

AKHTAR: A DISCUSSION ON A PERSIAN LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER
PUBLISHED IN THE OTTOMAN CAPITAL (1876-1896)

Thesis submitted to the
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History

by

Tanya Elal Lawrence

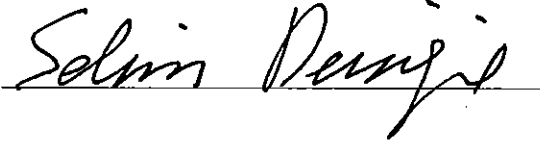
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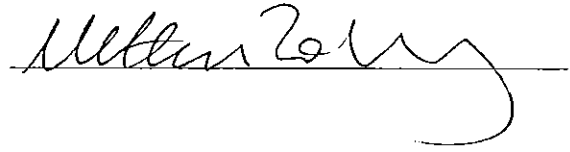
"Akhtar: A Discussion on a Persian Language Newspaper Published in the Ottoman Capital (1876-1896)," a thesis prepared by Tanya E Lawrence in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree at the Department of History,
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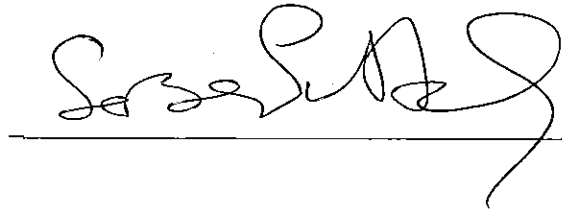
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Thesis Abstract

Tanya E Lawrence, "*Akhtar*: A Discussion on the Persian Language Newspaper

Published in the Ottoman Capital (1876-1896)"

By the second half of the nineteenth century Istanbul had become an important social and political environment for many Iranian activists and politicians who had been exiled from Iran. This community formed a highly active opposition base involved in Iranian politics from abroad. Although a certain amount of background material can be found in the literature concerning this community, no significant work has yet been carried out on its impact on political, social and literary reform in Iran. The publication of *Akhtar* from Istanbul is but one of the many precursors of change that was a product of the Iranian colony in Istanbul. This thesis is a discussion on *Akhtar* as an agent for change in Iran. It aims to trace the intellectual and structural origins of the newspaper's establishment in 1876 as well as its relationship to the Sublime Porte and Qajar State. The discussion will also include an examination of the newspaper's content and scrutinise its political stance on one specific historical moment, the Egyptian Crisis of 1881-1882 in an attempt to better understand how it managed to resist rigid censorship laws in both the Ottoman Empire and Iran while publishing news on potentially sensitive subjects. The political role the newspaper took on in the public sphere through the publication of letters from its readership will also be considered.

Tez Özeti

Tanya E Lawrence “*Akhtar*: Osmanlı Pay-ı Tahtında Basılmış bir Farsça Gazete üzerine Tartışma (1876-1896)”

On dokuzuncu yüzyılın ikinci yarısı itibariyle İstanbul, İran’dan sürgün edilen birçok İranlı aktivist ve siyasetçi için önemli bir toplumsal ve siyasal ortam halini almıştı. Çekirdeğini sürgündeki İranlı aktivist ve siyasetçilerin oluşturduğu bu cemaat yurtdışından İran siyasetine katılım gösteren ve hayli etkin olan bir muhalefet tabanı oluşturmaktaydı. Bu cemaati anlama çabasına bir arkaplan oluşturacak kadar malzemenin ilgili literatürde bulunmasına karşın cemaatin İran’da siyasal, toplumsal ve edebi alanda yapılan reformlardaki etkisine dair kayda değer bir çalışma henüz yapılmamıştır. *Akhtar*’ın İstanbul’dan yayımı, aslında İstanbul’daki İranlı cemaatin değişimi getiren aktörlerden biri olarak giriştiği faaliyetlerden biridir. Bu bağlamda *Akhtar* gazetesi bu tezin konusunu İran’daki değişimin bir faili olarak oluşturmaktadır ve bu çalışma gazetenin 1876’daki kuruluşunun zihniyet ve uygulama sahasındaki kökenleri ile Bâb-ı Âli ve Kaçar Devleti ile arasındaki ilişkilerini bağlantılandırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Tartışma aynı zamanda gazetenin içeriğine dair bir tahlil de içermekte ve 1881-1882 Mısır Krizi gibi belirli bir tarihsel ana ilişkin takındığı siyasal duruşu incelemektedir. Böyle bir incelemenin, *Akhtar* gazetesinin bu gibi hassasiyet arz eden meselelere dair haberler verirken nasıl hem Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda hem de İran’da yürürlükte olan katı sansür kanunlarına direnebildiğine dair de açıklayıcı olacağı umulmaktadır. Son olarak ise gazetenin okuyucularından aldığı mektupları yayımlayarak kamusal alanda nasıl bir rol üstlendiği ele alınacaktır.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In an attempt to keep transliteration to a minimum, I did not indicate any dotted consonants and have used the circumflex accent ^ for long vowels and the signs ' for the *hamza* and ' for the *'ayn*. The Persian silent 'h' is transliterated as *ā*; e.g. *nāma*. The following system has been adopted for the vowels:

<i>long</i>	ا	â
	و	û
	ي	î
<i>doubled</i>	ي	iiy
<i>diphthongs</i>	او	aw
	اي	ay
<i>short</i>	أ	a
	و	u
	ي	i

The Arabic definite article appears as *al-*: e.g. Jamâl al-Dîn. Frequently used terms such as Qajar, 'ulema, Khan, Shah or well known places such as Tehran, Kirman, Istanbul appear without macrons. Proper names of Ottoman-Turkish statesmen are spelled in the modern Turkish alphabet in a way that is approximate to their Arabic alphabet originals. Again, in an attempt to keep transliteration to a minimum, I have not used special diacritical signs.

Translations are mine, unless stated otherwise.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The impact of Turkish political, social, and literary reforms upon Iran in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century was highlighted by the Iranian scholar Sayyid Hasan Taqîzâdah, one of the leading figures of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911, in a speech he delivered in 1959 on the background to the constitutional movement in Azerbaijan. He commented that:

Modern civilisation came to Azerbaijan by means of the knowledge of the Turkish language [...] There were several Iranian Azerbaijanis in Istanbul and other Ottoman provinces whose efforts to awaken Iranians to the modern world bore considerable fruit. Some of the leaders of the early constitutional movement in Iran were influenced by the Ottomans or had their eyes open in Istanbul [...] Light came from Istanbul to Iran, and especially to Tabriz, and gradually influenced the awakening of minds toward the political revolution [...] Âqâ Muhammad Tâhir, the founder and owner of the newspaper *Akhtar* in Istanbul, which for a time was the only modern style newspaper in Persian, was a Tabrizi. So were two editors of that newspaper, Hajjî Mîrzâ Mahdî, and Mîrzâ Mahdî.¹

Sayyid Hasan Taqîzâdah² had spent considerable time in Istanbul both before and after the Iranian Constitutional Revolution where he had witnessed the importance

¹ "Tahiyyah-i muqaddamat-i mashrûfiyyat dar Azerbaijan," in *Nashriyah-i kitabkhânah-i Milli-yi Tabriz*, Vol. I, (Tabriz), pp. 18-25. I have borrowed Nikkis Keddie's translation of Sayyad Hassan Taqizadah's speech delivered in April 1959 at the National Library in Tabriz. Please see "The Background of the Constitutional Movement in Azerbaijan," translated by Keddie, Nikki, *The Middle East Journal*, xiv (Autumn 1960), pp. 456-65.

² Sayyid Hasan Taqîzâdah was born in Tabriz in 1878 and came from an eminent clerical family. However, in his teens he began to follow a modern education outside the madrasa, studying subjects such as the sciences and medicine and travelled to the Caucasus, Istanbul and Egypt, returning to Iran shortly before the Constitutional Revolution in 1905. He became one of the leaders of the *Majlis*

and influence of Turkish reforms on similar movements in Iran, as well as coming into close contact with the Iranian colony in Istanbul. This colony consisted of a large community of merchants, as well as an important group of Iranian poets, reformers, and journalists who, as champions of change, called for modernisation and social reform in Qajar Iran. *Akhtar*, which can be considered the first Persian language newspaper published along modern lines³ and independent of the Qajar state and its censorship laws, was established in Istanbul in 1876 and its offices became a focal point that brought together the members of the Persian-speaking intelligentsia of the Ottoman capital. As will be discussed in some detail below, the offices of *Akhtar* drew to it a network of Iranians who belonged to the growing literate middle class who were either residents of Istanbul or travellers passing through the Ottoman Empire on their way to or back from Europe. As Peter Chelkowski has also commented "Istanbul, with its rich historical and cultural traditions, its multi-national population and its situation at the juncture of Europe and Asia, played a very important role in transmitting liberal and democratic ideas from Europe to Iran."⁴ Elaborating on Chelkowski's comment, it must be noted that this community's transmission of ideas to Iran was undoubtedly not limited to Western concepts but also greatly affected by Ottoman intellectual thought and the interaction

during the revolution and helped draft the first constitution and form the Democratic Party. He eventually had to leave Iran in 1911 because of the opposition of the clerical forces in the *Majlis* only to return once the Qajars were ousted.

³ I use the term 'along modern lines' in reference to the press to signify the development of journalism *outside* the state domain, which published news on matters of public concern, concerning government but not limited to government. In the Ottoman Empire for example, the development of the intelligentsia has been closely associated with the growth of journalism along such lines and the establishment of newspapers such as *Ceride-i Havadis*, *Tercüman-ı Ahval* and *Tasfir-i Efkâr*. See, Mardin, Şerif, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962).

⁴ Chelkowski, Peter, "Edward G. Browne's Turkish Connexion," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1986), p. 26.

between Iranian and Turkish reformers and intellectuals. The study of the exchange of ideas and the question of by whom and how the members of the Iranian community in Istanbul were most influenced in their articulation of political ideas and how such ideas were expressed is particularly useful in the assessment (or reassessment) of Iran's constitutional history and modernisation in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

The question of what modernisation signified and how that process took shape in nineteenth century Iran is still a matter of some debate and is therefore an important starting point to the discussion on the role of the Iranian community in Istanbul during this process: Scholars who have used the term modernisation and studied this process have tended to emphasise the early nineteenth century as a time for Iran's initial contact with Europe and have therefore considered western contact to be the most important aspect of the process of modernisation.⁵ Significantly, the term 'western contact' in this context has typically excluded any discussion on the Ottoman Empire, concentrating primarily on European contact. Such studies have overlooked the significance of local and regional forces at work in the conceptualisation of themes such as modernity, reform, progress and constitutionalism – based on the liberal French and Belgian models as well the Islamist constitutionalism.⁶ This has in return resulted in an incomplete account of

⁵ See for example, Avery, Peter, *Modern Iran*, (London: Ernst Benn, 1967); Farman Farmayan, Hafez, "The Forces of Modernisation in Nineteenth Century Iran," in Polk, William&Chambers, Richard (eds.), *Beginnings of Modernisation in the Middle East*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968); Lambton, Ann, "The Impact of the West on Persia," *International Affairs*, 33 (1957), pp.12-25, Algar, Hamid, *Mirza Malkum Khan: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernisation*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

⁶ Zarinebaf-Shahr, Fariba, "From Istanbul to Tabriz: Modernity and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia and the Middle East*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2008), p. 155.

the forces at play in the nineteenth and twentieth century process of change and reform in Iran. In this context, a discussion on the Istanbul-based Persian language newspaper *Akhtar* is significant from several standpoints: First, it served as a paradigm for other newspapers published in Persian outside of Iran (prior to the Constitutional Revolution), and the numerous publications published both within and without Iran during and after 1905.⁷ However, still more significant is that beside the technical expertise which *Akhtar* provided other newspapers, the newspaper became the first newspaper to acquire a solid readership base outside the boundaries of the government and members of the ruling elite. It was circulated across the Ottoman Empire and the Hijaz, Iran, Russian Transcaucasia and India as well in Europe. If the public sphere is a space for discussion away from the sway of the state, where critical perspectives on the state can be articulated and debated, then *Akhtar* provided some form of a platform for such debate to take place outside the boundaries of government.⁸ Although other newspapers published abroad such *Qanun* of London (1890-1898), Cairo's *Surayya* (1898-1900) and *Parvarish* (1900-1901), and *Habl al-Matin* (1893-1912), published in Calcutta, followed by – albeit at a later date – *Kava* and *Iranshahr* in Berlin also had significant impact on the reading public and the circulation of ideas outside the government's control, *Akhtar* precedes these publications.

Unfortunately there are no definitive figures concerning the circulation of any of these publications – most of which had to be smuggled into Iran due to censorship

⁷ Although there were a number of Persian newspapers published outside the auspices of the Qajar state in India prior to the establishment of *Akhtar*, these are generally considered to be Indian newspapers written in Persian.

⁸ Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

laws. The publishers had to pay a stamp tax on every paper they produced but as the relevant Stamp Office records no longer exist it is difficult to estimate the level of sales of each issue. However, there are numerous anecdotes that testify to their prevalence and influence among progressive circles.⁹ For example, Mîrzâ Hasan Rushdîyah, the founder of modern primary schools in Iran, is said “to have been inspired to go to Beirut to learn about modern methods of teaching after having read an article on this subject in *Akhtar*.”¹⁰ In *A Literary History of Persia*, E G Browne states unequivocally that *Akhtar* “was the only newspaper worth reading in Persia” in his reference to the press¹¹ prior to the Constitutional Revolution.¹² Browne also maintains that *Akhtar* was read aloud to the public in coffee houses, bazaars, *zûrkhânahs* and other gatherings throughout Iran.

That *Akhtar* was read in public spaces leads us to the question of who made up the newspaper’s readership and how it was circulated. One significant issue in the assessment of newspaper circulation is the question of universal literacy: Although it is not possible to state precisely the literacy rate of the general population in nineteenth century Iran, due to the lack of infrastructure and slow pace of educational

⁹ Nabavi, Negin, “Journalism in Iran i. Qajar Period,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online edition: June 15 2009, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/journalism-i-qajar-period>.

¹⁰ Kasravi, Ahmad, *Târikh-i Mashrutah-i Irân*. Tehran, 1340, p. 40-42.

¹¹ Throughout this thesis, I use the term ‘press’ to refer to the newspaper press and ignore other forms of print, such as pamphlets, *shabnâmahs*, periodicals and broadsides. Although these are undoubtedly important components of contemporary print culture, as I am limiting my discussion to the study of *Akhtar*, I have decided to omit such material. This is a limitation of the present study as opposed to a lack of recognition of their significance in the context of Iranian politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

¹² Browne, Edward Granville, *A Literary History of Persia*. Vol. 4, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), p.468.

reform, the literate population was presumably low.¹³ Charles Issawi estimates that the literacy rate among craftsmen was at around two percent and 0.2 percent among peasants.¹⁴ With such a low literacy rate, what kind of a readership could *Akhtar* hoped to have attracted? As the letters to the editor illustrate, the majority of the readership came from Tehran and Tabriz and the Northern provinces of Iran – namely Azerbaijan, Khurasan and Gurgan – and merchants made up an important fraction of the correspondence submitted to the newspaper's offices.¹⁵ This is hardly surprising as Azerbaijan was much more modernised economically and was involved in international trade with well-established contacts with Istanbul – and the rest of the world. On the other hand, as merchants needed to be able to read and write for bookkeeping purposes, the majority of wholesale merchants, shop keepers, money lenders and bâzârfs were literate.¹⁶ As the Constitutional Revolution was borne out of the alliance between the propertied middle class,¹⁷ the clergy and modern

¹³ Toward the mid-nineteenth century, reformers in Iran eventually reached the consensus that sending students abroad and knowledge of foreign languages alone would not bring about necessary reforms and modernisation, and that a modern education system needed to be initiated within the country. The establishment of the Dar al-Funûn by Mîrzâ Taqî Khan Amîr Kabîr marked the beginning of this movement. However, aside from a military school named *Madrasa-yi Nasirî* and a few vocational schools, little was done toward promoting a better system of education after Amir Kabîr was ousted from government. It was only following Nasir al-Din Shah's assassination in 1896 that the *Anjuman-i Ma'arif* was established as well as *Rushdiyyah* schools, improving significantly the number of schools in Iran. The late nineteenth century also saw the opening up of missionary and foreign schools. See, Ringer, Monica, *Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran*, (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, Inc.), 2001.

¹⁴ Issawi, Charles *The Economic History of Iran: 1880- 1914*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp.24-25.

¹⁵ Notwithstanding, I have come across letters sent to the editors of *Akhtar* sent from cities such as Yazd, Shiraz and Kirman. In fact, in one such issue, the author of the letter specifically states that "even in Kirman, we subscribe to *Akhtar*, which is followed with great interest by its readership here." See, *Akhtar*, 30 zilhacca 1303 (29 September 1886). However, such letters make up a small percentage of the letters sent to the newspaper.

¹⁶ Issawi, Charles *The Economic History of Iran*, pp.22-24.

¹⁷ I am borrowing Professor Ervand Abrahamian's use of the term 'propertied middle class' to signify the urban merchant population, small landowners, bazaar shopkeepers and workshop owners. This class was intimately connected to the 'ulema' as its members funded bazaar mosques, madrasas and *maktabs* and religious foundations (*vaqfs*). Please see, Abrahamian, Ervand, "The Causes of the

intelligentsia, and as it was the rising discontent of these social groups vis à vis the inimical Qajar state that culminated in the Constitutional Revolution, *Akhtar*'s strong readership base among wholesale merchants, shop keepers and members of the bazaar is significant. It was after all protests carried out by shopkeepers and moneylenders in Tehran requesting repayment of government loans¹⁸ in early 1905 that would ultimately spark the Constitutional Revolution.

Notwithstanding, one noteworthy issue is that readership differs from circulation and relatively low readership does not necessarily signify limited circulation: Shiva Balaghi has argued convincingly that in the Iranian context, the consumers of print culture should not be equated with those who could read and that "the lines between literacy and orality were more blurred."¹⁹ According to the British counsel in Rasht, H L Rabino, who developed a keen interest in Persian newspapers and had an impressive collection which he then passed on to E G Browne who went on to produce the first comprehensive and scholarly listing of Persian-language publications in *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia* (Cambridge, 1914), "even those who were illiterate were known to purchase newspapers for their children" so that they could read these out aloud. It can therefore be argued that the reading of printed matter in small social gatherings expanded the boundaries of the public

Constitutional Revolution in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Aug., 1979), p. 388.

