language course, and she eagerly expressed her desire to attend, saying, “When the Azerbaijan Civic Nation announced that academic Turki language courses would be held, all the love in my heart for my mother tongue was rekindled.” Nevertheless, participating in the classes proved challenging for Maryam due to family restrictions related to her gender and internet limitations imposed in Iran during the 2022 fall protests against gender oppression. Reflecting on her experience, Maryam stated, “Classes started, and no matter how willingly and joyfully I participated in the lessons, the pain I suffered because I was a woman did not leave me.” She wrote, “Learning our mother tongue has always been a big battle for us. Fight against outdated ways of life within families, fight with oppressive ideas in society, and fight against those who deprived us of our rights...” Despite enduring significant hardships, Maryam remains resolute and confident, stating, “With all the difficulties, I am sure that we will obtain our rights someday and achieve victory in these battles” (Maryam Noorollahy, 2023).

Minoritized language education, exemplified by the Azerbaijani Civic Nation's academic Turki course, not only enhances literary and language skills but also contributes to critical thinking and awareness of linguistic discrimination, identity, and intersecting forms of oppression. Participants perceive themselves as change agents by embracing and critically engaging with their marginalized language. This reclaiming of what is denied in a language learning experience profoundly shapes their identity, evident in their writings and reflections as acts of empowerment and raising their voices against oppression.

In fact, the desired educational outcome envisioned by subaltern educators within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation is the sense of empowerment and transformation, rooted in their early years of underground classes in Tabriz. This is exemplified by a note on the back of Figure 7, which shows students at the 1998 Azerbaijani Studies Symposium. The note, in Turki with Arabic script and seen in Figure 8, reads, “Sing, your voice will create new hopes, new desires, new happiness, like saplings in hearths.” This message reflects a strong, hopeful vision, positioning education as a means for positive change and a brighter future for the community and its children.



**Figure 7: Students performing in Sharafkhaneh, December 1998, at the First International Azerbaijani Studies Symposium**



**Figure 8: The note behind the students' performance picture**

The broader vision of social empowerment and transformation through education extends beyond the Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators' practice. This approach is evident in other oppressive situations worldwide where subaltern educators use education to empower their communities. Fluri (2008) highlights the role of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) in locally empowering women where national and international power structures have historically failed. Brodsky et al. (2012) argue that RAWA, through community-based and feminist education, empowers individuals to address oppression and promote social change. This points to the transformative potential of education in building alternative knowledge bases and community spaces, even while struggling against all limitations. The organization focuses on training individuals within its outreach who can return to their communities as advocates of RAWA's values, creating a larger community of empowered individuals committed to social change. Meek (2015), within the context of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), argues that educators within the movement approach teaching as inherently political because they see schools as a means to achieve social and

environmental transformation. Tarlau (2019) shows how MST activists engage in education to further their goals of land reform, agrarian reform, and social transformation. Similarly, Mariano and Tarlau (2019) demonstrate how MST leaders recognize the importance of engagement with public education to transform schools into institutions aligned with their broader political and economic objectives.

Furthermore, the Azerbaijani Civic Nation's subaltern education, which amplifies marginalized voices, aligns with critical pedagogy theorists such as Paulo Freire and bell hooks. Paulo Freire (1970) argued that education plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals as passive participants within the system or encouraging critical thinking, enabling them to define their roles in the world actively. Similarly, bell hooks (2014) championed the idea that education should prioritize the recognition of student voices, arguing, "our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another" and that "Any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged" (p. 8). She insists this must be more than a statement; it requires demonstration through pedagogical practices, starting with educators genuinely valuing every student's presence and viewing their contributions to the classroom dynamic as valuable resources. This philosophy mirrors the Azerbaijani Civic Nation's approach of engaging in an inclusive educational environment where each student's voice is heard and valued, thus creating a supportive and engaged learning community.

Moreover, the Azerbaijan Civic Nation educator's educational approach aligns with Cummins' (2000) work, which criticizes traditional pedagogy for omitting critical perspectives on historical and contemporary events and creating a "sanitized curriculum" that reinforces societal power structures, shaping "good citizens" who conform to existing norms (p. 255). Cummins urges educators to "nurture intellect and identity equally," confronting "coercive

power relation” and addressing marginalization to use education as a tool for “transforming the future rather than reproducing the past” and thus enabling individuals who have long been marginalized to “reclaim dignity and voice” (p. 6, 8). Cummins (2000) argues that the inclusion of minoritized languages in education validates culturally diverse students' experiences and cultures, challenging societal perceptions of inferiority or worthlessness. This approach encourages critical reflection on dominant notions of superiority and devaluation, as he points out that “coercive power relationships break down when the subordinated group refuses to play their (essential) part in being the recipients of this form of power” (p. 238).

### **Academic Language Revitalization through Writing, Discourse Building, and Intellectual Responsibility**

As discussed in the previous section, educators in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation consider teaching literacy in their minoritized language to empower individuals against linguistic and social marginalization. Expanding on this notion of empowerment, this section addresses RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 within academic linguistic revitalization, examining how subaltern educators empower their oppressed language and learners, the resources and strategies utilized, and the sociopolitical contexts influencing their activities. The findings reveal that academic language revitalization is pushed through publications, language courses, and integration into academic and public discourse, creating spaces for language use and its expansion across diverse fields. Intellectuals, exemplified by educators as organic intellectuals, play a major role, and carry responsibility in this process.

In the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, educators are strategically revitalizing Turki as a minoritized language by establishing new linguistic spaces and domains for its use. A notable example of this strategy was the publication of “Bayqush” [(owl)] a literary magazine in Turki at

Tabriz University in 2001. This publication aimed to use the language in modern literary expression, aiming to overcome its limited use and contribute to its prestige and value. In their expression of dedication, they stated:

Feeling the gap for a literary magazine with a contemporary spirit, we present to you “Bayqush,” which we have hastily prepared. When we chose the name Bayqush for the magazine, we thought that the literature of a language imprisoned by chauvinism, politicization, and a lack of written and learning practice could not be anything other than ruins. But this is not the end. Bayqush exists, and if it doesn't freeze in the cold or lose its way, and if it is not beheaded and killed, it will sing. (“Contents,” 2001)

In exile, Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators persist in their advocacy for “contemporary” and relevant content creation, including the development of academic materials in Turki. They organize weekly lecture series, panel discussions, conferences, and courses through virtual platforms to further this cause. Lecture titles such as “Modern Education in Iran and the Role of Mirza Hasan Rushdiyya,” “The Standardization Process of Turki in Iran and the Challenges We Face,” “The Formation of the Iranian/Persian National Identity and the Azerbaijani Turk Question,” “Environmental Injustice in Iran,” “Sustainability and Ecological Citizenship,” and “Discursive Frames of the Turkish Movement Against Discrimination in Iran” demonstrate their efforts to utilize Turki in academic and intellectual discourse (AZ Civic Nation, n.d.). Moreover, the fall 2023 virtual course, the “Sociology of Social Movements,” was also aligned with this perspective, aiming to engage diverse students in interdisciplinary collaboration, introduce academic discourse, and share knowledge in Turki (Az Civic Nation, 2023).

In this pursuit, Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators showcase a distinctive approach to linguistic empowerment by actively integrating it with critical topics and academic discourses,

such as language, gender, the environment, and intersectional discussions, contributing to the formation of intersectional discourses in Turki through public education. They organize discussions in Turki, addressing topics such as “Crafting the Modern Women in Azerbaijan,” “Moving Towards Feminism,” and “The Process of Development of Centralist Feminism from State Feminism to Nationalist Feminism in Iran” (AZ Civic Nation, n.d.). Furthermore, these educators champion the intersectional framework through articles like Lale's “Let's Amplify Azerbaijani Women's ‘Lake Urmia is Thirsty’ Call.” In this specific piece, Lale explores the intersection of gender, environmental concerns, and ethnolinguistic marginalization (Javanshir, 2023b).

Their dedication to academic language use, particularly in writing, is also evident in various language course designs. For example, in promoting their introductory language courses, Lale expressed her intention: “I planned to prepare an online language grammar and writing course for Azerbaijani writers and academics living abroad, considering the lack of opportunities for Azerbaijanis to study in their mother tongue in Iran,” inviting those conducting scientific research and seeking to improve their ability to write articles in Turki (Az Civic Nation, 2021a). Similarly, in promoting an advanced/academic Turki language course, it was stated that, “For nearly two years, the Az Civic Nation, as an academic association, has been organizing talks and sessions covering subjects like economics, politics, social sciences, culture, and the environment” to lay the groundwork for language expansion into the realms of “thinking and thought” (Az Civic Nation, 2022b). Lale discussed the importance of these courses considering the absence of formal educational opportunities for acquiring literacy in minoritized languages in Iran. She posed a reflective question: “When we ask why a writer or historian does not write in



Turki, we should also question ourselves: Can any English speaker, for instance, compose an academic article in English without undergoing proper training?”

Recognizing the limitations of individual efforts, the educators urge community intellectuals to consider the writing and promotion of Turki across various domains not as a mere “choice” but as a “duty.” It is argued that this is an urgent approach in safeguarding the language against the linguistic dominance of Farsi, which jeopardizes Turki's “functionality” (Az Civic Nation, 2021c; Pourmusavi, 2022). Lale stresses intellectuals' responsibility and role in linguistic revitalization by arguing that the duty of ordinary people is fulfilled when they “speak Turki with their child,” and “the responsibility for activists, intellectuals, and writers begins” thereafter (Quluncu, 2022a, para. 8). She asserts, “If intellectuals cannot write contemporary global issues in Turki or translate them, we are not doing our job as writers” (para. 8).

They also emphasize intellectuals' responsibility to actively contribute to contemporary critical discourse, especially in addressing linguistic marginalization and raising awareness. Samad urges intellectuals to educate themselves and the public by asking fundamental questions like “How does language impact our lives?” and “What are the consequences of language loss?” (Quluncu, 2022b, para. 9). Similarly, Lale encourages Turk intellectuals, writers, and activists to reflect on the impact of linguistic marginalization, urging them to ask, “How did the Farsi colony create a barrier between us and our language?” (Javanshir, 2023a, p. 30). She expresses concerns about the lack of discussion on Turki's critical situation and questions, “Why is Turki in a critical situation, [and] in addition to the policies of the state, how did we contribute to this?” (Quluncu, 2022a, para. 6).

These educators encourage critical discursive engagement and dialogue within the Turk community in Iranian Azerbaijan, using terms like “linguisticism,” “language imperialism,”

“language genocide” and anti-colonial discourse, with terms like “internal colonialism,” “colonial conditionality,” and “colonizer’s language” to highlight Turki's marginalization and contribute to discursive formation (Javanshir, 2023b; Quluncu, 2022b).

In discussions on language revitalization and discourse expansion, educators acknowledge the key role of intellectual figures like Dr. Mohammad Taqi Zehtabi, who significantly influenced the revitalization of the minoritized Turki language in Iran (Asgharzadeh, 2007; Quluncu, 2023; Shaffer, 2022). Zehtabi's pioneering influence on linguistic discourse is exemplified in the publication of his book *The Ancient History of Iranian Turks* in Turki. Through this work, he extended the language domain beyond traditional bounds, transcending its limitations from literature and folklore to its application in historical writings. Samad discussed how in the pre-1990s era, literary figures were often considered the “language owners” within cultural activism. However, Zehtabi challenged this perception by championing Turki not only in traditional literary realms but also broadening its scope across various academic fields. Similarly, Lale, discussing Zehtabi's intellectual legacy, stated, “In our time, 20 years ago, Dr. Zehtabi chose to write his book on history in our language, in Turki” (Quluncu, 2022a, 04:34). This discourse implies the value of such commitment and the importance of its recognition, serving as a source of inspiration and a model for others to follow in broadening its use. The impact of Zehtabi's contributions is evident in how educators within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation deliberately incorporate Turki into writing, discussions on diverse academic subjects and socio-political discourses.