¹⁸ 1904 was marked with a bad harvest and a sudden disruption in the northern trade caused by a cholera epidemic followed by the Russo-Japanese War and the subsequent revolution in Russia which led to a spiralling inflation throughout Iran. The price of sugar rose by thirty three percent in early 1905, and the price of wheat increased by almost ninety percent. When the government's plea for further foreign loans was rejected, the Shah was unable to repay local creditors and raised tariffs on merchants. Later on that year, a number of protests against the "financially bankrupt, morally discredited, and most crucial of all, militarily ineffective" Qajar dynasty culminated in the Constitutional Revolution. Abrahamian, Ervand, *The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran*, pp.403-405.

¹⁹ Balaghi, Shiva, "Print Culture in Late Qajar Iran: the Cartoons of *Kashkūl*," *Iranian Studies*, Volume 33, No: 3-4 (Summer/Fall 2000), pp. 168-169.

sphere beyond those of the *literate* public and included in that arena illiterate persons as well. Through public readings of newspapers such as *Akhtar*, spaces such as coffee houses, shops and bazaars became public literary spheres where private individuals could be exposed to ideas and exchange opinions, in this manner becoming part of the public.²⁰

Due to the perceived influence of the press politicians have often actively sought to determine its political components. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, the press in nineteenth century Iran was no different. *Akhtar* too was initially established at the request of the Iranian Embassy in Istanbul to serve as a political tool of the Qajar state in the Ottoman capital. However, as the offices of *Akhtar* were out of the reach of Nasir al-Din Shah's rigid censorship laws and funded by the Ottoman state and through readership subscription, the nature of political discussion that took place in its issues was far more open to engaging in vigorous debate. Outside the government's control, ideas and criticisms relative to the country's progress were expressed freely and more forcefully. In spite of frequent bans and its ultimate prohibition from entering Iran after the Tobacco Régie in 1892, the newspaper's issues were circulated in Iran by one means or another.²¹ On the other hand, the publication of *Akhtar* also coincided with a period of intense tightening of censorship laws in the Ottoman Empire following the accession of Sultan Abdülhamid in 1876. The abandonment of the Press Law in 1878 allowed

²⁰ Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). Although I attach weight to the theme of 'the public' and to the 'public opinion' it produced, it is much easier to discover the constitution of this body, i.e. 'the public', as it was equated with those who read newspapers. Notwithstanding, I do realise that the identity of this body can be almost as elusive as that of the public itself, precisely because it is difficult to gauge the level of sales, circulation, who exactly made up the readership and how that readership engaged with the contents of newspapers. See, Barker et al., (eds.), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America 1760-1820*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.22-23.

²¹ Farman Farmayan, Hafez, *The Forces of Modernisation in Nineteenth Century Iran*, pp. 146-147.

government officials to suspend papers without stating cause or reason²² and newspapers published in Arabic and Persian were also closely observed by Ottoman officials.²³ However, *Akhtar* seems to have successfully avoided prohibition. Funded by the Hamidian regime, in return it published articles promoting Islamic unity under the banner of the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph and refrained from criticising Ottoman government.

Akhtar had a strong readership base in the Ottoman Empire, especially as there was strong Iranian presence across the Porte's territories. Approximately sixteen thousand Iranians were living in Istanbul in 1889, as well as another five thousand seven hundred Iranians residing in Anatolia, namely in Adana (2, 714), Izmir (995), Aleppo (850), Erzurum (721) and Van (448).²⁴ Most of these were merchants involved in trade between Azerbaijan, Iran and the Ottoman Empire and some had become Ottoman subjects and even married Ottoman women despite the Ottoman prohibition against the marriage of Sunnis and Shi'is.²⁵ This large Iranian

²² Cioeta, Donald, "Ottoman Censorship in Lebanon and Syria: 1876-1908," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (May, 1979), pp. 170-171.

²³ Orhan Koloğlu, "Un Journal Persan d'Istanbul: *Akhtar*," in T Zarcone and F Zarinebaf-Shahr, (eds.), *Les Iraniens d'Istanbul*, (IFRI, Tehran, 1993), p.135.

²⁴ Sâsânî, Khan Malik, *Yâdbûdhâ-yi sifârat-i Istanbul*, (Tehran, 1345), p. 94. Mirza Husayn Farahânî gives the same estimate in his travelogue *Safarnâma* (Tehran, 1965, p.150), stating that that some sixteen thousand Iranians were living in Istanbul and its vicinity in last decade of the nineteenth century.

²⁵ Zarinebaf-Shahr, Fariba, "From Istanbul to Tabriz: Modernity and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia and the Middle East*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2008), pp.156. Karen Kern has provided evidence that cross-sectarian marriage was common enough in the nineteenth century for the Sublime Porte to pass a law stipulating its prohibition: The first clause of the 1874 law stated that "marriages between Ottoman and Iranian citizens, as in olden times, are strongly prohibited." Under the same law, marriages between Ottoman women and Iranian men were also banned as it was feared that Ottoman Sunni women would convert to Shi'ism and that their Shi'ite offspring would ultimately constitute security problems on the Eastern borders of the Ottoman

community in Istanbul ensured the survival of many Iranian civic institutions, among which were an Iranian school, a hospital, a cemetery and several publishing houses. Istanbul was therefore one of the major centres of Persian extra-Iranian activities throughout the nineteenth century, as well as during the Constitutional Revolution and the *Istibdâd-i Saghîr*.²⁶ This was a direct result of its geographical location with the city's port serving as a central transit point for goods going to and from Iran. Towards the mid-nineteenth century Iranian merchants became international dealers and brokers in the cosmopolitan seaport city and controlled the traffic of many commodities.²⁷ Istanbul had, as well as Iranian merchants and students, three main categories of immigrants from Iran: Those who had been exiled by the Iranian government, those who escaped voluntarily fearing persecution, and those who were seeking a less hostile environment for their political and literary activities. Iranians congregated mainly in the district called *Valide Hanı*, which became a transit point not only for cargo but for information and ideas. *Akhtar* was published from the *Valide Hanı* in Sirkeci.²⁸

Empire. See, Kern, Karen, *The Prohibition of Sunni-Shi'i Marriages in the Ottoman Empire: A Study of Ideologies*, (New York: Columbia University, 1998).

²⁶ The *Istibdâd-i Saghîr*, i.e. 'lesser autocracy', is the thirteen month period between June 1908 and July 1909 when less than two years after the first parliament had convened in Tehran, the absolutist monarchy made a comeback. In June 1908, Muhammad 'Ali Shah arrested many constitutionalist leaders and ordered the Cossack Brigade to bombard the parliament. Constitutionalists had to retreat to Tabriz, which the Cossack Brigade also attacked, followed by a Russian occupation of the city. Pro-constitutionalists were able to take over and depose Muhammad 'Ali Shah with the help of tribesmen and peasants in July 1909 and replaced him with his nine year old son, Ahmad. During this period, many Iranians either left or were exiled from Iran, and good number headed to Istanbul, hugely increasing the number of the Iranian colony in Istanbul. For more on the *Istibdâd-i Saghîr* see, Abrahamian, Ervand, "The Crowd in the Persian Revolution," *Iranian Studies* 2, (1969), pp. 128-50; Idem, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982); Gheissari, Ali, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Etehadieh, Mansoureh (Nizam Mafi), *The Origins and Development of Political Parties in Persia 1906-1911*, Ph.D. diss., (University of Edinburgh, 1980).

²⁷ Chelkowski, Peter, *Browne's Turkish Connexion*, p. 27.

²⁸ Chelkowski, Peter, *Browne's Turkish Connexion* p. 28.

Although a certain amount of background material can be found concerning this community of opposition involved in Iranian politics from abroad in *Les Iraniens d'Istanbul*, eds. Th. Zarcone and F. Zarinebaf-Shahr (1993), there is yet much need for further study of this colony of Iranians in Istanbul. This work deals with a number of interesting subjects, ranging from history of Iranian diplomatic presence in the Ottoman Empire and the participation of Iranian diplomats in Masonic lodges in Istanbul to the treatment of Shi'i subjects in the capital at the turn of the century and Muharram ceremonies, as well as drawing on the Iranian merchant community and various trades taking place between Istanbul and Iran in the nineteenth century. This thesis will consider how the newspaper *Akhtar* was part of the move towards change in Iran. A certain amount of work has also been published on *Akhtar*, however most references made to the newspaper – all of which highlight its importance as a transmitter of political ideas into Iran at a time when strict censorship laws were imposed within the country – fail nonetheless to supply any information beyond the cosmetic. They mostly provide publication dates, the names of some of its better known contributors, the newspaper's publication of the Persian translation of the first Ottoman constitution only six weeks later after its proclamation on 23 December 1876,²⁹ and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's connection in its ultimate cessation of publication in 1896. The journal's literary style has also been commented on as it was markedly in contrast to what contemporary critics abhorred

²⁹ The Persian translation of the Ottoman constitution was published in *Akhtar* on 7 February 1877, pp.2-8. It should be noted that newspapers published in Iran at the time did not mention the Ottoman constitution at all.

in the older conventions of Persian prose and thus made it an interesting example for the early instances of the 'new Persian'.³⁰

Notwithstanding, scholars such as Anja Pistor-Hatam, Roxanne Haag-Higuchi, Hitoshi Suzuki and Orhan Koloğlu have published articles of varying quality on *Akhtar* which touch on different issues. Anja Pistor-Hatam has carried out research on the reform movements in Iran and the Ottoman Empire and how Iranians reacted to European inspired reforms taking place in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century. In this context, she analyses the contents of issues that published and commented on the Ottoman constitution and remarks on how the editors' "wanted to convince their readers that contrary to claims of their opponents, the constitution was compatible with Islam."³¹ In her article in *Les Iraniens d'Istanbul*,³² Pistor-Hatam emphasises in a similar vein that *Akhtar* sought to prove the compatibility of the Ottoman constitution with Islam, and draws parallels between the discussion in *Akhtar* and the argumentation used by well-known Ottoman statesmen such as Mustafa Fazıl Paşa, Namık Kemal and Midhat Paşa in their reasoning that the Islamic principle of *shûrâ* supported the establishment of the Ottoman parliament. In the same article, Pistor-Hatam also discusses *Akhtar*'s editors' discussion of patriotism as one's duty to the motherland (*vatan*), which drew

³⁰ Avery, Peter, "Printing, The Press and Literature in Modern Iran," in Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly and Charles Melville, (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.831-832.

³¹ Pistor-Hatam, Anja, "Iran and the Reform Movement in the Ottoman Empire: Persian Travellers, Exiles, newsmen under the Impact of the Tanzimat," in Bert Fragner et al., (eds.), *Proceedings of the Second European Conference of Iranian Studies* (Rome, 1995), pp. 561-88.

³² Pistor Hatam, Anja, "The Persian Newspaper *Akhtar* as a Transmitter of Ottoman Political Ideas," in Zarcone, Thierry and Zarinebaf-Shahr, Fariba, eds., *Les Iraniens d'Istanbul*, (Istanbul-Tehran: Institut Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes (IFEA) /Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1993).

heavily on Namık Kemal's writings in *İbret*.³³ However, these articles do not comment on the fact that once the Ottoman Parliament was dissolved in 1878, direct references to constitutionalism and the compatibility of constitutional government and Islam became much more infrequent as *Akhtar*'s editors were well aware of the fact that the Hamidian regime would not look upon such discussion favourably. In a third and final article on *Akhtar*, Anja Pistor Hatam refers to a number of letters, albeit limited in number, sent from merchants in Azerbaijan to the newspaper's offices in a discussion on the views of the journal's Iranian readership on the economic expansion of Europe into Iran.³⁴

Akhtar published a number of articles on Japan from 1880 through to the year of its final publication, 1896. These articles helped shape the image of Japan in the minds of its Iranian readership as Japan continued to integrate into the modern global diplomatic and economic system. Japanese scholars such as Roxanne Haag-Higuchi and Hitoshi Suzuki have commented on *Akhtar*'s reportage on Japan. Haag-Higuchi remarks that the example of Japan was used as "an eminent historical argument in the public political debate of the Constitutional movement in Iran" and aims to "elucidate the techniques of this instrumentalisation."³⁵ Hitoshi Suzuki has published

³³ Pistor Hatam, Anja, *The Persian Newspaper Akhtar as a Transmitter of Ottoman Political Ideas*, pp. 144-145.

³⁴ Pistor-Hatam, Anja, "Non-European Views on the Expansion of Europe: Conflicting Views and Emotions Expressed by the Readers of a 19th century Persian Newspaper," in Herzog, Christoph, Raoul Motika and Anja Pistor-Hatam, eds., *Presse und Öffentlichkeit im Nahen Osten*, (Heidelberg, 1995).

³⁵ Haag-Higuchi, Roxanne, "A Topos and its Dissolution: Japan in Some Twentieth Iranian Texts," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. ½ (Winter-Spring 1996), pp.71-83. The articles published in *Akhtar* on Japan serve as good examples of the editors' indirect espousal of constitutionalism. Although no direct references to constitutionalism were made in these articles, by means of the positive depiction of the country's progress, parliamentary rule was touched on favourably.

on the newspaper's role in Tobacco Régie,³⁶ a subject which has been the subject of research in Nikki Keddie's treatment of the tobacco protests.³⁷ Orhan Koloğlu's article is a brief discussion on the establishment of the newspaper and its successful evasion of complaints or interdiction from the Sublime Porte's Press Bureau. He also remarks on the 'mystery' of the journal's eventual prohibition but does not deal with the question of what kinds of ideas were articulated in the newspaper.³⁸

Akhtar was owned and run by Âqâ Muhammad Tâhir Tabrîzî, a member of the Azerbaijani community in Istanbul. Âqâ Muhammad Tâhir had left Iran in his early twenties and would spend the rest of his life in the Ottoman Empire where he is said to have died some time after the Constitutional Revolution.³⁹ Two of the other editors of the newspaper were Hajj Mîrzâ Mahdî and Mîrzâ Mahdî (later called Za'im al-Dawlah). Hajj Mîrzâ Mahdî was the son of a merchant from Tabriz and did most of the writing for the newspaper.⁴⁰ His social background and the urban ethos of the editors had a significant impact on the newspaper which had a large readership

³⁶ Suzuki, Hitoshi, "A note on the January 20 1891 *Akhtar* Article Concerning the Persian Tobacco Concession," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 1 (1986), pp.310-331.

³⁷ Keddie, Nikki, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1966).

³⁸ Orhan Koloğlu, *Akhtar*. Koloğlu comments on the fact that following Nasir al-Din Shah's assassination on 1 May 1896, the Turkish press kept the news of this event very quiet and reported no more than a line or two in their margins that the Iranian Shah had passed away: In Koloğlu's words "Rien ne sera publié au cours de 17 jours suivants alors que la presse européenne ne s'en occupe que de l'événement" (p.137). On 4 August *Akhtar* was shut down for circulation and there can be little doubt that the issue would have contained news on the Shah's assassination. However, on the day before the newspaper was to be next circulated, Ottoman authorities unexpectedly and suddenly shut down its printing press. Interestingly however, on the very day the newspaper was shut down, the *Moniteur Oriental* reported that the editors of *Akhtar* had been decorated by the Iranian government.

³⁹ Browne, E G, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), pp.17, 36.

⁴⁰ Peter Avery, *Printing, The Press and Literature in Modern Iran*, p.831.

base among merchants, especially from Azerbaijan. Mīrzâ Mahdî had studied medicine in Tabriz as well as in Istanbul, and after fourteen years of collaboration in the publication of *Akhtar* from 1876 to 1890, he moved to Cairo in 1891 and began to publish *Hikmat* (1892-1911)⁴¹ which continued to be published throughout the constitutional movement, and whose articles were influential along with other Persian newspapers abroad like *Surayya* and *Parvareh* and *Habl al Matin*. Mīrzâ Mahdî would publish material in *Hikmat* which reflected the similar patriotic and defensive vein the editors of *Akhtar* espoused of Shi'ite Islam and Iran; it opposed the activity of Christian missionaries, as well as Russian, British, and Ottoman interference in Iranian affairs, and supported the efforts to introduce modern scientific knowledge into Iran.⁴² Among other well-known contributors of the newspaper were Shaikh Ahmad Rûhî, Mīrzâ Âqâ Khan Kirmânî, Mīrzâ Habîb Isfahânî who all had ties to other Iranian reformists and dissidents, such as Malkum Khan and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. Some of these men were also connected to one another through the Iranian School in Istanbul, the *Dabistân-i Īrāniyân*: Mīrzâ Mahdî Tabrîzî, the editor of *Akhtar*, Âqâ Khan Kirmânî and Mīrzâ Habîb Isfahânî had all taught at this school at different times for extra income.⁴³

What most of these men had in common was their status as 'dissidents' in the eyes of the Qajar State and the fact that they had been more or less obliged to leave

⁴¹ *Hikmat* is the first Persian-language newspaper to be published in an Arab country. It was published in Cairo from 28 *safar* 1310/20 September 1892 until 1 *jumaada thani* 1329/30 May 1911, as a weekly for the first eight years, three issues per month for the next five years, and fortnightly for the remaining six years. See, Nasiraddin, Parvin, "Hekmat," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online edition: March 22, 2012, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hekmat>.

⁴² Nasiraddin, Parvin, "Hekmat," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online edition: March 22, 2012, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hekmat>.