As demonstrated, Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators, acting as organic intellectuals, are working to revive Turki in Iran through publications, education integration, and raising linguistic awareness, despite challenges. Scholars like Grenoble (2021) stress the need for diverse efforts

in language revitalization, including incorporating it into previously unexplored domains to address its historical neglect. Additionally, sustaining a language necessitates persistent commitment, vision, and hard work. This ongoing process requires a continuous influx of new ideas and the execution of interconnected projects, all contributing to the shared goal of sustaining the language (Penfield, 2021).

While bottom-up academic linguistic revitalization efforts are commendable, broader structural changes are necessary. These changes include institutionalization, dismantling linguistic dominance, and implementing inclusive policies to ensure the relevance of minoritized languages in writing, academia, and beyond. Eisenlohr (2004) argues that increasing teaching material alone will not ensure language revitalization. An essential component is an ideological shift among speakers, as he states, “an increase in teaching material...does not necessarily lead to language revitalization” (p. 35). Scholarly studies echo this perspective, noting the need for systemic changes beyond localized initiatives. Akin's (2011) study on Kurdish diaspora initiatives shows the role of grassroots efforts, like creating dictionaries and modernizing literacy, as practices contributing to language revitalization but acknowledges broader societal challenges. Similarly, Leinonen's (2022) research reveals that community-led educational initiatives in Kurdish in Türkiye, despite impacting elites, fail to change daily language practices, arguing that it is necessary to have “state support, affirmative action, and strong language policy” for effective language empowerment (p. 22).

## **Chapter 6**

### **Discussion**

This thesis investigated the challenges faced by subaltern educators engaged in the empowerment of minoritized languages and their speakers, focusing on a case study of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation and Turki in the context of Iran. The study explored the manifestation of power dynamics involving oppression and resistance in language, education, and activism, tracing the educators' engagement over three decades from underground classes in Tabriz to exile-based virtual education in Toronto. The examination was contextualized against the backdrop of Iran's politics of monolingualism initiated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the state's systematic linguistic homogenization policy, stigmatizing minoritized languages and posing challenges to linguistic diversity and inclusion (Asgharzadeh, 2015; Kalan, 2016, 2024; Qarabagli, 2022a; Rashidi, 2019).

The thesis was structured around three central research inquiries. RQ1 explored how subaltern educators articulated their activities and navigated challenges in empowering their oppressed language and its learners. RQ2 investigated the resources, strategies, networks, and spaces utilized by subaltern educators in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation in Iran to effect meaningful change. Lastly, RQ3 examined the sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and power-relational contexts influencing subaltern educators' endeavors to promote minoritized languages, particularly within politically hostile contexts, through underground educational settings.

In addressing these questions, the thesis employed a single-case study methodology and qualitative data collection methods. Primary data sources included interviews with two key educators, supported by methods such as social media content analysis, publications, and

document examination. Thematic analysis was utilized to understand and categorize the collected data.

In terms of its theoretical framework, the thesis employed a subaltern theoretical framework, drawing on scholars such as Antonio Gramsci, Ranajit Guha, and Gayatri Spivak. Specifically, the study drew on Gramsci's concepts of hegemony, subalternity, and transformative education. It explored how education could perpetuate or challenge dominant ideologies and power relations. Moreover, Gramsci's ideas helped think about the centrality of organic intellectuals from subaltern communities in leading counter-hegemonic movements and specifically addressing sociohistorical challenges in decolonizing education, knowledge production, and systemic oppression.

The literature review on grassroots activism in minoritized language education and revitalization, including diasporic communities, provided a comprehensive framework for the case study. It examined various aspects of the context, addressing concerns, identifying shared challenges and strategies, and exploring methodologies used by researchers in similar studies. The examination of empirical studies beyond language revitalization revealed how marginalized activists, especially those engaged in informal education, navigate political oppression. This deepened my grasp of power dynamics, grassroots educators' resistance, and experiences, including using underground networks, activism in exile, virtual spaces and social media platforms.

### **Key Conceptualizations**

In the Azerbaijani Civic Nation case, the analysis of subaltern educators reveals the critical role that underground cultural spaces play in politically hostile environments, providing necessary alternatives for community-based learning, solidarity, and resistance. The significance

of these underground efforts lies in offering a unique platform for celebrating and promoting community, culture, and language in restricted settings. Their approaches reinforce the idea that linguistically marginalized communities globally employ a range of strategies, discourses, and practices in navigating language struggles, adapting to varying socio-political and linguistic contexts (De Korne, 2021; DePalma et al., 2015; Flubacher & Busch, 2022; Heidemann, 2012; Olko & Sallabank, 2021; Spolsky, 2012; Urla, 2012). De Korne (2021) argues that “there are no ideal nor one-size-fits-all strategies, but that activists employing a repertoire of adaptable strategies have the potential to resist inequalities and imagine new linguistic futures” (p. 25).

The use of underground spaces by Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators aligns with other research findings on the utilization of such spaces for education within oppressive contexts. Rostami Povey's (2003) findings on Afghan women during Taliban rule reveal the establishment of underground home-based schools in that context, aimed at confronting education restrictions, constructing community bonds, and addressing gender-specific concerns through networks. Similarly, Fluri (2008) studied the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), a feminist-nationalist organization that, in a hostile environment, continued their work for Afghan women and political change from exile and underground. RAWA established schools, literacy programs, orphanages, and health clinics as part of their efforts. Furthermore, Buyantueva's (2018) and Kjaran's (2020) studies on LGBTQ+ activism in Russia and Iran show the necessity of underground educational networks for marginalized activists grappling with criminalization and persecution, providing valuable insights into the Azerbaijani Civic Nation case.

Furthermore, in politically hostile contexts, as demonstrated in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation case study, the success of alternative community-based education largely depends on

network-driven collaboration among community leaders, artists, and educators. This approach involves the effective utilization of community resources. During their underground period in Tabriz, families voluntarily opened their homes for classes, and a network-driven collaborative framework greatly enhanced pedagogical practice. In exile, their collaboration with activist groups ensures the sustainability of their work through community networks, facilitating lectures, courses, and panel discussions. This collective, community-based strategy remains the cornerstone of their education model, actively involving diverse groups in their educational efforts. By pushing a sense of integral contribution among individuals to the community education struggle, they strengthen the credibility of their work, addressing shared needs and overcoming challenges with a united front.

Similar strategies have been observed in other politically sensitive contexts, particularly in studies like Rostami Povey's (2003) examination of Afghan women under Taliban rule. In this context, women, often at great personal risk, established covert schools at home and volunteered as educators. This not only solidified collective commitment and networks but also validated their efforts, sustaining necessary social bonds essential for the sustainability of their work. Furthermore, supporters of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) played an important role in sustaining the organization's activism, as discussed in works by Fluri (2008) and Brodsky et al. (2012). These supporters provided important financial and political assistance, facilitated the organization's transnational network, and contributed to the resilience of RAWA's initiatives in the face of political oppression and gender-based challenges. Importantly, RAWA's supporters were not limited to women, and strategic partnerships with men who aligned with feminist principles allowed the organization to have an

inclusive approach in challenging patriarchal norms and practices within Afghan society (Fluri, 2008).

To draw and sustain support and collaborative efforts, Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators utilize informal and alternative language education to shape discourse on language, identity, oppression, and resistance. By rationalizing their endeavors, they aim to inspire collective commitment and secure community support for the empowerment of minoritized languages, addressing issues like marginalization and discrimination. This impact is apparent in students' praise for the academic Turki language course and their active engagement in discursive practices, which shows the contribution of Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators' alternative language education initiatives in the broader struggle for linguistic justice and beyond (Qarabagli, 2023).

This strategy can be seen in contexts like Clothey's (2022) study on the Uyghur exiled community in Istanbul, Türkiye, where non-formal education spaces function as platforms for counternarratives, challenging the dominant discourse imposed by the Chinese government. By identifying China as the main adversarial force against the Uyghur people and occupier of their homeland, these educators contribute to the collective struggle for linguistic, cultural, and political struggles, and shaping narratives that empower marginalized communities and resist oppressive forces. Similarly, Heidemann's (2014) study on Basque language activists in 1970s-1980s France reveals that, despite challenges such as ideological and institutional struggles, activists strengthened strategic solidarity. They framed their language as socio-historically marginalized and oppressed by French nationalist policies, forming a legitimate basis for resistance during the early stage of the *Ikastola* movement, a bilingual education initiative in the French Basque Country with Basque as the primary medium of instruction across all subjects.



Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators, influenced by experiences of linguistic oppression, champion a critical approach to language and education, acknowledging their ties to broader social policies, ideologies, and power dynamics. They challenge simplistic views that solely link minoritized languages to cultural or ethnic attributes, focusing instead on the dynamic nature of language and education as social practices that reflect and perpetuate inequalities (Bourdieu, 1991; Kalan, 2021a; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Ricento, 2000). In advocating for broader recognition of language's power dynamics and the sociopolitical link between language and inclusion/exclusion, they perceive their linguistic and educational engagement as a means of resistance against discrimination (Dei, 2006). Moreover, by challenging traditional notions of language and education, they resist the reinforcement of hegemonic knowledge and ideologies, offering alternative modes that inspire societal transformation through critical consciousness and community engagement (Cummins, 2000).

Through a counterhegemonic approach, they seek to promote education and the use of the minoritized Turki language, countering its exclusion from educational institutions and mainstream society. They address and protest its limitation to everyday oral practices and its stigmatization as merely a “local language,” while inviting academics and activists to participate in discussions on academic and socio-political topics utilizing their marginalized language. This initiative aims to create a space for language use, challenging linguistic norms, marginalization, and stigma, thus raising the prestige of Turki as a language capable of intellectual discussions and relevance to the modern world. This aspect is also found by Clothey's (2022) examination of non-formal education within the Uyghur exiled community in Istanbul with strategies such as teaching scientific subjects in Uyghur to counter the negative portrayal of the language as “backward” by Chinese authorities.

By creating discourses that challenge dominant language ideologies and discriminatory practices, minoritized language activists and educators could initiate debate and facilitate alternative perceptions and uses of language (Heidemann, 2014; Urla, 2012). According to Dei (2006), “language can serve as both a tool of resistance and domination,” arguing that “for language to be a tool of resistance, its use must subvert dominant thinking.” It is essential for language activists to “avoid situating their narratives within the confines of dominant discourse and thinking” (p. 29).

The Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators, in their academic linguistic revitalization efforts, extend beyond language alone by engaging with critical discourses in various fields such as sociology, education, history, philosophy, literature, economics, and political science. Through integrated education, the goal is to raise linguistic and social awareness, revitalizing Turki academically across diverse fields and thus contributing to both linguistic and social empowerment. In other words, through their own alternative and informal education, they create a platform to introduce values that they believe to be counterhegemonic to those socialized by mainstream educational and societal systems. The content and methodology of instruction are shaped by the vision and beliefs of those organizing these programs, and they are influenced by the available resources. Consequently, this dynamic interplay shapes the transmitted vision of various forms of identity within communities (Brodsky et al., 2012; Clothey, 2022; Fluri, 2008; Mariano & Tarlau, 2019; Meek, 2015; Tarlau, 2017, 2019).

Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators, acting as “organic intellectuals,” break from traditional language teaching. Their struggle goes beyond a sole focus on language, acknowledging its intersection with power dynamics in the realms of environment, class, ethnicity, gender oppression, and social movements. Through intersectional linguistic education,

they aim to strengthen their language struggle by connecting it to other movements, advocating community engagement, and gaining support through solidarity, thus building bridges and driving meaningful change. Despite the significance of this perspective, the intersectionality of linguistic movements remains a relatively unexplored terrain in academic literature. This contribution is worth thinking about and opens avenues for discussions among scholars and activists alike (Asgharzadeh, 2015; Pennycook, 2022).