⁴³ Gurney, John D, "Mīrzâ Âqâ Khan Kirmânî, Shaikh Ahmad Rûhî va Edward Browne," *Kelk*, 94, (Dey 1376), p.141.

their own countries and take refuge in the Ottoman capital. Mîrzâ Habîb Isfahânî (d.1898) had spent time in Baghdad in the 1850s where he probably became close to the Babi circle.⁴⁴ Sometime after his return to Iran in 1866 he was forced to take refuge in the Ottoman Empire on the apparent charges of slandering the prime minister of the time, Muhammad Khan Sipahsâlâr ‘Azam Qajar, in a poem.⁴⁵ Moreover, according to Maryab Sanjabi, the Qajar government’s clamp-down on the activities affiliated with the *farâmûshkhânah* at around the same time probably also led to a hasty departure from Iran. The *farâmûshkhânah* – meaning the house of oblivion or forgetfulness – was Malkum Khan’s form of a Masonic lodge in Iran which incorporated “the political wisdom of Europe with the religious wisdom of Asia; i.e. accomplish the westernisation of Iran under the guise of an ‘Islamic reformation’.”⁴⁶ Although Malkum had originally presented the *farâmûshkhânah* to Nasir al-Din Shah “as a device for securing the loyalty of the most important men in the realm” and had promised the Shah the position of ‘grand master’, the *farâmûshkhânah* soon aroused hostility and rejection as it was essentially a secret organisation of manifestly Western orientation more than anything else.⁴⁷ Malkum

⁴⁴ Babism was a nineteenth century messianic movement in Iran and Iraq under the leadership of Sayyid ‘Alî Muḥammad Shîrâzî, ‘the Bâb’ (1235/1819-1266/1850). Babism stands out as the only significant millenarian movement in Shi’ite Islam during the nineteenth century and is of particular interest in that, unlike other Islamic messianic movements of approximately the same period, it involved, in its later stages, a wholesale break with Islam and an attempt to establish a new religious system. Although the Babi movement was suppressed effectively by the Qajar state, Bahaism became an extension of the Babi impetus towards the proclamation of a revelation that was post-Islamic during the 1860s. The relative success of Bahaism inside Iran – where it constitutes the largest religious minority today – as well as in numerous other countries, gives “renewed significance to its Babi origins”. See, McEoin, D M, “Babism,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online edition: August 19, 2011, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/babism-index>.

⁴⁵ Sanjabi, Maryam, “Mardum-Guriz: An Early Persian Translation of Moliere's *Le Misanthrope*,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (May, 1998), p. 251.

⁴⁶ Algar, Hamid, *Mirza Malkum Khan*, p.37.

⁴⁷ Algar, Hamid, *Mirza Malkum Khan*, p.39. The *farâmûshkhânah* was suspected above all of propagating republicanism which was associated with irreligion and the disruption of social order.

was exiled from Iran in 1862 for his involvement in the *farâmûshkhânah* and left for Cairo. Thanks mainly to the efforts of the Iranian ambassador to Istanbul, Mîrzâ Husain Khan, he was pardoned and given a post at the embassy in Istanbul in 1868.⁴⁸ Mîrzâ Habîb and Malkum Khan, as well as many of the members of the *farâmûshkhânah* were also accused of being atheists, which constituted yet another reason for leaving Iran.

Due to this connection through the *farâmûshkhânah*, Mîrzâ Habîb became a friend and follower of the Malkum with whom he continued to maintain a close relationship throughout his career. Mîrzâ Habîb was also close to the circle of Young Ottomans in Istanbul, especially Şinasi, Namık Kemal and Recaizade Ekrem – who were at the height of their journalistic and literary production in the mid sixties when Mîrzâ Habîb arrived on scene in Istanbul. Mirza Habib's translation of Molière's *Misanthrope* (*Mardum-Gurîz*) was published in the same publishing house as Şinasi's newspaper, *Tasvîr-i Afkâr*.⁴⁹ Sanjabi maintains that Recaizade Ekrem Bey assisted Mîrzâ Habîb in his free translation of Molière's *Misanthrope*, a play deeply critical of the society it depicts for all its hypocrisy and the oppressive and violent government that defines it. Mîrzâ Habîb published a series of articles in *Akhtar* in 1885-1886 entitled "*Bâzihâ-yi tamâshâ va tamâshâ khânah*", i.e. "play for spectacle

⁴⁸ Mirza Malkum would eventually return to Tehran in 1872 as assistant to Grand Vizier Mîrzâ Hasan Khan Pîrnîa Mushîr al-Dawlah, and became the chief of the Persian legation in London in 1872. He remained in the position until 1888, but lost his position and became publically disgraced in 1889 as a result of a scandal over selling a cancelled concession for a lottery.

⁴⁹ In 1865, Şinasi, under suspicion for his alleged participation in an anti-government plot, left Istanbul for Europe, leaving the editorship of *Tasvîr-i Afkâr* to Namık Kemal. However, in 1867 Namık Kemal too had to leave Istanbul because of an article criticising foreign intervention during the uprising in Crete. He eventually left for Europe to join the Young Ottoman circle in Paris. The editorship of *Tasvîr-i Afkâr* was assumed by Recaizade Ekrem.

and the playhouse”, which was probably the first of its kind to appear in Persian.⁵⁰

Malkum Khan was also close to the circle of Young Ottomans in Istanbul and being well-versed in French, he was an admirer of the French school of literature, their critical perspective and social message, a view he shared with other Young Ottomans.⁵¹

Mîrzâ Âqâ Khan Kirmânî was another important contributor to *Akhtar* and a friend of Mîrzâ Habîb's, as they were colleagues in the Iranian school and connected through the offices of *Akhtar*: Mîrzâ Kirmânî had arrived on the scene in Istanbul later than Mîrzâ Habîb, in 1886. He had even stayed in Mîrzâ Habîb's home for a short while upon his arrival in Istanbul. According to Fereidun Adamiyat, Kirmânî and Mîrzâ Habîb developed a close relationship and Kirmânî assisted Mîrzâ Habîb in his translation of orientalist James Morier's *Hajji Baba Isfahânî* into Persian.⁵² This was one of the “most popular Oriental novels in the English language and a highly influential stereotype of the so-called ‘Persian national character’ with critical observations on nineteenth century Iran.”⁵³ Kirmânî too had been obliged to leave Iran following an argument with the governor of Kirman which brought to an end his brief experience as a government official. He had secretly left Kirman and finally sought asylum in Istanbul.⁵⁴ In Istanbul, Kirmânî mixed socially with a group of

⁵⁰ Sanjabi, Maryam, *Mardum-Gurîz*, p. 256.

⁵¹ Sanjabi, Maryam, *Mardum-Gurîz*, pp. 254-256. On his return to Istanbul in 1868, Malkum took on Ottoman citizenship and was employed by the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the help of the prime minister ‘Ali Pasha, with whom he also maintained close relations.

⁵² Adamiyat, Fereidun, *Andîshihâ-yi Mîrzâ Âqâ Khan Kirmânî*, (Tehran: Intishârât-i Payâm, 1357), p. 22.

⁵³ Abbas, Amanat, “Hajji Baba of Ispahan,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online edition: March 1, 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hajji-baba-of-ispahan>.

⁵⁴ Bayat-Philipp, Mangol, “Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani: A Nineteenth Century Persian Nationalist,”

Persian expatriates, merchants, traders, teachers, writers and poets and his association with *Akhtar* gave him the opportunity to enlarge his own circle of friends and acquaintances. He would contribute to the newspaper in a series of articles published in 1891-1892 entitled "*Dar Fan-i Guftan va Nivishtan*", i.e. "On the Art of Speech and Writing." His time in Istanbul saw the completion of practically all his works, namely his treatise on Babism, the *Hasht Bihisht*.⁵⁵

Kirmânî also collaborated with Jamal al-Din al Afghani, who had come to Istanbul in 1892 at the Ottoman Sultan's invitation⁵⁶, in promoting and organising Afghani's pan-Islamic movement. However, Bayat-Philipp argues that Mîrzâ Âqâ Khan Kirmânî was much more of a nationalist and secular in his views in comparison to al-Afghani who was more concerned with pan-Islamism and not exclusively 'Iranian': "His pan-Islamic view dates to the time when he was still enjoying Sultan Abdülhamid's favours, and was closely associated with al-Afghani."⁵⁷ However, this was a flirtation that lasted only a very short while, as unlike Afghani, he made no attempt to promote the Islamic shari'a or to compare it to Western constitutions. Therefore, Mîrzâ Âqâ Khan Kirmânî did not seek to

Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January, 1974), p. 37. Except for a short trip that took him, in 1886, to Cyprus where he met the Azali leader Subhi-Azal and married his daughter, followed by a passage to Syria and Iraq, Kirmânî spent the last ten years of his life in the Ottoman capital.

⁵⁵ *Hasht Bihisht* was a Babi commentary on metaphysical and practical concepts where he expanded on Ibn Khaldun's theory that the rise and decline of a nation depended on the degree of its cultural sophistication.

⁵⁶ Bayat-Philipp Mangol, "The Concepts of Religion and Government in the Thought of Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, a Nineteenth Century Persian Revolutionary," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (September, 1974), p. 382.

⁵⁷ Bayat-Philipp Mangol, *The Concepts of Religion and Government in the Thought of Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani*, p.396-397.

develop further his notion of pan-Islamism, nor did he draw a definite program for the establishment of a unified Muslim government.⁵⁸

Although Kirmânî and Malkum never formally met, they appear to have established contact via correspondence when Kirmânî wrote to Malkum in 1890 in response to an advertisement in the newspaper *Qanun* for reporters and correspondents.⁵⁹ Asserting that he had written many articles for *Akhtar*, Kirmânî seems to have tried to persuade Malkum that he join the newspaper's staff in London. Seemingly discouraged by Malkum, he instead contributed to the newspaper from Istanbul and put forth certain suggestions to Malkum concerning the improvement of the material and style of *Qanun*, putting to use his experience writing and working for *Akhtar*.⁶⁰

Mîrzâ Âqâ Khan Kirmânî, Mîrzâ Habîb Isfahânî and their mutual friend and contributor to *Akhtar*, Shaikh Ahmad Rûhî would ultimately break off from the newspaper in 1892 over a dispute with the paper's owner Âqâ Muhammad Tâhir's son-in-law, Mîrzâ Husain Sharîf, who was also amongst the journal's contributors. Mîrzâ Husain Sharîf had asked Kirmânî for a copy of his book on Babism to pass it on to an English acquaintance and promised Kirmânî copyright for the book. However, once he was given a copy, Mîrzâ Husain Sharîf instead read out loud the contents of the book to a group of Iranians, accusing Kirmânî of heresy and irreligion.⁶¹ Moreover, he is said to have denied Kirmânî publishing rights for the

⁵⁸ Bayat-Philipp Mangol, *The Concepts of Religion and Government in the Thought of Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani*, p.397.

⁵⁹ The correspondence between Malkum and Kirmânî is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

⁶⁰ Algar, Hamid, *Mirza Malkum Khan*, pp.215-217. Kirmani also took it upon him to forward a copy of *Qanun* to the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid and advised that Malkum send a complete set of published issues to the sultan with a covering note in hope of a positive response. He also forwarded issues of the journal to the 'atabat and Iran.

book. In a letter Kirmânî wrote to Malkum Khan in May 1893, he states that all ties with the newspaper had henceforth been severed. This constituted a major break from the offices of *Akhtar*, and Mîrzâ Habîb, Shaikh Ahmad Rûhî and Mîrzâ Kirmânî never again contributed to its issues. This time also coincided with termination of the Iranian ambassador Muhsin Khan Mu‘în al-Mulk’s term in Istanbul. As Mu‘în al-Mulk had acted as a mediator between the Qajar state and *Akhtar*, and had ensured that the already-strained relationship between the Shah and the editors was kept in check without heading towards crisis, his departure from Istanbul and the resignation of a number of its most significant contributors led to a gradual decline in the quality of newspaper which was finally closed down in 1896 following the assassination of Nasir al-Din Shah by Mîrzâ Riza Kirmânî, an alleged Babi sympathiser with close ties to al-Afghani. Al-Afghani had purportedly asked Mîrzâ Riza to assassinate the Shah. Since Mîrzâ Âqâ Khan Kirmânî and Shaikh Ahmad Rûhî were both associated with Afghani and also alleged Babi-Azali sympathisers, the Iranian government found it convenient to charge them all with murder. In July 1896, Kirmânî and Rûhî were executed in Tabriz.⁶² Their executions highlight that no Iranian subject was entirely safe from the Qajar state and that expatriation from Ottoman lands to Iran was not impossible. This explains to a large extent why many of the articles published in Iran were left unsigned for reasons of anonymity. The execution of two of the newspaper’s contributors took place a month after *Akhtar* was banned in May 1896 following Nasir al-Din Shah’s assassination. Regardless of Âqâ Muhammad Tâhir’s relentless demands that the ban on its circulation be reconsidered, these were refuted by the Ottoman government.

⁶¹ Adamiyat, Fereidun, *Andîshihâ-yi Mîrzâ Âqâ Khan Kirmânî*, pp.23-24.

⁶² Bayat-Philipp, Mangol, *Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani*, p. 39.

This thesis is meant to be but a contribution to the study of *Akhtar* and the role of Iranian community in Istanbul in the emergence of public opinion in Qajar Iran leading to the Constitutional Revolution. Far from exhausting the variety of topics up for discussion, it proposes the enlargement of the debate on the newspaper, its contributors and the colony of Iranians in Istanbul at the turn of the century. Considering the twenty years worth of issues published in *Akhtar* and the sheer volume of subjects treated in these issues, this thesis will take a variety of approaches in its study of the newspaper. In Chapters One and Two, I examine the structure of the newspaper and investigate who owned the journal, by what means it was funded, who wrote for it, how it was distributed and who read its contents. Such an analysis will make it possible to analyse in some detail in Chapter Three the journalistic texts in *Akhtar* in the backdrop of the broader contexts in which the newspaper operated as discussed in the two previous chapters. The reportage on the Egyptian Crisis of 1881-1882 represents in microcosm the political sensibilities of the newspaper's editors as well as the necessity of 'playing to please all sides', i.e. ensuring that its contents were not deemed unsuitable by the Sublime Porte or the Qajar State but managed to appeal to a readership both within and without Iran who wished to read news which did not reflect the official stance of the state. Chapter Four will deal with letters sent to the editors from Iran and will comment on the kind of socio-economic and political issues the readership engaged in and wished to see published in the newspaper. The plethora of concerns as expressed by the newspaper's readership is an important source of information on the points of view and sentiment of the literate middle class in nineteenth century Iran. In the conclusion, I argue that the study of *Akhtar* is significant in considering the local and regional forces at work in the conceptualisation of themes such as modernity, reform, progress and

constitutionalism and the transmission of liberal and democratic ideas from the Ottoman Empire to Iran. This is especially the case as I maintain that politicised public opinion was borne directly from the public literary sphere which *Akhtar* was an important part of in the late nineteenth century.

CHAPTER TWO

MOVING TOWARDS *AKHTAR*: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIRST PERSIAN NEWSPAPER IN THE ISTANBUL

On 13 January 1876 (16 *zilhicca* 1292) the first copy of the Persian newspaper *Akhtar* appeared in the Istanbul press. Under the title was the affirmation that “This newspaper will comment on daily news, politics, commerce, science, literature and matters of public concern, and any [submitted] article that is of interest to the general public will be accepted and published free of any charge.”⁶³ This phrase would appear in every issue of the newspaper for the next twenty years it remained in publication until it was banned on 4 August 1896 (24 *safar* 1314), following the assassination of Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848-1895) on 1 May 1896.

In this very first issue of the newspaper, the editors lay down why it was of pivotal importance that a Persian language newspaper should be published from Istanbul. The opening headline of the newspaper, “*Rûznâmah va Gâzet*” (the Newspaper and Gazette), praises the role of the press as the cornerstone of any developed nation: In *Akhtar*’s view, a major factor in progress and modernisation was the printing press. Its contributors considered the press to be the most suitable medium for the promulgation of what they regarded as progress, and asserted that the press was the main source of knowledge (*rûshanâyî*), civilisation (*madanîyat*),

⁶³ “*Rûznâmah va Gâzet*.” *Akhtar*, 13 January 1876 (16 *zilhicca* 1292).

“*In gâzat az havâdis-i gûnâgûn va az siyâsât va pûlîtîk va az tijârât va ‘ilm va adab va dîgar minâfa’-yi ‘umûmîya sukhan khâhad guft. Har gûna mavâd-i mufîda-yi ‘amma majjânan qabûl va tab’ khâhad shud.*”

freedom (*âzâdî*), progress (*taraqqî*), education (*tarbi'at va ta'allum*) of any nation. Istanbul and the printing press in the Ottoman Empire was described at some length and praised, stating that "Without a doubt, Istanbul presently has the good fortune of being the capital of a great Muslim state [...] in which numerous newspapers and journals are published. Those who are able to read [these newspapers] are to be envied."⁶⁴

Akhtar's contributors had good cause to 'envy' the relative freedom of press that the Ottoman state afforded its subjects and the quality of newspapers being published in the Ottoman capital. Newspapers published in Iran during the nineteenth century mainly occupied themselves with official news of the palace⁶⁵ and for much of the Qajar period, journalism was a state-run domain. *Kâghaz-i Akhbâr* ('News Sheet') was the first newspaper to be published in Iran in 1837 and lasted only for a short while. Some fourteen years later, in 1850, *Vaqâ'î-i Ittifâqîya* ('Newspaper of Current Events') was founded by Mîrzâ Taqî Khan Amîr Kabîr, *sadr a'zam* to Nasir al-Din Shah, as part of his modernisation programme.⁶⁶ Amir Kabîr's *Vaqâ'î-i*

⁶⁴ Extract from *Akhtar*, 13 January 1876 (16 *zilhicca* 1292).

⁶⁵ Pistor Hatam, Anja, *The Persian Newspaper Akhtar as a Transmitter of Ottoman Political Ideas*, p. 141.

⁶⁶ Amîr Kabîr (1807-1853) was the chief minister (*amîr-i nizâm*) to Nasir al-Din Shah during the first four years of his reign (1848-1853) and attempted reforms in the military, treasury, administration, judiciary and sciences, most of which were a deliberate imitation of the Ottoman reforms. Among these were attempts to balance the state budget by attempting to increase the sources of revenue and decrease state expenditure; the employment of military instructors from Italy and Austria for the formation of a well-equipped and disciplined standing army as well as having armament factories built in Tehran, Khurasan, Azerbaijan, Fars, and Isfahan, and a cannon foundry in Tehran. He also established the Dâr-al-Funûn College as an elite military and technical college and commissioned public works such as water canals, bridges and bazaars, and provincial cities witnessed the rise of important buildings such as a citadel in Shiraz, a new commercial centre in Isfahan, a barracks in Mohammara. However, Amîr Kabîr became increasingly unpopular among the Shah's courtiers and dignitaries as well as with the queen mother, Mahd-i 'Ulyâ. He was dismissed in November 1851 and sent to Kashan where he was put to death in a bathhouse. For more on Mîrzâ Taqî Khan Amîr Kabîr and his modernisation programme, see Amanat, Abbas, "The Downfall of Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir and the Problem of Ministerial Authority in Qajar Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 23 (1991), pp. 577-599; Idem, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the*

Ittîfâqîya had been inspired by the Ottoman official gazette, the *Takvim-i Vekayi* (first published in 1831), and like its counterpart, it was more of an official bulletin, reporting the events at court, rather than a newspaper in the modern sense.⁶⁷ The *Vaqâ'î-i Ittîfâqîya* continued to be published until 1861, with a total of four hundred and seventy one issues.⁶⁸ In 1861, the newspaper's name was changed to *Rûznâme-yi Dawlat-i 'Aliyya* and put under the directorship of Muhammad Hasan Khan I'tizad al-Saltana, the minister of science and great uncle of the Shah who had studied at the Dûr al-Funûn and then in Paris. Most of the news in this newspaper still concerned the Shah, the court, the appointment of courtiers and officials. It also carried some news of ministries and in particular the ministry of science and published on the Dâr al-Funûn College, paying attention to scientific discoveries and inventions in Europe.⁶⁹ By the mid-1860s, the number of official state-owned newspapers that were published in the capital had increased to four. However, these were addressed at a select audience, rarely reflecting the everyday problems and concerns of those outside the palace circle.⁷⁰ Significantly, provincial news came either from the secretaries (*munshî*) or the functionaries (*kârguzâr*) of local governors who were not accountable to the newspapers.⁷¹ In 1872, all other official newspapers and journals ceased publication and in their stead a new journal, *Îrân* (1872-1896), was published

Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press and Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1997).

⁶⁷ Tabataba'i, Muhi, *Târîkh-i tahlîlî-i mat-bû'at-i Îrân*, (Tehran, 1988), pp.26-27.

⁶⁸ Ettehadieh, Mansoureh and Sadeq, Said Mir Muhammad, "Newspapers and Journals Reprinted from 1991 to 2001," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. ¼, Qajar Art and Society (2001), pp. 196-197.

⁶⁹ In 1870 the name *'Aliyya* was changed briefly to *Dawlatî* but the paper resumed its old name in 1871.

⁷⁰ Nabavi, Negin, "Journalism in Iran i. Qajar Period," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online edition: June 15 2009, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/journalism-i-qajar-period>.

⁷¹ Nabavi, Negin, *Journalism in Iran i. Qajar Period*.

by I'ti-mad al-Saltana. He introduced a number of innovations that were a step closer to a freer press: The editors of *Īrân* actively gathered news and did not limit themselves to reports sent by provincial governors, and each issue also contained an instalment of a serialised novel. Otherwise, the model of the previous papers was more or less followed: As the official newspaper of the palace, *Īrân* contained news about the Shah, his travels and his courtiers, as well as reports of ceremonies, decrees, celebrations, festivals, and periods of religious mourning, and was a medium of influencing the Qajar bureaucracy.⁷²

Long before *Akhtar* appeared in the Istanbul press, there was growing awareness among members of the Qajar ruling elite of the discrepancy in quality between the newspapers published in Iran and those in the Ottoman Empire. In a letter written in 1865, several years before he became grand vizier to Nasir al-Din Shah, Mîrzâ Husayn Khan Mushîr-al-Dawlah (Sipahsâlâr), wrote of the frustration and indignation he felt whenever he read and compared newspapers in Iran with those published in Istanbul.⁷³ At the time, Mirzâ Husayn Khan was the Iranian ambassador in Istanbul, a post he held from 1859 to 1870.⁷⁴ He had spent part of his youth in Paris and witnessed the decline of the Second Republic (1848-1852) and held consular positions in Bombay and Tiflis before taking up the ambassadorship in Istanbul in 1859.⁷⁵ He would leave his post in Istanbul only to serve Nasir al-Din

⁷² Ettehadieh, Mansoureh and Sadeq, Said Mir Muhammad, *Newspapers and Journals Reprinted from 1991 to 2001*, pp. 197-198.

⁷³ Adamiyat, Fereiydun, *Andîsha-yi taraqqî va hukûmat-i aânûn-i 'asr-i sipahsâlâr*. Tehran, 1973, p.376.

⁷⁴ Mîrzâ Husayn Khan Mushîr-al-Dawlah's ambassadorship to Istanbul marks what has been called "the golden of Iranian diplomacy in Turkey" as it was during his service in Istanbul that the Iranian legion was elevated to the rank of 'embassy', becoming a *sifârat-i kûbra*. Mîrzâ Husayn Khan, who held the title of 'plenipotentiary minister' (*orta elçi*) until 1869, became the first Iranian ambassador (*büyük elçi*) to be stationed in the Ottoman Empire.

Shah as *sadr-i a'zam* from December 1870 to September 1873, followed by subsequent positions as Minister of Foreign Affairs (*vazîr-i umûr-i khâraja*) between 1873 and 1880 as well as Minister of War (*vazîr-i jang*) from 1874 to 1880. In the abovementioned private letter written from Istanbul to Mîrzâ Yûsuf Khan Mustashâr al-Dawlah⁷⁶, the Iranian consul-general in Tiflis at the time, he states that:

For some time now, I have abandoned the habit of reading newspapers that reach us from the seat of our Caliphate [Tehran]. They are sent very rarely, and whenever they are sent, I pass them on directly to the Embassy without reading them as when I study and compare these to the newspapers and press in Istanbul, the result is nothing but displeasure [...] I have repeatedly communicated to the state these newspaper's faults [...] but have seen no good come of it. Therefore, all I can do is to abstain from reading any of these [newspapers].⁷⁷

Although Mîrzâ Husayn Khan does not specify which Ottoman newspapers he read and compared to those published in Persian, one can assume that he must

⁷⁵ Pistor-Hatam, Anja, *Akhtar as a Transmitter of Political Ideas*, pp.145-146.

⁷⁶ Mîrzâ Yûsuf Khan was one of the first and most influential advocates of political and economic modernisation in nineteenth-century Iran and his major work, *Yek Kalameh* ("One Word"), was instrumental in converting many educated Iranians to the cause of constitutionalism and socio-economic modernisation. The two men were not only personal friends, but they also shared a firm belief in the necessity of reforming Iran's traditional political system. When in 1870, both Mîrzâ Husayn Khan (Mushîr al-Dawlah) and Mîrzâ Yûsuf Khan (Mustashâr al-Dawlah) returned to Iran – the former from Istanbul and the latter from Paris – Mushîr al-Dawlah invited Mîrzâ Yûsuf Khan to join the Ministry of Justice as his deputy and personal adviser. However, Yûsuf Khan, who became disillusioned by the degree of corruption and injustice that he witnessed, would ultimately quit his post. He wrote a series of critical articles in *Akhtar* in 1888 and as a consequence was arrested for several months and dismissed from court. See, Bakhash, Shaul, *Iran: Monarchy, Bureaucracy and Reform under the Qajars: 1858-1896*, (London: Ithaca Press for the Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, 1978), and Zarinebaf-Shahr, Fariba, "From Istanbul to Tabriz: Modernity and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia and the Middle East*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2008), pp.162-163.

⁷⁷ Letter from Mîrzâ Husayn Khan to Mîrzâ Yûsuf Khan Mustashâr al-Dawlah, 5 October 1865 (14 jumaada avval 1282), as quoted from Adamiyat, Fereiydun, *Andîsha-yi taraqqî va hukûmat-i aânûn-i 'asr-i sipahsâlâr*. Tehran, 1973, p.387. The letter reads:

"Muddatî ast bar khûd mukhammar nimûda hastam rûznâma-yi dâr al-Khalâfa ra mutâla'a namikunam. Khaili be nudrat mîfiristand va har vaght ham ke mi firistand bedûn-i mutâla'a ba atbâ'-i sifârat midaham zirâ ke az muqâyisa va mutâla'a-yi ânhâ bâ rûznâmajât-i matba'a dar Islâmbûl bijuz ânke asbâb-i kudûrat-i man shavad samarî namidahad... Mukarrar mâ'ayib-i in qism rûznâma va taklîf-i rûznâmanavîs va natîjayi ke az in kâr khâsta hastand ba dawlat 'arz nimûda am. Samarî nadidam. Zûram be khûdam risîd ke digar mutâla'a nanimâyam."

have been referring to either *Tercüman-ı Ahval* which first appeared in October 1860 and was published by İbrahim Şinasi Efendi and his friend Agâh Efendi,⁷⁸ or *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, which appeared in June 1862, published also by Şinasi who left *Tercüman-ı Efkâr* six months after it first appeared and started his own newspaper.⁷⁹ Turkish newspapers published prior to these two journals were state-owned (the *Takvim-i Vekayi* and *Ceride-i Askeriye*) and the first privately owned newspaper, *Ceride-i Havadis*, founded by the ‘infamous’⁸⁰ William Churchill, was more of a precursor to Şinasi’s *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, where similar articles on subjects such as European parliamentary government, encyclopaedic information on the New World, and human reason would be published. The use of a more simplified and journalistic language, intended at “conveying ideas rather than at titillating the brain”⁸¹ was first attempted in the *Ceride-i Havadis* but perfected by Şinasi in *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, an important step in the modernisation of Ottoman society.⁸² In fact, when Mîrzâ Husayn Khan returned to Iran in 1870, no doubt inspired by his stay in Istanbul and the press in the Ottoman Empire, he actively encouraged changes to journalistic culture in Iran by establishing a number of semi autonomous and reformist newspapers: Among these were the *Vaqâ’î-i ‘Adliya*, *Nazâmî*, *Murîkh* and *Vatan/La*

⁷⁸ Nüzhet, Selim, *Türk Gazeteciliği: Yüzüncü Yıldönümü Vesilesile*, (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931), p. 38.

⁷⁹ Mardin, Şerif, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, p.253-254.

⁸⁰ Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, p.257. It seems that Churchill’s infamy was a result of his arrest (despite the laws of the Capitulations) after he accidentally shot a young boy while hunting near his summer residence in Moda. His indemnity cost Akif Paşa, the minister of Foreign Affairs, his post and consisted of a concession to establish a newspaper in Istanbul. See, Nüzhet, Selim, *Türk Gazeteciliği: Yüzüncü Yıldönümü Vesilesile*, (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931), p. 38.

⁸¹ Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, p.258.

⁸² Rahim, Ahmet, *Matbuat Tarihimizde Methal: İlk Büyük Muharirlerden Şinasi*, (Istanbul: Yeni Matbaa, 1927), p.11.

Patrie.⁸³ Not unlike the *Tasvir-i Efškâr*, these newspapers were also written in simple language and avoided the use of repetitive synonyms – a feature of the old style –, and even incorporated a small amount of criticism. Significantly, it was Mîrzâ Husayn Khan who first used the word *vatan* in the modern sense of ‘patria’ when he took up the editorship of the bilingual newspaper *Vatan/La Patrie* (first published on 5 February 1876), in which the journal’s editors declared that they would “dedicate themselves to the modernisation of Iran” and that they would “use the law as the only criterion of judgement.”⁸⁴ *La Patrie* was banned from publication after the circulation of its very first issue. The abovementioned newspapers published on topics such as patriotism, civilisation, the need for better education, justice and the rule of law, and did not simply report the news at court. In Iran, where such topics were subjects of public discussion much later than in the Ottoman Empire, these newspapers represented the views of a very small minority of Iranian liberals, to which Mîrzâ Husayn Khan belonged. Once Mîrzâ Husayn Khan fell out of favour and was consequently dismissed in 1880, “the quality of journalism is generally considered to have further declined, and a great number of newspapers were placed under the patronage of the Ministry of Publications (*vizârat-i inṭibâ’ât*).”⁸⁵

Censorship of the press in Iran had begun shortly after the publication of the second Persian newspaper, *Vaqâ’i-i Ittifâqîya*. As early as 1851, Nasir al-Din Shah had hired one of his functionaries, a British subject named Edward Burgess to

⁸³ All these newspapers would be suspended once Mushîr al-Dawlah was dismissed from his office in 1880. The official newspaper *Îrân* would remain the sole newspaper in publication.

⁸⁴ See, Rahim, *Matbuat Tarîhimizde Methal*.

⁸⁵ Under Nasir al-Din’s son and successor, Muzaffar al-Din Shah (r. 1897–1907), state-owned newspapers continued to be published under the supervision of the Ministry of Publications. See, Kohan, Go’al, *Târîk-i sânsûr dar maṭbû’ât-i Îrân*, 2 vols., (Tehran: 1360–62/1981–83), pp. 41–42 and Adamiyat, Fereydu, , *Andîsha-yi taraqqî*, pp. 174–175.

oversee (*mubâshirat*) the contents of Amîr Kabîr's *Vaqâ'î-i Ittifâqîya* and to ensure that nothing unsuitable was published in it.⁸⁶ According to Burgess, after the ouster of Amîr Kabîr in 1852, the quality of the *Vaqâ'î-i Ittifâqîya* deteriorated to the extent that it published nothing "except foreign news, without the prime minister having previously revised it" and that he was "obliged to consult the prime minister and also sometimes the king himself about articles to be put in the gazette".⁸⁷ It seems that this continued to be the trend until a Ministry of Publications (*vizârat-i intibâ'ât*) was established in early 1871 which placed a great number of publications (all state sponsored newspapers) under its patronage and censored the contents of published material. In February 1885, at the suggestion of I'timâd al-Saltana, Nasir-al-Din Shah would also establish an office of domestic censorship (*sânsûr-i dâkala*) which was to check all newspapers before they were printed, and appointed I'timâd-al-Saltana as its director. This new bureau was overseen by the Ministry of Publications.⁸⁸ Contrary to the journalistic developments taking place in the Ottoman Empire, as late as the 1870s there was no privately-owned newspaper circulated in Persian in Iran.

With the exception of the newspaper *Turkestân* which appeared briefly in Istanbul in 1855, no Persian-language newspaper was published in the Ottoman Empire until the appearance of *Akhtar* in 1876. This is surprising, especially given the large community of Iranians living in the Ottoman Empire and says something about the culture of newspaper reading among Persian speakers both in and outside

⁸⁶ Karimi-Hattat, Ahmad, "Censorship in Iran: The Qajar Period," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online edition: 15 December, 1990, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/censorship-sansur-in-persia>.

⁸⁷ Burgess, Charles and Edward, *Letters from Persia Written by Charles and Edward Burgess, 1828-1855*, ed. B Schwartz, (New York, 1942), pp.114-116.

⁸⁸ *Letters from Persia*, pp. 387-389.

Iran. The Ottoman Empire and its capital Istanbul had had almost constant presence of a community of Iranian merchants, artists and scholars since the fifteenth century. Especially once the Arab provinces were added to Ottoman lands in the sixteenth century, the number of Iranians in the Empire further increased with the influx of pilgrims on their way from Iran through to the Hijaz and the shrine cities in Iraq. However, as the Ottoman Empire did not recognise Iranians – as they did European and non-Muslim subjects – as constituting a separate *millet* (i.e. the society of adherents of a ‘protected’ religion) until the nineteenth century, it is not possible to give exact approximation of the number of Iranians resident in the Ottoman Empire at any one time.⁸⁹ As they were not recognised as a *millet*, Iranians living in and visiting the Ottoman Empire did not receive exemption from Ottoman law and practice, and the state did not keep centralised records of their activities. This could perhaps explain why the Iranian community residing in the Ottoman Empire have received so little scholarly attention in comparison to the resident European merchant communities in the Ottoman Empire. Nonetheless, this is still striking given that Bruce Masters states that he estimates that “in terms of actual numbers, during any period of its history there were probably more Iranians resident in the Ottoman Empire than from any other foreign state.”⁹⁰ It was only after Ottoman-Iranian treaties of Erzurum in 1823 and 1848 that Iranians were recognised as foreigners by the bureaucrats of the Porte, and were given special consideration in their dealings with the central government. Like their European counterparts, Iranians were thus also entitled to state intervention should they encounter violations of the treaty by

⁸⁹ Steensgaard, Niels, "Consuls and Nations in the Levant from 1570 to 1650," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* vol. 15, no 1-2 (1969), pp. 13-55.

⁹⁰ Masters, Bruce "The Treaties of Erzurum (1823 and 1848) and the Changing Status of Iranians in the Ottoman Empire," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1/4 (1991), p.3.

Ottoman subjects, whether government officials or otherwise.⁹¹ Significantly, in 1847 the first Ottoman *salname* (yearbook) was published in which the names of nineteen countries are mentioned as having diplomatic representation in Istanbul, and Iran is the only Muslim state ranking with 'friendly nations' (*duwal-i muhibbah*), along with countries such as France, Britain, Holland, Sweden, Prussia, and Spain.⁹²

The Iranian ambassador to Istanbul in 1876, the year that saw *Akhtar*'s first issue published, was Muhsin Khan Mu'în al-Mulk (1820-1899). He had arrived in Istanbul on 4 May 1873 to take up the position of ambassadorship, a post he would hold for eighteen years, until 25 May 1891. At a time when Iranian-British relations were strained due to the Herat affair,⁹³ Muhsin Khan Mu'în al-Mulk was an ideal candidate to fill the post as he had previously spent considerable time in the Iranian

⁹¹ Masters, Bruce, *The Treaties of Erzurum (1823 and 1848) and the Changing Status of Iranians*, pp.9-10.

⁹² Strauss, Johann, "La presence diplomatique Iranienne à Istanbul et dans les Provinces de L'Empire Ottoman (1848-1908)," in Zarcone, Thierry and Zarinebaf-Shahr, Fariba, (eds.), *Les Iraniens d'Istanbul*, (Istanbul-Tehran: Institute Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes (IFEA) /Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1993), p. 11. The Qajar state had no official representation in the Ottoman Empire until the mid-nineteenth century and until Mahmud II's reign (1808-1839) there was no diplomatic contact between the two states other than official visits. The period between 1836 and 1854 saw the dispatch of semi-permanent Iranian emissaries (*memur-i devlet*) and in 1854, the first Iranian plenipotentiary minister (*orta elçi*) was instated in the Ottoman capital. Another important development is the addition of Iran in 1823 to the list of countries for which the bureaucrats at the Porte maintained separate registers of cases involving its citizens who needed state intervention (*Ecnebi Defterleri*). For more on Iranians in *Ecnebi Defterleri* see, Masters, Bruce "The Treaties of Erzurum (1823 and 1848) and the Changing Status of Iranians in the Ottoman Empire," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1/4 (1991).