The grassroots resistance of Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators against linguistic marginalization in Iran draws attention to the need for activist-driven educational efforts towards broader structural changes. They advocate for education, where “educators, students, and communities challenge the historical pattern of subordination that has characterized relations in the broader society” (Cummins, 2000, p. 246). By recognizing the important contribution of educators and community leaders, they aim to involve and inspire individuals in empowering their marginalized language across various domains by merging language with critical education and activism. This perspective sees minoritized language education and use as a social practice that promotes transformative change, with educators and community leaders considering themselves and their members as agents of change. In the context of subaltern informal education, Fluri’s (2008) research reveals how underground subaltern education empowers individuals with alternative subjectivity through active citizenship, subaltern leadership, and counter-hegemonic politics.

The Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators exhibit resilience in the face of challenges, operating underground in a context defined by Ruiz (1984) as “language as a problem.” Despite limited resources, stigmatization, persecution, exile, and government threats, they persist in contesting societal norms, refusing constraints, and actively pursuing their goals. This resilience

is mirrored in other subaltern communities. Brodsky et al. (2011) found that interconnected individual and organizational resilience is an essential approach for achieving empowerment within challenging contexts, as demonstrated by their research in the context of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). Rostami Povey (2003) showcases the determination of women in underground education under Taliban persecution, building community and trust networks, and raising awareness on gender-specific concerns. Similarly, Henry and Plantan (2022) explore activism in exile, focusing on Russian environmentalists. Buyantueva's (2018) study on Russian LGBTQ+ rights activism reveals the effective utilization of the Internet for community-building and mobilization. Kjaran (2020) examines underground gay activism in Iran, discussing commitment to underground education and awareness creation. Alsahi's (2018) case study on Twitter's campaign against the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia shows the resilience of social activism in politically hostile environments and the utilization of the internet as an alternative space in this process. Furthermore, studies on the “My Stealthy Freedom” campaign in Iran (Koo, 2016; Malekpour, 2021; Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2017) unveil the resilience of women's activism leveraging social media against gender and political oppression. Lastly, research on Brazil's landless workers movement reveals their resilience in engaging with education as an important part of their long-term strategy for social transformation (Mariano & Tarlau, 2019; Meek, 2015; Tarlau, 2017, 2019).

While grassroots and informal efforts to promote a minoritized language are invaluable, more is needed to bring about meaningful change (Akin, 2011; Heidemann, 2014; Leinonen, 2022). To achieve a more accessible, equitable, and inclusive mother-tongue-based multilingual education in Iran, these efforts must be expanded and complemented by broader initiatives.

Structural changes with a legal foundation must be made for dismantling language hegemony. This involves institutionalizing diverse languages, recognizing minoritized voices in decision-making, and shifting from a monolingual to a multilingual ideology (Kalan, 2016). Moreover, de-securitizing language issues is key, treating them as social factors rather than threats (Asgharzadeh, 2015).

This transformation supports anti-racist, inclusive education, promoting a human-centric practices and perceptions of cultures and languages. That is, embracing diversity is essential for equity, as failure to do so perpetuates discrimination and exclusion for those who do not conform to dominant societal norms. Furthermore, integrating diversities in education, government, media, and public spheres is a holistic and critical approach in addressing not only language-related prejudices but also biases rooted in ethnicity, region, religion, class, gender, and more. This framework can revolutionize education, turning it into inclusive, empowering environments where students feel a genuine sense of belonging, enjoy the learning process, and establish a strong connection to the school environment, community, language, and teaching materials (Asgharzadeh, 2008; Dei, 2006; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2003; Dei et al., 2006; Kalan, 2016). Thus, acknowledging the Azerbaijani Civic Nation educators' advocacy for linguistic and educational inclusion, it should inspire bottom-up and macro-level transformations through inclusive practices in using minoritized languages and promoting diversity across broader society.

### **Contributions and Limitations**

The thesis makes significant contributions through its focused study methodology, offering a rich narrative of subaltern educators' experiences. It also provides an informative exploration of the historical and sociopolitical context of linguistic marginalization in Iran. This

is achieved through diverse qualitative data collection methods like interviews and social media content analysis.

The study is enriched by employing a subaltern theoretical framework, particularly inspired by Antonio Gramsci's calls for alternative educational spaces. It explores the transformative role of organic intellectuals in marginalized communities and the ways in which they can contribute to critical consciousness, community involvement, and empowerment within challenging power structures. Moreover, Guha's critique of dominant narratives constructed by nationalist elites problematizes their role in marginalizing minoritized voices. It calls for inclusive practices and promoting alternative, subaltern discourse, and knowledge production, mainly led by intellectuals from these marginalized communities. Spivak's contribution to subaltern studies addresses the significance of critically examining the challenges marginalized voices face in subaltern contexts due to intersecting oppressions. It also encourages intellectuals to adopt reflexive, critical approaches that acknowledge the diversity and complexity of subaltern experiences. These insights further deepen our view of an anti-hegemonic perspective within a subaltern framework, exposing how power dynamics impact language, education, oppression, and resistance within nation-states like Iran. It also reveals the critical contributions of subaltern educators, exemplified by those within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, in advancing linguistic justice and beyond.

In this regard, the thesis fills a major gap in the scholarly literature by investigating the experiences of subaltern minoritized language and alternative educators in Iran, where there is almost no prior exploration. It also contributes to the broader picture of language marginalization and resistance in Iran, an underexplored domain. The study reveals challenges and strategies in minoritized informal language education and activism within politically sensitive contexts,

specifically in Iran, where bottom-up and community initiatives confront securitization, being perceived as threats, resulting in government suppression and exile (Asgharzadeh, 2015; Rashidi, 2019). Therefore, the study contributes to understanding the creative and adaptive strategies and resources used in such contexts, including underground spaces, community networks and support, and exile-based informal and virtual education—an aspect also overlooked in academic discussions. Going beyond the identified gaps, the study offers valuable insights into interdisciplinary areas of sociolinguistics, subaltern studies, education, sociology, and intersectionality perspectives (Asgharzadeh, 2015; Pennycook, 2022).