⁹³ From the second quarter of the nineteenth century onwards, the British worried that Iranian expansion towards its eastern borders would bring about Russian proximity to India. As early as 1801, the British engraver John Cary had produced a map of Persia that sought to delineate Iran's eastern boundary. In 1837, the Iranian army attempted to regain its lost territory in Afghanistan, but were unsuccessful. In 1852, Nasir al-Din Shah "replayed the Herat scenario, though he reduced Iran's territorial ambitions to regard Herat", but Iranian forces were once again forced to renounce any claim over Herat when the British threatened to occupy the island of Kharg in the Persian Gulf. In 1856, Nasir al-Din made preparations to enter Herat, only to expose the limits of Iranian military strength once again. As late as 1870-1873, there were ongoing debates with the British regarding Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan border, with ongoing negotiations and debate on assigning territorial ownership. See, Kashani-Sabet, Firoozeh, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation 1804-1946*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp.30-33; Amanat, Abbas, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press and Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1997).

Embassy in London where had had many dealings with the British. Upon his return to Iran in 1891, Nasir al-Din Shah would place him in charge of the Ministry of Justice (*Dīvân-khâna-yi 'Aliyya-yi A'zam*) as well as the Ministry of Commerce.⁹⁴ There is substantial evidence that suggests that Mu'în al-Mulk, very much like his predecessor Mîrzâ Husayn Khan, followed and read newspapers coming out of Iran, and wished for their improvement. In a letter he wrote to the editor of the newspaper *Îrân* in 1872 – while he was still the consul-general in London – he remarks on the positive changes that have been made to the new official newspaper. As mentioned above, in 1872 all official newspapers were shut down and replaced by the new state-run newspaper *Îrân* which strove to publish news concerning matters outside the palace. Mu'în al-Mulk wrote to the editor of the newspaper expressing his delight in the changes he observes, but demanded that more be done to improve the quality of the journal:

Those [among the embassy staff] who previously threw away official newspapers and burned them, and who had no interest what so ever in following what was printed in them, are now reading and collecting these newspapers. However, certain improvements must still be made [...] It seems that your writers still mistakenly believe that overstated expressions and rhymed verse are becoming and befitting [of a newspaper]. However, the plainer and clearer [the language of] a newspaper is, the more satisfactory it will be.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Yarshater, Ehsan, "Observations on Nasir al-Din Shah," in Bosworth, Edmund and Hillenbrand, Carole, (eds.), *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), p.3.

⁹⁵ Letter from Muhsin Khân Mu'în al-Mulk to the editor of *Îrân*, as quoted from Adamiyat, Fereiydun, *Andîsha-yi taraqqî va hukûmat-i aânûn-i 'asr-i sepahsâlâr*. Tehran, 1973, p.392-393. The letter reads: "*Ashkhâsî ke sâbeqan rûznâma ra nâkhânda bar âtîsh andâkhta misûzândand va hargaz ba mutâla'a-yi ân raghabat namîkardand – hal'în rûznâmajâtira bâ kamâl-i 'itînâ va iltîfât ja'm va mujallad mînimâyând. Likan ba'zî chîzhâst ke hanûz takmîl nashuda... hanûz bar munshîyân-i rûznâma mushtaba ast ke ilfâz-i mughallagha va 'ibârât-i musajja' va mughafâ dar rûznâma mustahsan va pasindîda ast. Va hâl ânke har qadr 'ibârât-i rûznâma sâf va bî aghlâq bâshad bahtar va pasindîdatar khâhad bûd.*"

Although Mu‘în al-Mulk is directing his criticism at the style, rather than content, of the newspaper, it is nonetheless significant that he feels the need to encourage on the one hand the positive changes made to the official gazette of the state, yet does not refrain from demanding that more be done to ensure that the newspaper is more ‘satisfactory’, i.e. that an effort must be made to ensure that the newspaper’s style resembles that of its European and Ottoman counterparts.

After all, it was Muhsin Khan Mu‘în al-Mulk who convinced Nasir al-Din Shah and his ministers that a newspaper published in Persian in Istanbul could serve as a medium of influence on Iranian subjects living in the Ottoman Empire.⁹⁶ Once the newspaper was finally published, he would also correspond with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on numerous occasions to ensure the survival of the gazette. After the first issue of the newspaper was published, Mu‘în al-Mulk wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran informing them that “As [the editor] Âqâ Muhammad Tâhir (Tabrîzî) cannot manage on his own, I have asked Mîrzâ Najaf ‘Ali Khan to assist him.”⁹⁷ Mîrzâ Najaf ‘Ali Khan was the first secretary to the consul-general as well as the embassy’s Translation Bureau. It seems that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had sent the editor of the newspaper a hundred Liras, which was enough to ensure the publication of the first sixty issues. Once these sixty issues were published, the ambassador once again wrote to the Ministry expressing his hope that a second donation would be sent to ensure the journal’s survival.⁹⁸ The question of the newspaper’s financing was obviously a crucial one. After only sixty issues, due to a lack of finances, the newspaper was forced to discontinue publication.

⁹⁶ Pistor-Hatam, *Akhtar as a Transmitter of Ottoman Political Ideas*, p. 142.

⁹⁷ Sâsânî, *Yâdbûdhâ-yi sifârat-i Istanbul*, p.205.

⁹⁸ Sâsânî, *Yâdbûdhâ-yi sifârat-i Istanbul*, pp.205-206.

Interestingly, when help did come, it was not in the form of a donation from Tehran, but rather as a gift from the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph, Abdülhamid II, who had recently acceded to the throne (r.1876-1908). The newspaper, which had published its last issue on 13 April 1876, resumed circulation on 11 January 1877 thanks to the support of Sultan Abdülhamid who subscribed to the journal and asked to be sent fifty-five copies of each issue. After demanding that one be put aside for himself, he asked that twenty of these be sent to the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs, another twenty to the Ministry of Education, two to Court and the rest to the *şahzades* (i.e. princes). In addition, Abdülhamid also agreed to finance the newspapers on a regular basis by sending Muhammad Tâhir Khan, the editor, a fixed sum each month.⁹⁹ The scene was set: *Akhtar* henceforth came under the protection of the Hamidian regime, and in exchange promoted Sultan Abdülhamid's pan-Islamic policies. The strictly censored Hamidian press was extremely effective throughout this period in encouraging pan-Islamic ideas within the Empire. After all, in pushing the pan-Islamic line newspapers were a potent force in creating a feeling of unity among the Muslims and in solidifying loyalties to the central government.¹⁰⁰

In retrospect, the Qajar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by failing to agree to finance *Akhtar* made a major mistake in judgement. Once the newspaper's funding started to come predominantly from the Porte, this gave its editors the independence to criticise the Qajar state and to take a relatively removed stance from the Shah and his ministers' personal agenda. Notwithstanding, let us note that *Akhtar* was not severely critical of either the Qajar or the Ottoman state, as its criticism was usually

⁹⁹ Extract from letter by Muhsin Khan Mu'în al-Mulk to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dated 27 *muḥarram* 1294 (12 February 1877), as quoted from Sâsânî, *Yâdbûdhâ-yi sifârat-i Istanbul*, p.206.

¹⁰⁰ Duguid, Stephen, "The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 9 (1973), p. 141.

indirect and veiled. The newspaper is known more for its commentary of events than its denunciation of political authority.¹⁰¹ Direct criticism was left for a different context, appearing mainly in a series of editorials and letters to the editor.¹⁰²

And surely enough, once it resumed publication in January 1877, a series of articles published in *Akhtar* on 23 January 1877 (9 *muharram* 1293) regarding the crisis in the Balkans that would lead to the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), gave Mu‘în al-Mulk’s good reason to feel alarm. The contents of this issue of *Akhtar* were the first among many that would highlight that *Akhtar* would not serve as the Qajar state’s mouthpiece as previously hoped by the Shah. In the abovementioned issue, *Akhtar* commented on the outcome of the Constantinople Conference, held in Istanbul from 23 December 1876 to 20 January 1877 to discuss the Great Powers’ project for political reforms both in Bosnia and in the Ottoman territories where the majority of the population was Bulgarian. The six countries attending – Russia, Britain, France, Germany, The Austro-Hungarian Empire and Italy – reached a compromise agreement asking that Bulgaria be divided into an eastern and western province, and that Bosnia-Herzegovina be united into one province.¹⁰³ Each province would have a considerable degree of autonomy which would include a provincial assembly and local police force. Serbia was to lose no territory and Montenegro was to be allowed to keep the areas it had overrun in Herzegovina and northern Albania.

¹⁰¹ Nikki Keddie, Orhan Koloğlu, Anja Pistor-Hatam have all commented on the *veiled* criticism *Akhtar* incorporated in its articles. I disagree with Bayat Philipp-Mangol who calls *Akhtar* a ‘revolutionary’ newspaper (see, Bayat-Philipp, Mangol, “The Concepts of Religion and Government in the Thought of Mirza Âqâ Khan Kirmânî, a Nineteenth Century Persian Revolutionary,” in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.5, No.4, September 1974, pp.281-400). The fact that *Akhtar* was able to remain in circulation for twenty years without a single complaint being lodged against it in Press Bureau of the Porte is demonstration that the newspaper’s editors knew how not to cross the fine line between veiled commentary and criticism.

¹⁰² Chapter Four will deal exclusively with the letters to the editors.

¹⁰³ Stravrianos, L.S, *The Balkans since 1453*, (London: C. Hurst&Company, 2000), pp.403-406.

These terms were presented as the 'irreducible minimum' to the Ottoman Empire.

These were then rejected by the Ottoman government who instead took the occasion to issue a constitution which gave full equality to all Ottoman subjects and stipulated that Ottoman territory was inalienable.¹⁰⁴

Akhtar's headlines on 23 January 1877 read "What was the preamble to the [Constantinople] Conference and what was its result?" What followed was a four-page article on the decisions taken by the Great Powers at the Conference and how the consequences of these decisions would affect the Ottoman Empire:

Six Great Nations gathered following the defeat and affliction of the Serbian population and at the request of Russia in order to find a favourable solution and to eliminate [further] bloodshed and to reconcile the disturbances which are the *internal* affairs of the Ottoman Empire. [...] It was evident from the proposals that were put forth by the abovementioned [European] ministers that this was essentially an act to interfere with the Ottoman State's internal affairs and a breach of the independence of a great state whose integrity had [previously] been guaranteed and accepted by each and single one of the present states. In addition, it would be impossible to argue that these Great States were unaware that [...] they were disregarding the rights of a great people and state by accepting such terms.¹⁰⁵

The article went on to arguing that the implementation of such terms could not possibly have positive results: As a direct consequence, the Slavs would wield great power in *Rumeli* which would eventually result in more bloodshed.

¹⁰⁴ Jelavich, Barbara, *The History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Vol. I. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.356.

¹⁰⁵ "Muqaddimah-i Kūnfarāns chī būd? Natijah-i ān chī būd?" Extract from *Akhtar*, 23 January 1877 (9 muharram 1293). Emphasis my own. The article reads:
"Sish dawlat-i buzurg ba 'unvān-i salāh jūyī va khair khāhi dar zamn-i raf'-i qa'ilahayi dākhili-yi Dawlat-i 'Aliyya-yi 'Usmānī va qāyab-i hal-i khūnrīzī-yi khusūsi yā 'umūmī pas az maqlūbī va parīshānī-yi jami'at-i Serbiha va khāhash-i mutāraka az janāb-i fakhīma-yi Rus taklif-i in'āqād-i yik majlis-i kūnfarāns rā bamīyān āvarda [...] takālif-i chand ke vuzarā-yi mushār aliya ba mīyān āvardand ashkār va musallam būd ke ān kār asāsan mudākhala kardan ba 'umūr-i dākhaliya-yi Dawlat 'Aliyya-yi 'Usmānī va rakhna andākhthan ba bunyān istiqlāl-i yik dawlat-i buzurg ast ke khūd-i ān dawlathā yikān yikān muta'ahhad va zāman-i istiqlāl-i ān dawlat shuda and."

Akhtar's stance was clear: Russia, Britain and all other present states at the Conference were impeding on the Porte's integrity and independence by intervening in what the newspaper opined were the internal affairs of the Ottoman State. Mu'în al-Mulk was of course horrified at the turn events had taken: It seemed that almost overnight, *Akhtar* had espoused a pro-Ottoman and anti-Russian stance, which by default went against the policy of the Qajar state. At a time when Iranian relations with Britain were tense and the state's policy was to maintain neutral terms with Russia, the effect of such anti-Russian sentiment could potentially be detrimental. Mu'în al-Mulk informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that he had attempted to collect the published copies of that particular issue, but that there were sure to be many more copies that had remained in circulation. He explained the situation as such:

This week [*Akhtar*] published a fabricated account regarding the Ottoman-Russian [affair] and has disturbed matters in such a way that it is difficult to mend completely [the damage that has been done]. I have attempted to collect some of the paper's issues. I have reproached the director of the newspaper, Hajji Rizâ Qulî and the editor, Âqâ Muhammad Khân. [However] because Ottoman subjects are partners of the newspaper and there the Ottoman state is involved in its affairs, closing down the newspaper is out of the question. And moreover, other newspaper will report on [what *Akhtar* has published]. Soon the Russians will speak out [and ask for an explanation].¹⁰⁶

By the time this letter was sent to Tehran in early February 1894, it was indeed too late for the Iranian Embassy in Istanbul or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran

¹⁰⁶ Letter dates 1 June 1867 (28 *muharram* 1294), from Muhsin Khân Mu'în al-Mulk to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran, as quoted from Sasani, *Yâdbûdhâ-yi sifârat-i Istanbul*, pp.206-207. The letter reads:

"In hafta sharhî az qarîha-yi khîsh dar hâl-i dawlat-i 'Aliyya va Rûssiya nivishta va chanân baham zada ke islâhash dar kamâl-i ishgâl ast. Kamtârin ba'zî az nuskahâ râ jam' kardam. Hajjî Rizâ Qulî, mudîr-i idâra va Aghâ Muhammad Tâhir, sâhib-i imtiyâz ra malâmat kardam. Chûn bastan-i rûznâma bajihat-i inke itbâ'-yi 'Usmânî sharîk and va nizârat-i 'umûmî-yi ân dar dast-i hukûmat ast mumkan nakhâhad bûd va lâbud az nuskha-yi îsâl shuda dar rûznâmahâyî dîgar naql mikonand. Dûr nîst az taraf-i Rûshâ bamaqâm guftigû bar âyad."

to have direct say in *Akhtar*'s affairs and what it chose to publish. Not only was the newspaper being funded by the Porte, Ottoman subjects were now partners of the paper: *Akhtar* could no longer "serve as a medium of influence on Iranian subjects living in the Ottoman Empire" as the Shah and his ministers had once hoped.

Early 1877 was indeed a critical stage in Russian-Ottoman relations: The Russians were weighing the option of whether it would be strategically wise to draw Iran into the war and had asked for talks, and the Iran state was also anxious that a neutral stance be taken – at least for the time being. On 24 April 1877, Russia would declare war on the Ottoman Empire. From the Russian point of view, Britain's attitude towards Russia was hostile and the possibility of British intervention in favour of the Ottoman Empire could not be overlooked.¹⁰⁷ The Russians foresaw this possibility and some time before declaring war on the Ottoman Empire called for a meeting and talks in Tehran to conclude an alliance with Iran against the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁸ There were some among the Russian delegation who believed that the one area where Russia could effectively threaten Britain and compel it from joining the war with the Ottoman Empire was Central Asia. The Minister of War, Dmitry Miliutin suggested an alliance be concluded with Iran, promising Najaf and Karbala to the Iranians in exchange for the Astarabad province, situated by the Afghan

¹⁰⁷ Kazemzadeh, Firuz, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914: A Study in Imperialism*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), p.45. Both Britain and Russia were well aware of one another's basic interests during the Eastern crisis of 1875-1878. Britain's first and foremost concern by 1877 was to ensure that Russia would not gain possession of the Straits and Constantinople as this would present a major danger to the British Empire by threatening the vital Mediterranean routes to British India. British attention was therefore directed at the safeguarding of the Straits and the Turkish capital rather than the Turkish borders in the Balkans. Once Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 24 April 1877, the British foreign secretary, the Earl of Derby, communicated to the Russian government that emphasised British interests, i.e. that the Suez Canal and the maintenance of the *status quo* in the Straits and in the Persian Gulf must be maintained. See, Jalevich, Barbara, "Great Britain and the Russian Acquisition of Batum, 1878-1886," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 48, No. 110 (January, 1970), pp. 44-66.

¹⁰⁸ Kazemzadeh, Firuz, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914*, pp.40-48.

border.¹⁰⁹ Miliutin believed that such a move would intimidate the British and keep her from entering the war along with the Ottoman army. However, when the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, N.K Giers intervened to point out that such an alliance would bring about “quick retaliation on the part of the British and complicate matters, depriving [the Russians] of the advantages which Persia’s neutrality could afford [the Russian army]”,¹¹⁰ the plan was abandoned. In this backdrop, a Persian language newspaper publishing material that could provoke anti-Russian sentiment was not looked upon favourably by the embassy staff in Istanbul and the article in *Akhtar* was seen as an embarrassment. The Russian Embassy in Istanbul did in fact file a complaint with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stating that such behaviour on behalf of Iranian officials was unacceptable: There was, after all, at least one embassy staff working for the paper.¹¹¹ As a consequence, the Iranian Embassy dismissed Mîrzâ Najaf ‘Ali Khân, the first secretary to the consul-general and Translation Bureau, who had been sent over to the offices of *Akhtar* to lend a helping hand. Mu‘în al-Mulk informed the Russian Embassy that they had dismissed the author of the ‘nonsense’ that had appeared in the journal. Whether or not Mîrzâ Najaf ‘Ali Khan was in fact the author of the published article is questionable as whoever did write the piece did not sign it. It seems that Mîrzâ Najaf ‘Ali Khan was the only person the Iranian Embassy had the authority to punish as testament to the Russians that the matter had been taken seriously.

¹⁰⁹ This would be a promise made to Iran at the expense of the Ottoman Empire as Najaf and Karbala – two of the holiest Shi‘i sites in the world – were in Ottoman territory at the time.

¹¹⁰ Report from the Russian War Minister to the Tsar, April 8, 1878, as quoted from Kazemzadeh, Firuz, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, p. 46.

¹¹¹ Sâsânî, *Yâdbûdhâ-yi sifârat-i Istanbul*, p.207.