This research significantly contributes to our critical perspective on language and education as contested realms of power and resistance, advocating for an inclusive approach within diverse and multilingual contexts. It challenges the historical tendency to ideologically construct languages, particularly in colonial and nationalistic contexts, aimed at imposing homogeneity among diverse peoples (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). The study offers insight into the unique sociopolitical factors that shape educational dynamics by exploring informal minoritized language education in hostile environments and contributes to context-specific discussions. Furthermore, it extends beyond a singular language focus by adopting an intersectional framework, recognizing language as intricately connected with other social forces (Asgharzadeh, 2015; Dei, 2006). This holistic perspective enriches our perception of minoritized language education, positioning it as an inclusive and transformative endeavor. Moreover, it deepens awareness of the empowering role of alternative language education in collective community resistance against linguistic oppression and beyond. In doing so, it challenges traditional and positivist research practices and theoretical frameworks, advocating for a critical and transformative approach to minoritized language education within the broader context of

social dynamics. Lastly, going beyond advances in the academic field, the study empowers marginalized language communities and other subaltern groups in similar contexts with practical insights, inspiring them to participate in community-driven and alternative educational practices.

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. Using a single-case approach, combined with a limited number of interviews, may restrict the generalizability of the findings, particularly in a diverse linguistic landscape like that of Iran. While the study offers valuable insights into the experiences of subaltern educators, future research could investigate the perspectives of activist educators from diverse Turk marginalized communities and other linguistically minoritized groups in Iran, bringing to the surface dynamics of their efforts for language education. This could be part of a broader comparative and multiple case study model. Moreover, alternative research could consider the perspectives of students and community members who encountered and participated in the educators' work through interviews. In this study, their voices were also evaluated through social media content analysis of posts written by these students. However, conducting interviews with them could provide more in-depth knowledge and understanding.

## **Implications**

In the challenging context of Iran, where the government systematically persecutes informal and unofficial community-based educational and cultural practices that diverge from its control and ideological agenda, immediate policy changes may be unrealistic. The study acknowledges the harsh reality of subaltern educators facing persecution and criminalization for teaching minoritized languages (Amnesty International, 2019, 2021). Despite these formidable barriers, the research serves as a foundational resource for future policy models, laying the groundwork for informed, inclusive, and diversity-recognizing recommendations. In other



words, rather than anticipating immediate shifts in government policies, the study contributes to a long-term vision, advocating for inclusivity and diversity in Iran's educational and broader societal landscape. It aims to contribute to a historical record of educational oppression and resistance and provide a roadmap for future policymakers open to embracing diversity and promoting a more inclusive educational environment in Iran.

While emphasizing institutional responsibility in multilingual settings, the study cautions against governmental support without stifling the creativity and independence of bottom-up, community-based educational initiatives. Educators involved in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation's informal and underground educational initiative explicitly expressed that a key advantage of their approach was operating outside government control. In these spaces, they enjoyed the freedom to implement their own creative pedagogies and curriculum, avoiding external dominance. Recognizing the inherent limitations of top-down approaches, the study argues for a shift towards embracing multilingualism and acknowledging diverse linguistic practices, creating a space for organic interactions and the development of contextually relevant educational practices. The approach should involve letting go of the need to control or impose and, instead, empowering communities to decide on their language use, curriculum, and educational practices for meaningful and sustainable development (Kalan, 2021a; Edwards & Kalan, 2023; Simon & Kalan, 2016; WhyKnowledgeMatters, 2024). Makoni and Pennycook (2007) advocate for "rethinking language" to imagine "alternative ways of understanding language and strategies of disinvention and reconstitution." They raise the situational nature of these approaches, arguing that they are "not fixed or standardized", and endorse a qualitative and social approach to language, prioritizing its impact on humans over quantitative analysis (pp. 3-4).

Institutions are encouraged to reconsider their strategies and draw valuable lessons from successful initiatives such as the Azerbaijani Civic Nation. As demonstrated, community-based educational practices, led by activist educators, thrive organically, an aspect that calls for a reconsideration of existing top-down institutional methods. This entails a critical examination of power dynamics within education, prompting a reconsideration of who holds the authority to transmit knowledge (Kalan, 2021a; Edwards & Kalan, 2023; Gagne et al., 2022; Simon & Kalan, 2016). It is thus argued that grounding knowledge production concerning marginalized communities in their practical struggles promotes a bottom-up approach, prioritizing their needs and self-definition over top-down institutional and elitist interpretations (Asgharzadeh, 2015).

The study demonstrates the value of activist involvement in education as a collective and meaningful responsibility. It advocates for an educational framework developed based on people's needs and active participation on the ground. This approach encourages shared responsibility in addressing educational, linguistic, and community challenges collectively, and introduces a layer of social responsibility to educational practices. This paradigm shift aims to create a more inclusive, responsive, and socially aware educational system (Kalan, 2021a; Simon & Kalan, 2016; WhyKnowledgeMatters, 2024).

Recognizing the impact of activist-driven education, the Azerbaijani Civic Nation case study could inspire community leaders and activists to establish alternative spaces promoting community-based learning, solidarity, and resistance. The need for alternative educational spaces becomes clear, particularly in politically hostile contexts where diversities face explicit oppression, and official spaces for such activities are restricted (Edwards & Kalan, 2023; Simon & Kalan, 2016).

The study suggests an intersectional approach in education, acknowledging the links between language and factors like gender, ethnicity, region, religion, and class, urging activists and scholars to address these alongside other forms of oppression. This approach contributes to transforming societal hegemonic forces by extending beyond a singular focus on language to encompass its intersection with other forms of oppression and marginalization (Asgharzadeh, 2015; Rashidi, 2019).

Aligned with this perspective, the study contributes to a broader and contextually rich view of language and language activism. It argues that language is not an isolated entity but intertwined with collective forces and social movements operating on various levels. These movements challenge issues of dominance across politics, regions, ethnicities, genders, identities, discrimination, belonging, sovereignty, decision-making, and more. By adopting this approach, the study amplifies diverse perspectives from linguistically marginalized communities, calling for committed studies to fully grasp their experiences. This inclusive engagement encourages a more holistic exploration of the multifaceted impact of language and language activism within the broader socio-cultural and political landscape (Asgharzadeh, 2015; Kalan, 2021a; Rashidi, 2019; WhyKnowledgeMatters, 2024).

### **Future Research Directions**

Future research could examine the role of subaltern educators among other linguistic marginalized groups within Iran, such as Kurds, Balochis, Arabs, or Turkmen, each facing unique challenges and experiences, yet sharing similar dynamics of linguistic, cultural, and political marginalization (Amnesty International, 2019). Additionally, comparative studies could extend to communities with similar concerns outside Iran, where the interplay of linguistic marginalization and criminalization may be evident. The goal is to contribute to the

understanding of challenges, diverse strategies, and alternative practices, as well as the contextual factors within these marginalized communities. Furthermore, the research can also explore the impacts of community-based minoritized language education on broad social, political, and discursive transformations by examining the experiences and perspectives of marginalized students and the wider communities engaged in these initiatives. These studies can adopt an intersectionality approach, focusing on interlinked social forces in subaltern education and resistance efforts in a more detailed and focused approach.

In terms of methodology, this study encourages educators, particularly from linguistically marginalized communities such as Iran, to utilize “teacher research” and “action research” methodologies to report findings from the field (Edwards & Kalan, 2023; Gagne et al., 2022; Simon & Kalan, 2016). Edwards and Kalan (2023) proposed a structured model of action research. This model aimed to liberate teachers from knowledge subjugation within oppressive institutional frameworks influenced by global neoliberalism and linguistic imperialism. They argue for the importance of creating autonomous and alternative spaces and practices in educational settings. By documenting alternative practices and outcomes, educators can communicate the potential of this approach to fellow educators, ultimately challenging the reproduction of inequity in educational settings. Similarly, Simon and Kalan (2016) advocate for collaborative practitioner inquiry in adolescent literacy. Educators promote equity through student-centered pedagogies, intentionally engaging with students to address diversity, equity, and social justice. Teacher-led inquiry communities enhance educational outcomes through collaborative dialogue and curriculum development, shaping critical literacy pedagogy, combating isolation, and promoting inclusion.

Furthermore, acknowledging the complex nature of research on subaltern educators requires interdisciplinary collaboration. Thus, artist-researchers, multilingual scholars, social movement researchers, intersectional scholars, historians, and critical pedagogy researchers can broaden our knowledge of linguistic marginalization within sociohistorical and sociopolitical contexts and the ways in which it can be challenged and transformed. In doing so, not only do we give recognition and voice to alternative approaches of subaltern communities within education and activism, but we also contribute to broader knowledge in these fields.

## **Conclusion**

As a language activist and researcher from Iranian Azerbaijan, I faced intimidation for advocating mother-tongue-based education, leading to exile to Türkiye in 2007 and later relocating to Canada in 2009. I continue to highlight linguistic marginalization in Iran and promote minoritized language education and activism (Qarabagli, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2023; Rashidi, 2019).

With this positionality as an academic activist, I began examining the experiences of exiled educators within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation as a case study for my master's thesis. Drawing insights from both insider and outsider perspectives, my goal was to amplify silenced voices, shed light on overlooked research areas, and bridge theory with practice. Through this endeavor, I sought to make meaningful contributions to minoritized language education and activism, particularly in politically hostile environments, while also learning from the experiences of these educators.

Due to my involvement in language activism within the Turk community of Azerbaijan in Iran, I was aware of individual activist educators organizing informal Turki language classes, primarily by university students. However, prior to this study, I was not aware of the Azerbaijani

Civic Nation educators' underground language and cultural classes for children back home, dating back to the 1990s. My knowledge was limited to their recent online exiled-based educational initiatives. Learning about Lale and Samad's underground language education involvement in Tabriz broadened my awareness of their multifaceted contributions and how they integrated art into pedagogy.

Additionally, it led me to reflect on the community-based nature of such activism and the variety of minoritized language education approaches tailored to specific community contexts and needs. I also considered the potential for mobilizing various community members such as families, publishers, historians, musicians, academics, and students. Realizing my previous oversight spurred me to consider the prevalence of overlooked community-based informal educational practices and their significance in marginalized contexts. This motivates me to explore similar subaltern educational domains further, gaining insight into their contributions to marginalized communities and their experiences and struggles.

Finally, as I wrap up this journey, I wish to express a few hopes in my suppressed language: I hope that one day, oppressed languages in Iran will find their rightful place in official educational environments and beyond without facing marginalization. I envision a future where students like me can freely write research papers and theses in these once-silenced languages. To achieve this aspiration, we must persist in our struggle against ideologies and systems that reproduce fear of linguistic differences and promote the supremacy of a single language to advance their agendas of oppression and domination. It is crucial that we embrace linguistic diversity as an approach to liberation from oppressive forces, celebrating human and societal differences, and promoting just and equitable relations within diverse groups (Asgharzadeh,

2015; Dei, 2006; Dei et al., 2006; Edwards & Kalan, 2023; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Simon & Kalan, 2016; WhyKnowledgeMatters, 2024).

*Mən ümid edirəm, bir gün İran'da əzilmiş olan dillər, rəsmi öyrətim ortamlarında və toplumda hak etdikləri yeri tutacaqlar. Gələcəkdə mənim kimi öyrəncilərin, bir zamanlar susdurulmuş bu dillərdə özgürcə araşdırma yazıları və tezlər yazabiləcəyini xəyal edirəm. Bu arzuya çatmaq üçün, fərqli dillərin qorxusunu yaradıb və tək dilliliyi və dil üstünlüyünü öz hökmranlıq və kontrol vasitəsi kimi görən ideolojilərə və sistemlərə qarşı inamlı mübarizəmizi sürdürməliyik. Dil, insan və toplum fərqliliklərini qəbul etmək və onları mənimsəmək, basqıcı güclərdən qurtarma və fərqli qruplar arasında daha ədalətli və bərabər əlaqələri sağlama yolunda önəmli bir addımdır.*

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## Appendix 1

### Sample Interview Questions

The below semi-structured interview questions were formulated to capture participants' insights concerning the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, covering aspects such as its context, challenges, perceptions, strategies, and goals.