From January 1877 to January 1891 (when *Akhtar* was banned from entering Iran) *Akhtar* continued to write articles filled with such 'mischief' (*fuzûlihât*). Nasir al-Din Shah and his ministers were aware of the contents of the newspaper and its pro-Ottoman and often – albeit indirectly – anti-Qajar tone, but could not interfere directly with its affairs for the reasons discussed above. On the other hand, the newspaper did continue to maintain good relations with its gracious hosts: Istanbul and Abdülhamid II. It did so primarily by promoting Abdülhamid's pan-Islamist agenda¹¹² and calling for the Islamic unity of the Muslim World, taking an anti-Russian stance during the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War (although Iran had declared its neutrality), maintaining a hostile standpoint vis à vis Armenians and keeping altogether silent during the Armenian massacres of 1894-1896. A more thorough examination of how the newspaper espoused pan-Islamic unity will be carried out through analysis of the documentation of the Egyptian crisis of 1881-1882 in Chapter Three.

Nonetheless, *Akhtar* managed to avoid prohibition in Iran until 13 January 1891 (2 *jumaada thani* 1307) and acquired great popularity within Iran until this date. It was ultimately the material it published during the Tobacco Concession that would result in a six month suspension followed by a ban on entering Iran. During the weeks leading up to the Tobacco Concession the newspaper published a strong-worded article criticising the Shah and his ministers for 'selling the rights of the

¹¹² Sultan Abdülhamid's pan-Islamic policies have been dealt in great detail elsewhere and will not be discussed at any length here. Please see, Duguid, Stephen, "The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 9 (1973), pp. 139-55; Deringil, Selim, "Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.23, No.3 (August 1991), pp.345-359; Kısakürek, Necip Fazıl, *Ulu Hakan Abdülhamid Han*, (Istanbul, 1981); Koloğlu, Orhan, *Abdülhamit Gerçeği*, (Ankara, 1987).

public',¹¹³ to foreigners for unfavourable returns. From November 1890 onward, discontent had started to brew both within and outside Iran as Nasir al-Din Shah had agreed to yet another concession.¹¹⁴ In return for a personal gift of twenty-five thousand pounds to the Shah, and an annual rent of fifteen-thousand pounds to the state, an Englishman named Major Talbot Talbot was to acquire a fifty-year monopoly over the production, distribution, and exportation of tobacco. He was also asked to pay the Iranian state a mere twenty-five percent of the yearly profits.¹¹⁵ When the first signs of an organised campaign in Iran appeared in early January 1891, *Akhtar* showed solidarity by publishing an article criticising previous concessions and the state of affairs in Iran:

We hope that our officials will do their best for the improvement of our country and will not permit it to remain in a state of misery and will follow the example of their neighbours in discharging their duties [...] I do not see the results of the Shah and his ministers' journey to Europe. Did they not see the glory of those countries which dazzles the eyes of the spectators? [...] Does not the person who transacts business realise that he is selling the rights of the public and that he must consult with ministers who are representatives of that public? When all business is transacted secretly what is the meaning of the Imperial Council? It is clear enough that under the present system no improvement can be made, on the other hand, the country will go to ruin.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *Akhtar*, 13 January 1891 (2 *jumaada thani* 1307). In her commentary of the same article in *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*. London: Frank Cass & Company, 1966., Nikki Keddie states that this article was published on 12 January, however the correct date is 13 January.

¹¹⁴ An interesting statement was made by Hajji Mulla 'Ali Kani, one of the country's leading *mujtahids*, in early 1880 revealing Iranian sentiment regarding foreign encroachment in Iran in the form of concessions over banks, railways and finally, tobacco. He declared that "They came to Iran as to a conquered country [...] They sent their officials to every quarter [...] Seeing themselves unhindered, they treated Iranian subjects harshly, and paid no attention to the government. Every day orders are issued to the provincial governors that they should without fail do their utmost to promote the affairs of these companies' officials. The Shah does nothing but stand silently and watches [as they do this]". Extract quoted from Algar Hamid, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulema in the Qajar Period*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969, p. 208. I think these words sum up perfectly the anger felt across classes regarding the tobacco concession that would eventually lead to the famous Tobacco Protests later on in the same year.

¹¹⁵ Abrahamian, Ervand, *The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran*, p. 399.

¹¹⁶ *Akhtar*, 13 January 1891. Parts of this extract have already been translated by Nikki Keddie in *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1966), p.45, from which I have borrowed. The original text reads:

Although the article did not mention the Tobacco Concession *per se*, the reference to previous concessions in such unfavourable terms and the assertion that “all business is transacted secretly” was a clear reference to the Tobacco Concession that had been agreed to behind closed doors to provide immediate financial respite in the face of present lack of funds. In 1891, the Qajar state was almost completely bankrupt: As early as the 1870s the government had considered taking foreign loans from foreign banks and Nasir al-Din Shah began to use gold and silver reserves which had accumulated in the royal treasury in order to avoid doing so. However, by the late 1880s sixty six percent of these reserves had already been used.¹¹⁷ The central government was too weak to enforce its fiscal demands throughout the country – this had been the case for the last three decades – and therefore only able to extract but a fraction of taxes due from the provinces. Expenditures were high and Nasir al-Din Shah regarded the granting of concessions to foreigners as a fairly straightforward way to ensure short-term financial reprieve.

Once the contents of the article in *Akhtar* reached Nasir al-Din Shah, he wrote to the Chief Minister, Amîn al-Sultân¹¹⁸ immediately, and ordered that *Akhtar* be completely banned from entering the country. He complained that as “the newspaper

“Umîdvârîm ke buzurgân-i millat-i mâ nîz asbâb-i âbâdî-yi mamlakat râ ke ni'mathâ-yi ân hastand farâhim âvarda bish az in mamlakat râ khâr va bîmaqâdâr nasapandand. Râstî namîbînîm hâsil-i inhamâ sîyâhat va gasht va guzâr-i avvali-yi dawlat-i 'Aliyya-yi Îrân dar mamalik-i Ûrûp chî shud? Âyâ marâtib-i âzâdî va rûshanâyî-yi ân balâd râ chashm-i bînandigân va tamâshâ konandigân ra khîra mîsâkht nadîdand? Âyâ vâsata-yi kâr hîch vîjdân nadârad va pîsh-i khûd namîyândîshad ke in imtîyâzât mutazamman-i huqûq-i 'umûmiya ast bâyard imsâl in kârhâ bamashvarat-i vuzarâ-yi dawlat ke vukalâ-yi millat and sûrat babandad. Dar sûratî ke hama-yi in gûna kârhâ 'umda dar parda khâhad shud pas ma'nî-yi dâr al-shûrâyî kubrâ chîst?”

¹¹⁷ Gilbar, Gad, “The Opening up of Qajar Iran: Some Economic and Social Aspects,” *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 49, No. 1, In Honour of Ann K. Lambton (1986), p.87. Gold and silver reserves decreased from a one and a half million pounds in 1868 to half a million in 1888.

¹¹⁸ ‘Ali ‘Asghar Khân Amîn al-Sultân was the son of the Shah’s former butler and court minister. He rapidly rose to power in the early 1880s and assumed a large number of governmental posts, finally becoming Chief Minister to Nasir al-Din’s court in 1888.

has once again published much nonsense, [...] this time [*Akhtar*] must certainly be prohibited in no uncertain terms and post offices must not accept its issues into the country.” He went as far to demand that “henceforth foreigners as well as English, Russian and French postmen must be prohibited from dispatching the paper into Iran.”¹¹⁹ He told Amîn al-Sultân to sign his *farmân* and to inform relevant embassies at once.

Akhtar was thereafter suppressed from entering Iran. However, this did not prevent its editors from publishing an even stronger-worded article in late January, this time addressing the question of the Tobacco Régie directly. This time, the article stressed that should the concession be granted, Iranian merchants would henceforth be unable to export tobacco and those formerly engaged in this trade would have to give up their businesses. Iranian tobacco would thus provide profit only for the English and in the process also result in unemployment in Iran. However, although the article candidly remarked on what the results of the passing of the concession would be, it did not call for rebellion, as had Mîrzâ Malkhum Khân’s *Qanun*, the London-based Persian language newspaper.¹²⁰

Akhtar continued to be published from Istanbul after it was banned from entering Iran. It was smuggled clandestinely into the country nonetheless, and its followers within Iran were called ‘*Akhtarî-mazhab*’, i.e. the sectarians of Akhtar.¹²¹ In Istanbul, the likes of Mîrza Malkhum Khan, diplomat and journalist; Jamal al-Din al-Afghânî, the great protagonist of pan-Islam; and scholars and writers such as

¹¹⁹ Letter from Nasir al-Din Shah to Amîn al-Sultân, from Safa’i, Ebrahim, *Asnâd-i Siyâsî-yi Dawrân-i Qajârîya*. Tehran, 1347, Document no. 71.

¹²⁰ For the documentation of the Régie in *Qanun*, see Keddie, Nikki, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1966).

¹²¹ Browne, Edward Granville, *A Literary History of Persia*. Vol. IV, p.468.

Shaykh Ahmad Rûhî Kirmânî, Mîrzâ Âqâ Khan of Kirman and Mirza Habîb Isfâhânî continued to be actively involved with the newspaper. The publication of *Akhtar* demonstrated to the Qajar Shah for the first time the power of a freer press. At a time when journalism did not exist in Iran and the press was a tool the state utilised to influence opinion, the Shah's inability control the editors of *Akhtar* marked the beginning of a new era in Iranian journalism and readership. In this backdrop, *Akhtar*'s 'story' is significant as its establishment and survival support the thesis that Qajar politics cannot be understood solely through the Shah's arbitrary rule despite prevailing attitudes in the existent literature. The fact that the Shah's own ministers convinced him to allow the establishment of the newspaper is testament that although the Qajar state was indeed oppressive and arbitrary, there were ways in which Iranians could negotiate with it and manage to protect their own interests. The fact that the first Persian language newspaper, albeit published abroad, would also rank among the very first examples of a politicised Persian language press is in this respect a significant illustration of how 'the powerful and powerless managed one another'¹²² in order to form a significant political base that would influence national politics in varying ways in nineteenth century Iran.

¹²² Martin, Vanessa, *The Qajar Pact: Bargaining, Protest and the State in Nineteenth-Century Persia*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p.9. Vanessa Martin convincingly argues that it was a balancing act employed by the Qajar state both in matters concerning foreign policy as well as internal affairs that ensured the continued existence of the Qajar state throughout the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER THREE

THE QUESTION OF THE EGYPTIAN CRISIS AND ITS DOCUMENTATION IN

AKHTAR 1881-1882

From September 1881 through to September 1882, *Akhtar* reported extensively on the escalating political crisis in Egypt and published a series of articles regarding what it labelled the 'Egyptian Question'. In July 1882, Egypt was occupied by the British who claimed that the sole purpose of their actions was to prevent anarchy and restore the political authority of the Khedive who was unable to suppress the ongoing national movement led by Colonel 'Urabi. As a consequence of the events of 1881-1882, although never a formal colony, Egypt became part of the British Empire and the khedival government provided the necessary façade of autonomy for the British who would remain in Egypt for a period of seventy-four years.

In September 1881, the editors of *Akhtar* noted that Ahmed 'Urabi was gradually increasing his power in Egypt and in January 1882 they also commented on Britain and France's endorsement of the Khedive, Tevfik Paşa, at the expense of 'Urabi Paşa. By the summer of 1882, the newspaper had become increasingly concerned with the Egyptian Crisis, and between early June and August reported on Egypt in its every issue. The newspaper's editors published translated articles from foreign newspapers, relayed news they had received by telegraph from Egypt and printed a number of editorials which put forth their own opinions on the unfolding of events. Unobtrusively or at times directly anti-British, openly pro-'Arabist and subtly critical of the Khedive, these offer interesting insight on the sensibilities of the *Akhtar*'s editorial in their treatment of a popular rebellion against foreign

encroachment, which had obvious parallels to the situation Iranians were facing back at home. A thorough examination of how the 'Urabi movement is recorded in *Akhtar* is relevant as the failure of 'Urabi's forces and the subsequent intervention of Britain in the country's affairs present in microcosm some of the most striking socio-political realities that Iranians were faced with in the late nineteenth century.

Furthermore, set against the background of the dynamics of the relationship between Abdülhamid II and the editors of *Akhtar*, as well as the newspaper's espousal of the Sultan's pan-Islamic policies, the treatment of the crisis is shrouded in layers of meaning, highlighting the newspaper's attempts at striking a subtle balance between keeping the Sublime Port satisfied while publishing original material.

To understand fully the events that took place as they are covered in *Akhtar* between September 1881 and September 1882, it is necessary to give an account of antecedent events going further back in history, perhaps as far as Egypt's bankruptcy in 1876 followed by the Goschen-Joubert plan for debt repayment and the deposition of Ismail as Khedive of Egypt in 1879 in the wake of Anglo-French financial takeover in the same year.¹²³ A more thorough analysis would have to incorporate

¹²³ Egypt constituted a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire and was ruled by a governor appointed by the Ottoman Sultan. From 1805 onwards, Ottoman Sultans merely acquiesced in the power of the Mehmet 'Ali Paşa family and as of 1867 the Ottoman governor of Egypt came to be known as the 'Khedive', a post that was already hereditary in the Mehmet Ali Paşa Dynasty. Khedive Isma'il's reign (1863-1879) overlapped with the cotton boom which generated significant income which in return allowed the state to undertake several improvements in infrastructure such as improved roads and canals, the extension of the telegraph line to the Sudan, the establishment of councils and schools, the abolition of the corvée and forced labour for peasants, the founding of paper factories and the opening up of the Suez Canal. However, Isma'il's infrastructure development entailed more expenditure than Egypt's income could provide, especially as the state's income was tied to the export of cotton whose price was set on a fluctuating world market. Obligated to contract foreign loans, by 1875 Egypt was a hundred million pounds in debt. In that year, Ismail sold his shares in the Suez Canal Company, making the British government overnight the single largest shareholder in the company. In 1876, Egypt declared its bankruptcy as it was unable to pay foreign debt. The French and British set up a debt commission to oversee the Egyptian budget and by 1877 more than sixty percent of all Egyptian revenue went to service the national debt. One significant result of was that foreign investments in Egypt (especially British investment) grew massively and closer ties were built between the British government and the economic sector. By 1879, discontent towards foreign ,

still more distant developments, and as one historian has commented, would need also to place these events at “the intersection between British and Egyptian history in the nineteenth century, and reach into the internal evolution of both countries as well as treating the more obvious evidence of their long-standing international connections.”¹²⁴ As a significant amount has already been published on the Egyptian Crisis in the backdrop of the abovementioned moments in history, these will not be further discussed at present. However, it is noteworthy and relevant to this chapter to note that although much has been written on the Egyptian Crisis of 1881-1882 from the British and Arab-Egyptian point of view, “surprisingly little has been written on the subject of how the Ottoman State reacted to this crisis in a land which was nominally under its suzerainty.”¹²⁵ *Akhtar* was concerned with the question of Egypt from an Ottoman perspective, especially as it was a fervid advocate of pan-Islamism under the leadership of the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph. Interestingly, on several occasions between 1881 and 1882, *Akhtar* commented on the silence in the Ottoman capital in regards the Egyptian question and urged (albeit indirectly) Abdülhamid to react to what was going on.

British historians such as Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher and Peter Mansfield have reduced the events of 1881-1882 and dubbed them the ‘Suez Crisis’

encroachment had had grown considerably and in April the Khedive decreed a financial arrangement recommended by the Assembly which was contrary to the one recommended by the European Commission. Britain and France intervened by asking that the Ottoman Sultan dismiss Isma‘il and that he be replaced by his son, Tevfik Paşa. As noted by Panayiotis Vatikiotis, in doing so “England and France seriously undermined the authority of the Khedival house and co contributed to the political upheavals of the next three years which culminated in the occupation of Egypt by British forces.” See, Vatikiotis, Panayiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt*, (New York: Frederick A Praeger Publishers, 1969), pp.143-144.

¹²⁴ Hopkins, A G, “The Victorians and Africa: A Reconsideration of the Occupation of Egypt: 1882,” in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Special Issue in Honour of J.D.Fage (1986), p. 363.

¹²⁵ Deringil, Selim, “The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis of 1881-1882,” in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.24, No. 1 (January 1988), p.3.

and have argued that British intervention was ordered in order to protect British control over the Suez Canal and to maintain its shipping route to the Indian Ocean.¹²⁶ A.G. Hopkins analysed the movement in the backdrop of British imperial history and argued that the 'Urabi movement was quelled by the British who were motivated by protecting the interests of their bond-holders with investments in Egypt as well as the pursuit political popularity back at home.¹²⁷ Egyptian scholars such as Latifah Salim and 'Abdul-'Azim Ramadan consider the 'Urabi Revolt to be a nationwide and mass rebellion on the part of intellectuals, urban guilds, both small and large landowners and have sought to understand the movement in the context of class conflict and socioeconomic factors influencing political affairs.¹²⁸ Juan Cole has built on such works but has opted for what he calls a 'social explanation'¹²⁹, examining the manner in which "economic and demographic change and the growth of state power created new interests among the strata that most participated later in the Revolution: the rural population, the local guilds and the intelligentsia."¹³⁰

Without doubt, these works have contributed significantly to an understanding of the events in Egypt leading to the 1880s. However, there seems to be a glaring hole in the literature, namely that none of the works have scrutinised in any detail the Ottoman response to the crisis and how these events affected the

¹²⁶ See, Robinson, Ronald and Gallagher, John, (eds.), *The Climax of Imperialism on the Dark Continent*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1961), pp. 76-121; and Mansfield, Peter, *The British in Egypt*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

¹²⁷ See, Hopkins, A G, "The Victorians and Africa: A Reconsideration of the Occupation of Egypt: 1882," in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Special Issue in Honour of J.D.Fage (1986), pp. 363-391.

¹²⁸ For literature on the Egyptian Left and the 'Urabi Revolt see, Salim, Latifah *Social Forces in the 'Urabi Revolution* (*al-Quwa*), Cairo, 1981; Ramadan, 'Abdul-'Azim, "Social Significance of the Urabi Revolution," in *L'Egypte*, pp.187-194.

¹²⁹ Cole, Juan, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1999), p.21.

¹³⁰ Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.21.