1. When and what motivated you to form the Azerbaijani Civic Nation? Did your previous experiences and encounters in any way lead you to this engagement?
2. How would you characterize the Azerbaijani Civic Nation in two or three sentences?
3. What makes Azerbaijani Civic Nation unique and necessary?
4. What activities do you do in the Azerbaijani Civic Nation? Which action is the most important? Why?
5. What do you think about the role of education in Azerbaijani Civic Nation's work? What educational tools do you use in your activism?
6. What are your strategies for achieving your mid-to-long term goals? How effective do you think these strategies were?
7. What are some of Azerbaijani Civic Nation's most successful projects and activities? Why?
8. Are there any changes because of your work in terms of language? If yes, what are those? (e.g. change in public discourse, policies, and perceptions).
9. What are some of the challenges facing the Azerbaijani Civic Nation? How do you overcome these challenges?
10. How does the Azerbaijani Civic Nation engage with members of the Turk minoritized community in Iran? What about other minoritized communities?

11. How do community members view your activism you try to engage with?
12. How is your work on minoritized language activism perceived by different members of hegemonic linguistic groups in Iran and its diaspora?
13. How does the socio-political context within Iran regarding minoritized languages influence your activism within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation?
14. What resources (e.g., people, money, materials, technology) do you use to achieve your goals?
15. How do technology and social media impact the Azerbaijani Civic Nation's work?
16. What are the most important things you have learned from your engagement with the Azerbaijani Civic Nation?
17. How would you evaluate your perception of language and language activism within the Azerbaijani Civic Nation? Do you think it has changed over time? Do you believe there is a need for using new discourses or strategies?
18. How does the diaspora position of the Azerbaijani Civic Nation associate it with opportunities or challenges?
19. What changes do you hope to see with your activism with the Azerbaijani Civic Nation? What are those in terms of education and language?
20. How do you think social issues you work on and what to see change are interlinked with other social problems and forms of social activism?
21. How do you negotiate your activism considering existing or potential external pressures? (Discursive, ideological, political, etc.)
22. Are there other issues not raised in this interview that you think may be relevant and critical in understanding the Azerbaijani Civic Nation?

## Appendix 2

### Consent Form



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#### Participant Consent Form

**Researchers:** Vahid Rashidi, MA Student in Education and Society (Thesis), McGill University, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), +17788777581, [vahid.rashidi2@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:vahid.rashidi2@mail.mcgill.ca)

**Supervisor:** Dr. Amir Kalan, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), [amir.kalan@mcgill.ca](mailto:amir.kalan@mcgill.ca)

**Title of Project:** Promoting Multilingual Education in Iran: A Case Study of Azerbaijani Civic Nation

**Purpose of the Study:** You are invited to participate in the research entitled “Promoting Multilingual Education in Iran: A Case Study of Azerbaijani Civic Nation.” The purpose of the study is to explore the role, objectives, dynamics, and challenges of promoting multilingual education in Iran by the Azerbaijani Civic Nation, a Toronto-based diaspora organization associated with the Turk minoritized community of Azerbaijan in Iran.

**Study Procedures:** Once you have read the participant consent form and have agreed to participate in the study, I will arrange an interview time (online) that is convenient for you. The interview will take approximately 2.5 hours and can be completed in single or multiple sessions. Online platforms such as Zoom and Skype will be used to conduct interviews. Only audio is required; you can turn off your camera function if you wish. The audio recorded via Zoom and Skype will be transcribed and analyzed. The principal researcher will transcribe interview data. Although this research is only for the MA thesis project, however, in future, it could be turned into a journal article. To protect your confidentiality, you will be given a fictional name. You may also choose to have your real name used in the research findings by selecting the option in the confidentiality section of the text. A mix of semi-structured and open-ended questions will be asked. You can skip any question that you are not comfortable discussing or add more information if you think it is needed.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can decline to answer any question, or you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you choose to withdraw before publication, all information obtained up until that point will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. However, once the data has been combined for publication, it may not be possible

to withdraw the data in its entirety. Once the publication has occurred, data can only be withdrawn from further analysis and use in future publications but only destroyed after the 7-year retention period.

**Potential Risks:** There are no anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

**Potential Benefits:** Participating in the study will have no direct benefit for you; however, your insights can contribute to our understanding of language promotion and education by members of Iran's minoritized communities within the diaspora (in this case, associated with the Turk minoritized community of Azerbaijan in Iran) and the key challenges that these activists and communities face and how they overcome them.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** Your identity will be kept confidential according to your selected option. If you choose to have your real name used, your identity will be made publicly available in the research findings. If you choose to have a fictional name used, your real name will be kept confidential and will never be made publicly available. I will be the only one with access to your audio recording and identifiable materials. For example, signed consent documents, code keys, emails, etc. The audio recording will not be shared with the public and will only be used to produce a transcript. Your data will be stored in a password-protected file on a computer. These data will be kept for seven years and then destroyed by me. The audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription.

Confidentiality Options:

Yes, I consent to be identified by my real name in the thesis or any other related publications: \_\_\_\_\_

No, I do not consent to be identified by my real name in the thesis or any other related publications: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_ *You consent to be audio-recorded.*

**Dissemination of Results:** The result of this study will initially be disseminated as a thesis but may be turned into a peer-reviewed journal article or a conference presentation. You will be notified and provided with a copy of the published work.

**Questions:** If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please get in touch with the Associate Director, Research Ethics, at 514-398-6831 or [lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca](mailto:lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca) citing REB file number \_\_\_\_\_

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#### ***For written consent***

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study.

Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information. A copy of this consent form will be given to you, and the researcher will keep a copy.

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_