Sublime Porte. With the exception of Selim Deringil who was written on the Ottoman response to the crisis and Hasan Adalı who has studied documents pertaining to the Egyptian Question in the Yıldız Collection of the Başbakanlık Archives¹³¹, scholars have generally treated the Ottoman Sultan as a passive bystander in the course of events or have simply not regarded the Ottoman response to the crisis as being of particular interest.¹³² True, the Sultan's authority in Egypt underwent significant change in the period 1517-1882, but as late as the 1880s the Ottoman sultanate continued to have great influence over Egypt and the province remained an integral part of the Empire, providing troops and paying tribute to the Sublime Porte.¹³³

The first news on Egypt published in *Akhtar* suggesting that there was unrest in the country appeared on 7 September 1881 (13 *shavval* 1298), under the unassuming title 'Egypt' (*Misr*). In the opening lines, the author stated that "It is now over a month that fragments of disturbing reports are coming out of Egypt [...] these reports are unfortunately largely contradictory of one another."¹³⁴ According to the author, European newspapers had been publishing news on the supposed disorder and disarray within the ranks of the Egyptian Army and there had been talk of the dispatch of British, French and Ottoman forces to Egypt in order to quell this alleged rebellion in the foreign press:

¹³¹ Adalı, Hasan, "Documents Pertaining to the Egyptian Question in the Yıldız Collection of the Başbakanlık Arşivi, Istanbul," in Holt, Peter, (ed.), *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.52-8.

¹³² I do not intend to make sweeping generalisations in regard a huge number of works published on the period. Although the treatment of the Ottoman Sultan as merely symbolic seems to be the predominant trend, scholars such as Juan Cole and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod have expressed their views that "Egyptians for the most part saw themselves as loyal subjects of the Sultan" (Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.27.) and that the Sultan's moral authority may have actually increased in the late 1870s.

¹³³ Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, pp.26-27.

¹³⁴ "Misr". *Akhtar*, 7 September 1881 (13 *shavval* 1298).

There are reports that [Egyptian] soldiers have become rebellious and that therefore these soldiers must be dispersed and in their place, a necessary number of British, French and Ottoman soldiers must be sent into Egypt in order to ensure that order and peace are maintained!!!¹³⁵

The three exclamation marks suggest that the author is not entirely convinced of the necessity (or sincerity of the motive) of sending through foreign troops to Egypt in order to ensure order in the country. The use of '!!!' at the end of certain passages, especially those concerning supposed 'peace-seeking missions' of foreign forces in autonomous countries is a feature of the newspaper that is used by the same, or perhaps multiple, authors on different occasions.¹³⁶

However, the article then states that other reports coming out of Egypt suggest that Egyptian soldiers have not shown signs of rebellion at all, and that rather, some soldiers have made legitimate complaints and that these grievances have been (unfairly) treated as signs of rebellion. The reason why these grievances have been treated as such stems from the desire to dissolve the Egyptian Army and to place European forces in its stead. According to these reports:

[Those making such claims] treat the matter as such suggesting that the Egyptian Army must be dispersed to ensure order and safety. The placement of European forces [in Egypt] is an age-old design that Egypt's enemy – and perhaps the Muslim World's greatest enemy – disguised as its friend, has drawn out.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Misr". *Akhtar*, 7 September 1881 (13 *shavval* 1298). The article reads:
"[...] *Banâbarîn bâyard ordû-ra mutafarraq sâkhtah ba jâyî ânhâ az asâkar-i Înglîs va Frânsah va 'Usmânî ba qadr-i lâzim dâkhil-i Misr nimûdah bavâsateh-i în asâakar-i mukhtalatah nizam va âsâyash khata-yi Misr râ nigâhdârî nimûd.*"

¹³⁶ For example, in its issue published on 18 July 1881 (2 *ramazân* 1299) – a week after the bombardment of Alexandria – *Akhtar* relayed snippets of British Prime Minister Gladstone's address to Parliament on the Egyptian Question: "Mr Gladstone, in his response to a member of parliament's question stated that 'Britain is not at war with Egypt. Seymour, the head of the British Navy, [by bombarding Alexandria] has only acted in defence.' !!!" The newspaper's editors obviously thought that the suggestion that Britain's bombardment of Alexandria had been an act of 'military defence' was too absurd to simply relay without comment, hence the '!!!'. As these articles are very rarely signed, it is impossible to discern whether there were only one or multiple authors in question.

¹³⁷ "Misr". *Akhtar*, 7 September 1881 (13 *shavval* 1298). The article reads:

In the meantime, “the strangest of all is that there is no proper discussion on the question of Egypt, which has taken the world by storm, in this capital city [Istanbul], the true official keeper of Egypt (*dar in pa-yi takht ke âstanâdgâh-i haghîghî-yi misr ast*).”¹³⁸ And if there is any discussion of Egypt in Istanbul, it is being “confined to official circles only.” The author comments that “this secrecy is the greatest cause for the impairment of all issues [concerning Egypt] (*âkhfâ-yi in hâlat dar daraja-yi nukhustîn sabab-i kharâbî-yi kârâ ast*).” The author admits that these reports are too confusing and contradictory to truly make sense of what is happening in Egypt but concludes with the following remarks:

It is not in the advantage of Egyptian soldiers to revolt against authority without cause or reason. However, let us suppose that this is all true. [Even] in that case, the dispatch of British and French soldiers to Egypt is unnecessary. Egyptian soldiers are citizens in the service of his Majesty the Sultan and belong also to the Ottoman Army and their pacification is the concern of the Ottoman state. As long as Egypt is part of the Ottoman Empire, on what grounds can the entry of British and French soldiers [into Egypt] be justified and legitimised?¹³⁹

The assertion that the incidents taking place in Egypt, whether simply rumours or reality, concern only the Sublime Porte as they are strictly internal matters of state echoes the Sultan’s stance that the disorder in Egypt was merely “a local affair

“Chanân baqalam mîdahand ke bâyard ‘asâkar-i Misr râ mutaqarraq nimûda barâyî nigâhdârî-yi âsâyîsh-i ‘asâkar-i mukhtalifah-i Ûrûp ba ânjâ guzâshta ke in khûd az tasavvûrât-i qadîmî-yi yikî az dushmânân-i dûtnamâyî-yi Misr na balka ‘uduv-i akbar-i tamâmî jahân ast.”

¹³⁸ “Misr”. *Akhtar*, 7 September 1881 (13 shavval 1298).

¹³⁹ “Misr”. *Akhtar*, 7 September 1881 (13 shavval 1298). The article reads:
“Badbahî ast ke ‘asâkar-i Misrî hîch sabab va jahatî bamaqam-i tamarrud bar namîyâyand. Balfarz konîm je in sahat dârad. Dar ânsûrat dakhûl-i ‘asâkar-i Înglîs va Frânsah ba Misr lazîm namîyâyad che ‘asâkar-i Misr khûd tâba’-yi âvâmir-i sunnîya-yi ‘alâ-yi hazrat-i pâdishahî va dar xxx-i ‘asâkar-i ‘Usmânî ast va âskân-i ânhâ râja’ badawlat-i ‘aliya ast dar sûratî ke Misr khûd az ajzâyi-ye xxx-i dawlat-i ‘Usmânî ast va dukhûl-i ‘asâkar-i Înglîs va Frânsah ba ânjâ mustanad be kudâm dalîl va haqânîyat ast.”

involving controversy over the dismissal of some officers.”¹⁴⁰ However, as will be argued, while the Sultan preferred to act with great caution and desired no more than the maintenance of the *status quo* in Egypt, *Akhtar* wrote of the necessity of the Sultan as sovereign of Egypt and the leader of the Islamic world to act more decisively.

The article quoted above sets the tone for the content of the material that appears in the newspaper from September 1881 through to September 1882, and gives the reader a fairly accurate idea of the newspaper’s stance towards the Egyptian question. There is nothing shocking or radical in the author’s words, in fact they express the situation on the ground fairly precisely. It was no secret in 1881 that British and French intervention in Egypt was designed solely to protect their own financial interests in the country: It was made necessary by the threat to Anglo-French dictation of Egyptian finances. ‘Urabi had led a military demonstration in early September and in October 1881 the Khedive would be forced to decree that the chamber of delegates should assemble on 23 December.¹⁴¹ ‘Urabi, who spoke as a ‘delegate of the people’, demanded that the Khedive call for a constituent assembly, and that the army be increased to its full complement of eighteen thousand men as was decreed in the *firman*s granted to Muhammad ‘Ali in 1841 by the Ottoman Sultan.¹⁴² Significantly, the chamber of 1881, unlike previous assemblies, manifested its desire for independence by demanding a constitution that imposed limits on

¹⁴⁰ Deringil, Selim, *The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis*, p.7.

¹⁴¹ This body, created by a law of 1866, had performed the role of giving a veneer of popular sanction to the decisions of the khedival government, but had not met for some time. See, Galbraith, John and Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, Ataf, “The British Occupation of Egypt,” in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (November, 1978), pp. 473-474.

¹⁴² Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, Ataf, *Egypt and Cromer: A Study in Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, (Praeger Publishers : London, 1967), pp. 5 ff.

khedival autocracy, and declared that the portion of the revenues not allocated to the payment of interest on debt should be subject to the chamber's jurisdiction. This meant the dismissal of European employees in the Egyptian government who were earning high salaries in positions that were "virtual sinecures."¹⁴³ The British and French were concerned that if 'Urabi's 'rebellious' -- i.e. nationalist -- forces were not checked, Egypt could throw off foreign control and repudiate its financial obligations. This would certainly not be favourable to British or French interests. Furthermore, 'Urabi's designs did nothing to assist Abdülhamid in his policy of maintaining the *status quo* in Egypt.

More striking is that the author calls 'stranger' (*'ajîbtar*) Abdülhamid's response (or therefore lack of a response) to the unfolding crisis. As the true sovereign of Egypt, "what", the author demands "could be the reason for this silence that threatens all?"¹⁴⁴ The answer lies undoubtedly behind the fact that the Egyptian Crisis came at a particularly bad time and the Sultan was obliged to act carefully: The Ottoman Empire was still trying to deal with the consequences of the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War, paying a heavy indemnity to Russia. It had also lost one fifth of its population as a consequence of the war. In May 1881 Tunisia had been lost to the French. In this backdrop, Abdülhamid realised that "the last thing he needed was a potentially explosive issue which would wreak havoc in the Islamic 'core' of his remaining domains."¹⁴⁵ Abdülhamid's policy through the crisis was one of moderation and caution, and any question of sending through military forces to

¹⁴³ Galbraith, John and Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, Ataf, "The British Occupation of Egypt," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (November, 1978), pp. 474.

¹⁴⁴ "Misr". *Akhtar*, 7 September 1881 (13 *shavval* 1298).

¹⁴⁵ Deringil, Selim, *The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis*, p.3.

Egypt was out of the question.¹⁴⁶ There was no loss of love between Abdülhamid and ‘Urabi Paşa and the Ottoman Porte regarded the nationalist movement as a threat to Ottoman suzerainty in the region. In one letter, Abdülhamid refers to the ‘Urabists as ‘vermin’ (*haşerat*)¹⁴⁷ and insists that a favourable solution be found without encouraging the ‘Urabist movement. The editors of *Akhtar* must have also realised all this. However, regardless of the current political climate, the lack of response is particularly significant as according to the newspaper, the stakes were high: Egypt was faced with what could perhaps be called the Islamic world’s greatest enemy, foreign encroachment and a threat to Islamic unity.

Akhtar considered the question of Islamic unity as one of primary importance and espoused Abdülhamid’s policy of pan-Islamism.¹⁴⁸ In the issue published immediately after 7 September, the newspaper printed a long article on the question of *Ittihad-i Islâm* (Islamic Unity) and stated that “in whatever way we treat the question of Islamic unity we can verily observe that the protection of piety and one’s [Islamic] character is the most necessary duty (*amr-i lâzamtarîn*) that concerns all Muslim tribes and peoples today.”¹⁴⁹ Due to the threat of political disarray imposed on the Islamic world by Western powers, the article argues, the previously divided

¹⁴⁶ Deringil, Selim, *The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis*, p.5.

¹⁴⁷ Deringil, Selim, *The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis*, p.9.

¹⁴⁸ In the aftermath of the 1877-1878 Turko-Russia War, the Ottoman Empire lost most of its non-Muslim population in the Balkans which allowed Abdülhamid to stress Islamic unity and emphasise his position as Caliph, even promoting his Arab subjects to more important positions in state bureaucracy. The policy of Islamic unity was aimed at “dispelling the feeling of despondency and renewing the Muslims’ faith in and loyalty to the Ottoman dynasty and government.” The pan-Islamic movement was perhaps the most prominent aspect of the policy of Islamic unity under the Hamidian regime but cannot be dealt in any depth here. For more on Sultan Abdülhamid’s policy Islamic unity and pan-Islamism see Deringil Selim, “Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (August, 1991), pp. 345-359; Duguid, Stephen, “The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 9 (1973), pp. 139-55.

¹⁴⁹ “Ittihad-i Islâm”. *Akhtar*, 14 September 1881 (20 *shavval* 1298).

Muslim peoples must reunite and stand by one another, for “today, Islamic unity and oneness is necessary” (*imrûz ittihad-i Islâm va yigânah shudan lâzim âst*). The article discusses at some length the technical developments of the West and calls for the Muslim world to follow in the footsteps of ‘science’ (*ilm*) and demands that the members of the ‘ulema advocate Islamic unity. All this is fairly standard; however one passage in the article stands out: The author affirms that there is one sultan in the Muslim world who must be the head of all other Islamic states and to whom all other Muslim leaders must be accountable:

We must realise that among all the Muslim sultans there must be one chieftain, and he must be greater [in rank], and all the others must recognise his superiority. And because it is thus, certain conditions and limits will be imposed and accepted. For example, the Shah of Iran must be distinguished as an independent sovereign and be given the same treatment European Emperors are accorded by the King of Kings of the Islamic world [i.e. the Ottoman Caliph-Sultan]. And when he visits the Ottoman lands, he must be considered to be the most important of foreign guests. [...] It is thus that a great step for Islamic unity can be taken.¹⁵⁰

The article also adds that the “King of Kings of the Islamic world must not stand silent at injustice inflicted on its subjects.”¹⁵¹

The timing of the article is certainly significant: With the Egyptian Crisis unfolding and the 7 September article commenting on the ‘silence’ in the Ottoman capital regarding the crisis, the call for Islamic unity in the following issue seems well timed and appropriate in the current political climate. The editors of the newspaper demanded that the Muslim world react by uniting under the leadership of

¹⁵⁰ “Ittihad-i Islâm”. *Akhtar*, 14 September 1881 (20 *shavval* 1298). The article reads: “*Bâyad badânim ke dar miyân-i pâdishâhân-i islâm yikî bâyard ra’is va buzurgtar bâshad va hama û-râ ba samat-i buzurg-i bashanâsand dar hâlatike ta’if-i buzurgî qâ’im bâshad. Va chûn chânan shûd hudûd va sharâtî barayî in nuqta qarâr dada shavad. Fil-al-misal pâdishâh-i Îrân râ yik pâdishâh-i mustaqil dânistah hamân ihtirâmî râke az jinâb-i shâhanshâh-i islâm pinâh dar haq-i impîrâturhâ-yi Ûrûp dar mu’âmalât-i dawlati ma’mûl ast isti’amal-i mâqûq-i ân-râ dar haq-i pâdishâh-i Îrân ja’iz badânim. Badîn xxx yik rishta-yi buzurg-i ittihâs-i islâm badast âyad.*”

¹⁵¹ “Ittihad-i Islâm”. *Akhtar*, 14 September 1881 (20 *shavval* 1298).

the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph, Abdülhamid. Moreover, indirect as it may be, *Akhtar* demands to know how the silence in the Ottoman capital can be explained and calls for a system where the protector of Muslim subjects (*pâdishâh-i islâm pinâh*) does not “stand silent” in the face of injustice endured from Western forces, who pose the greatest threat to Islamic unity. These sentiments echo the points raised in the previous issue relating to the inaction on the part of the Sublime Porte.

The question of audience is significant and must be addressed: Who did the author of these articles have in mind when he wrote these lines? Iranians residing in Istanbul and the Ottoman lands is of course the first answer that comes to mind. However, as has been discussed in the introduction, the newspaper was widely circulated (especially by the year 1881) not only in the Ottoman Empire but also in Iran, India, Russia, the Caucasus as well as England and France. The editors’ of *Akhtar* could reach Persian-speaking Muslims in India, Iranian subjects in Iran as well as merchants (Azeri as well as Iranian) residing across Russia and the Caucasus, and Iranian embassy staff, students and political dissidents in Europe. How was the Egyptian crisis and question of Islamic unity relevant to this readership, especially as the majority were neither Ottoman subjects, nor Sunni, nor Arab?

The question of foreign encroachment was a chronic problem in nineteenth century Iran when most of the second half of the century was defined by the continuous negotiations between the Qajar state and the regional framework of the rivalry between Britain and Russia; Iranian politics was a virtual battleground where “the powerful and powerless managed one another.”¹⁵² Iranian bureaucrats and intellectuals knew only too well the foes of Western infringement and its threat to national integrity. From early 1880 onward, the question of the annexation of Akhal

¹⁵² Martin, Vanessa, *The Qajar Pact*, p.5.

and Marv by Russian forces – who considered the occupation of this region to be of the first importance for her struggle against Britain – had brought Russo-British relations to a standstill. At the same time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran was trying (rather unsuccessfully) to negotiate the terms of a new treaty delineating the border between Iran and Russia without causing Britain too much alarm.¹⁵³

Akhtar commented on these developments in its 14 July 1881 (17 *sha'ban* 1298) and 10 February 1882 (26 *rabi-al avval* 1299) as well 29 February 1282 (10 *rabi-al thani*) issues. These articles briefly noted the Iranian Foreign Ministry's inability to act decisively at a time when two great powers, Britain and Russia were moving dangerously close to military action on Iranian soil. On the other hand, the first appeals to the Ottoman Sultan from British Muslims in India who had come as early as the 1860s when they came under the attack of the British, especially in the aftermath of the so-called 'Indian Mutiny'.¹⁵⁴ Stronger appeals were made to the Ottoman Sultan by Central Asian rulers attacked by the Russians, also in the 1860s.¹⁵⁵ By the early 1880s when *Akhtar* espoused Islamic unity, the notion of pan-Islamism was not only familiar but welcome to the readers of the newspaper.

Nasir al-Din Shah was not impressed with such calls for Islamic unity, especially as this form of unity called for the recognition of the Ottoman Caliph-Sultan as the head of the Muslim world. The Qajar State was the single major

¹⁵³ Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, pp.72-83. The Government of India was especially anxious for a settlement of the Russo-Persian issue as it wished to secure Afghanistan from Russian interference. The India Office was so involved with the "Persian frontier question" that Lord Hartington, the Secretary of State of India, sat in conversations between the British Foreign Secretary, Granville, and Russian ambassador to London, Lobanov, in 1882.

¹⁵⁴ Keddie, Nikki, "The Pan-Islamic Appeal: Afghani and Abdülhamid II," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 3, No.1 (October 1966), pp.47-48.

¹⁵⁵ Keddie, Nikki, *The Pan-Islamic Appeal*, p.48. The Central Asian leaders in question here are the khانات across Turkestan. From the early 1860s through to the 1870s, Russian forces invaded Tashkent, Khodjand, Shimkent, Samarkand and Panjikent and Ashkhabad (current day Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan).

Islamic power that did not recognise the Ottoman Sultan's claim to the Islamic Caliphate.¹⁵⁶ In a letter Mîrzâ Malkum Khan, the Iranian ambassador to London at the time, sent to Nasir al-Din Shah in 1880, he stated that "a group of fanatical flatterers" around Sultan Abdülhamid were encouraging the Sultan to rally the support of the Islamic world and wished for recognition as caliph. Malkum Khan added that the Sultan had even sent out proclamations of his station as Caliph to Egypt, India, Iran and Central Asia:

A group of fanatics and flatterers have convinced the Sultan that because European countries are determined to rid Rumeli of Ottoman sovereignty indefinitely, such a great defeat can only be compensated by an Ottoman claim to the right and power of the Caliphate. From Egypt to India, and especially in Iran and Central Asia, by this use of the little power that still remains [in Abdülhamid's hands], they are taking advantage of the [right] to power and dominance that the Caliph possesses. Books have been written on this claim and one newspaper has been founded exclusively for the purpose [of propaganda]. People in Istanbul are very keen on this idea at the moment and it is truly a fantastic idea, but the incompetence and impotence of [those] in Istanbul is beyond measure.¹⁵⁷

The Qajar monarch was no supporter of Islamic unity, which he regarded with great suspicion. Nasir al-din Shah wrote back to Malkum Khan and asked him to investigate the matter further. Mîrzâ Husayn Khan, who had served as ambassador

¹⁵⁶ Another point of contention between the Ottoman Sultan and the Qajar Shah regarding the question of religious leadership was Ottoman Iraq where the holy Shi'i shrine cities were located and the Shi'i 'ulema posed a serious threat to the Porte's central authority. Selim Deringil has argued that the Ottoman Sultan's attempts at converting the Shi'i population as a preventive measure against the influence of the Iranian 'ulema was cause for some animosity between the two states. The Porte regarded education as a tool against the spread of Shi'ism and sent specially trained teachers and 'ulema to Iraq. See, Deringil, Selim, "The Struggle Against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq: A Study in Ottoman Counter-Propaganda," *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Bd. 30, Number ¼, (1990), pp. 45-62.

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Malkum Khan to Nasir al-Din Shah, dated 21 *rajab* 1297 (29 June 1880), as quoted from Safai, Ibrahim, (ed.), *Asnad-i nowyafsa*. Tehran, 1971, Document 21, p.119. The letter reads: "Ba'zi az muta'sabîn va mutamalqîn-i Îslâmbûl zehni-yi sultan kardand ke chûn duwal-i farhangistân musammam hastand 'Usmânî râ az khâk-i Rûmalî bakulli bîrân bukanand bajahta-yi talâf-yi chanân shikast-i 'azîm châra munhasir ast ke dawlat-i 'Usmânî ruju' ba huqûq va qudrat-i khalâfa bukunad va ba zûr-i ân asbâbî ke bâqî mânda huqûq va tasallut masnad-i khalâfat râ az Misr tâ Hind va bakhusûs dar Îrân va Âsiyâ-yi vasatî jârî bokonand, dar in bâb ba'zî kitâbchahânivashtha va yik rûznâma-yi mahkhsûs ham bar pâ nimûdo va alân dar Îslâmbûl garm-i in khiyâl hastand, khiyâl vâqa'an khailî 'alî ast ammâ ghiflat va bî kafâyati-yi Îslâmbûl bâlâtâr az har naw-i khiyâl ast."

in Istanbul from 1858 to 1871, also confirmed the content of Malkum Khan's letter and informed the shah that "the Ottomans had embarked on a new policy of promoting Islamic unity under the leadership of the Sultan as the caliph of the Islamic world."¹⁵⁸ Perhaps ironically, once Malkum Khan fell out of favour following his involvement in the sale of a non-existent gambling monopoly to a group of European concession hunters in 1889, he became one of Nasir al-Din's most fervent critics and advocated pan-Islamism through the London based Persian-language newspaper *Qanun* that he founded in 1890.¹⁵⁹

Furthermore, men such as Mîrzâ Âqâ Khan Kirmânî and Shaykh Ahmad-i Rûhî who were both editors of *Akhtar* and political activists residing in Istanbul, believed that Nasir al-Din Shah was an obstacle to the success of pan-Islamism. Both had close ties to al-Afghani,¹⁶⁰ who fervently advocated Islamic unity, and who was recorded to have said that Abdülhamid had told him that "by reason of the long duration of his reign and his venerable age, Nasir al-Din Shah has acquired a power and prestige such that, if he is firm, the Shi'ite divines and the people of Persia will not move to support our ideas or accomplish our aims."¹⁶¹ Nasir al-Din was

¹⁵⁸ Safai, Ibrahim, ed., *Bargha-yi Tarikh*, Tehran, 1972, Document 35, pp. 114-15, as quoted from Kia, Mehrdad, "Pan-Islamism in Late Nineteenth-Century Iran," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (January, 1996), p. 33.

¹⁵⁹ See, Algar, Hamid, *Mirza Malkum Khan: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). Perhaps the greatest act of vengeance after his exile from Iran was that Malkum not simply supporter pan-Islamism but also explicitly advocated the need for a united Islamic front under the leadership of the Ottoman Sultan as a means of challenging the power and undermining the legitimacy of the Qajar Shah's government.

¹⁶⁰ Jamal al-Din al-Afghani had attempted as early as 1881 to ingratiate himself with Abdülhamid and published *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa* in 1884, where he flattered the Porte and the Sultan in what was most probably an attempt to attract Abdülhamid's favourable attention. From 1885 onwards, Al-Afghani repeatedly appealed to the Ottoman Sultan in writing asking him to be employed in his pan-Islamist programme. He was invited to Istanbul in 1892 where he continued to advocate pan-Islamism and remained there until his death in 1897. See, Keddie, Nikki, *The Pan-Islamic Appeal*.

¹⁶¹ Browne, E G, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910). New edition, (ed.), Amanat, Abbas, (Washington D.C., 1995), pp. 65, 83. Al-Afghani claimed that the Ottoman Sultan had spoken these words to him during a private meeting and repeated them to

unpopular within the circle of pan-Islamists and by extension, those connected to the offices of *Akhtar* who used the newspaper against Nasir al-Din by promoting Islamic unity under the Ottoman Sultan. Abdülhamid in return offered them protection on Ottoman soil while they used the written word against Nasir al-Din Shah. In the meanwhile, Nasir al-Din Shah and his ministers considered the Ottoman advocacy of pan-Islamism as an aggressive policy toward Iran.¹⁶² From the point of view of the editors of *Akhtar* however, the Egyptian Crisis was yet another episode in the classical age of imperialism, where two expansionist powers – Britain and France – threatened to collide with a nationalist movement, and it was an opportunity to remind their readers of the necessity of Islamic unity.

Following the articles it published in September on Egypt and Islamic unity, nothing specific on Egypt or Islamic unity was published in the newspaper until 20 January 1892.¹⁶³ In this issue, *Akhtar* briefly commented on the meeting of the chamber of delegates and the insistence of the assembly to have greater say in the allocation of revenues:

Şerif Paşa abstained from accepting such a proposal and declared that he would resign from his position the moment the Assembly insists on accepting such a proposal in regard the question of revenue. Should he resign from his post, it is suspected that the minister of war will take his place.¹⁶⁴

Mîrzâ Aghâ Khan and Ahmad-i Rûhî. Abbas Amanat believes that Afghani had most probably exaggerated the extent of the sultan's words. See Amanat, Abbas, *Pivot of the Universe*, p.443.

¹⁶²Kia, Mehrdad, *Pan-Islamism in Late Nineteenth-Century Iran*, p. 34.

¹⁶³ Although I was unable unearth anything that supports this claim, I suspect that this may have been due to a 'warning' the editors received after the article on Islamic unity appeared. The correspondence between the Iranian Embassy in Istanbul and Tehran suggests that *Akhtar* often crossed the line and needed words of caution to remind its editors of certain limits to what could be published.

¹⁶⁴ Hingâmah-i Misr va Mutâla'ât'. *Akhtar*, 20 July 1881 (9 ramazân 1299). The article reads: "Şerif Paşa az qabûl-i in ma'ni istinkâf karda izhâr dâshta ast ke har gâh majlis-i shûrâyî-yi milat dar rasîdagî va tasdîq-i mavâzana-yi mâliya isrâr bukunand az mâmurîyât-i khûd ista'fâ khâhad kard. Har gâh mushârâfiya ista'fa bukunad maznûn ast vazîr-i jang bajâ-yi û barîyâsat-i hiyyat nizâr mu'in bashavâd."

In their demand to control half the budget not pledged to European debts, the Egyptian chamber of delegates had signalled their determination to transform the chamber from “a debating society into a closer approximation of a parliament.”¹⁶⁵ When Şerif Paşa’s government fell on 2 February, it was over disagreement on this issue. On 9 February 1882 (19 *rabi al-avval* 1299) *Akhtar* commented on the formation of the new cabinet by the Circassian Mahmud Sami al-Barudi, and ‘Urabi’s appointment as minister of war. The next day, it printed the “good news” (*khabar-i farakhandah*) that the Khedive had approved the new budget. To go into much more detail on the news *Akhtar* relayed on the situation in Egypt between February 1882 through to July 1882 is not particularly useful to the discussion as the newspaper reported extensively and with great detail on the crisis by communicating news that had arrived by telegram and translated articles from foreign newspapers. They provide a good timeline to trace the development of affairs but do not offer original analysis. These articles were always published as first page news and described the unravelling of the crisis, but did not include commentary from the newspaper’s editors. Although news on Egypt appeared in *Akhtar* at an increasing from rate from February onward, between 13 June (27 *rajab* 1299) and 9 August (23 *ramazan* 1299) the crisis became front page news in every single issue. News of British and French fears that the new cabinet would place debt service in doubt; the Khedive’s dismissal of the al-Barudi cabinet (along with ‘Urabi) in May; ‘Urabi’s reinstatement a few days later; British pressure on the Khedive through their gunboats in Alexandria’s harbour; the arrival of the Derviş Paşa mission on 7 June; the tension between Egyptian and foreign nationals and the unrest (or so-called

¹⁶⁵ Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, p. 237.

'riot') in Alexandria in mid June that lead to the bombardment of Alexandria on 11 July were all relayed, once again without commentary from the editors.

However, one interesting point that must be highlighted is the treatment of the Khedive and his relationship with Derviş and 'Urabi Paşas. A close examination of the news *Akhtar* chose to relay points to a certain tendency to accentuate the Khedive's authority in Egypt and his *amicable* relationship to 'Urabi, contrary to what *Akhtar* claims was being circulated in foreign reports and news. It was undoubtedly a conscious policy on *Akhtar*'s part to portray the Khedive and 'Urabi as being on better terms than they actually were as its editors appreciated the need to strike a delicate balance between depicting 'Urabi as a popular leader on the one hand and as the servant of the Sultan on the other, especially at a time when his popularity was growing both in Egypt as well as in Istanbul. 'Urabi may have been a nationalist leader standing up to European encroachment, but this act in itself posed a threat to the power of the Sublime Porte in Egypt.

On its 13 June 1892 (27 *rajab* 1299) issue *Akhtar* printed news that foreign newspapers had declared that "a truce between the Khedive and 'Urabi Paşa is not possible. Embassy staff in Egypt confirm this."¹⁶⁶ However, in its next issue, published on 20 June (3 *sha'ban*), following the unrest in Alexandria, there was news in *Akhtar* that "Ahmed 'Urabi Paşa has accepted, on the Khedive's request, the mission to ensure the restoration of peace and order in Alexandria." It also states that "the Khedive is dispatching his orders through 'Urabi Paşa who is acting on [the Khedive's] orders."¹⁶⁷ When Tevfik Paşa appointed a new cabinet in mid-June, 'Urabi Paşa was once again minister of war in this 'royalist' assembly. From

¹⁶⁶ *Akhtar*, 13 June 1892 (27 *rajab* 1299).

¹⁶⁷ *Akhtar*, 20 June 1892 (3 *sha'ban* 1299).

Akhtar's point of view, all seemed well between 'Urabi and the Khedive who were both acting under the orders of Derviş Paşa, the representative of the Sublime Porte in Egypt.

Derviş Paşa had in fact been commissioned to remove 'Urabi from Egypt and invite him to Istanbul. There is no mention or implication of such a design in *Akhtar*. Derviş Paşa's initial attempts at bringing about reconciliation between 'Urabi and Tevfik were not encouraged by the Sultan as it was believed that his growing popularity was becoming dangerous to the prestige of the Sublime Porte.¹⁶⁸ 'Urabi's popularity was indeed growing, not only in Egypt but also in Istanbul. This explains the ambiguity of the news published in *Akhtar*: On the one hand, its editors made no secret of their esteem of 'Urabi and yet on the other hand, they ensured that he was depicted not quite as he was (a military officer who had become the leader and symbol of a nationalist movement) but how he *should* be from the point of view of the Ottoman state, a point of view that took into account the necessity of upholding the Porte's prestige. Should 'Urabi's forces prove successful and an Arab government founded in Egypt, this would be just as deadly a blow to Ottoman interests in the region as it would be to the British in Egypt.

Let us note that *Akhtar* chose not inform its readers of one other salient issue, just as it had chosen to withhold information concerning the dynamics of the relationship between 'Urabists and the Sublime Porte: Although the newspaper went to great lengths to give an accurate account of the situation on the ground, it nonetheless failed to mention that when Tevfik Paşa dismissed the al-Barudi cabinet along with 'Urabi, an ensuing uproar that took the nation by storm obliged the Khedive to reinstate 'Urabi. When 'Urabi returned, he asked that European fleets

¹⁶⁸ Deringil, Selim, *The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis*, pp.10-11.

leave Alexandria and insisted on some constitutional reforms, such as an organic law that spelled out clearly the Khedive's limits of power.¹⁶⁹ *Akhtar* did remark on 'Urabi's demand that British fleets leave Alexandria but did not mention 'Urabi's demand that the Khedive's powers be curbed. Nor did it inform its readers that 'Urabi had asked for constitutional reforms. Although more sympathetic towards 'Urabi than Tevfik Paşa, there seems to be limits to what the editors of *Akhtar* deemed appropriate: After all, even though he had acted under British influence, Tevfik was the representative of the Ottoman Sultan, and therefore the legitimate ruler of Egypt.¹⁷⁰ As Selim Deringil has demonstrated, contrary to assertions made by scholars such as Panayiotis Vatikiotis and Alexander Schölch, Abdülhamid did not play off Tevfik and 'Urabi against one another throughout the crisis, but in fact supported Tevfik Paşa and insisted repetitively that as the Sublime Porte's representative in Egypt, 'Urabi act on the Khedive's orders. A change of Khedive was considered to be an "extremely undesirable last-minute measure" as such a change could only come about as a result of foreign intervention and would be extremely damaging to Ottoman prestige.¹⁷¹ Therefore, any suggestion in *Akhtar* that 'Urabi had asked that the Khedive's power be limited could be taken as a suggestion that the Sublime Porte's authority in Egypt also be curbed. As apprehensive of the Khedive's mission and as encouraging of 'Urabi *Akhtar* was, it clearly did not wish to encourage the demand for constitutional reforms elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire (although it certainly desired to see such reforms take place back at home in Iran). Significantly, this echoed Abdülhamid's own concerns regarding the question of

¹⁶⁹ Cole, Juan, *Colonialism and Revolution*, p. 238.

¹⁷⁰ Deringil, Selim, *The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis*, pp.4-5.

¹⁷¹ Deringil, Selim, *The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis*, pp.7-8.

setting precedent: "It was not possible for me [i.e. the Sultan] to allow a Constitution in one province of my dominions and to withhold it from others," the Sultan had informed Malet, the Counsel General of Egypt during an interview.¹⁷²

Akhtar's content also implies that it was only when the Khedive was unable to bring the crisis to an end that the Ottoman Sultan acted by sending his own representative, Derviş Paşa to solve the problem, who was higher in rank and status than the Khedive. There is however, the subtle suggestion that Derviş Paşa may have been acting arbitrarily, although on a mission to "solve once and for all the crisis."

On 13 June 1892 (27 *rajab* 1299) *Akhtar* published that:

Today four members of the 'ulema visited Derviş Paşa and informed him of their view that Egypt can rid itself of foreign dominance only with the efforts of 'Urabi Paşa. They then asked Derviş Paşa that foreign battleships be asked to leave [Alexandria]. Derviş Paşa informed them "I have not come here to listen to your advice; I am here on a mission to execute the orders and to represent the will of the Sublime Porte."¹⁷³

There is something to be said about the fact that members of the 'ulema were expressing their support of 'Urabi Paşa and that Derviş Paşa consequently dismissed the suggestion of 'Urabi's 'efforts' at ridding Egypt of foreign intervention, stating that his mission was above such considerations. However, among all the reports *Akhtar* published at the time, this extract is the only one which comes anything near criticism of Derviş Paşa.

The 'will' of the Sublime Porte was that Derviş Paşa support Tevfik Paşa who was the legitimate representative of the Sultan, remove 'Urabi from the scene, and

¹⁷² Malet to Granville, 21 September 1881, as quoted from Deringil, Selim, *The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis*, p. 5.

¹⁷³ *Akhtar*, 13 June 1892 (27 *rajab* 1299). The article reads:
"Imrûz chahâr nafar az 'ulemâ-yi Misr az jinâb- i Dervîş Paşa dîdan nimûda izhâr dâshtand ke khulâsî-yi Misr az tasallut-i Ūrûpâyîyân ba ihtimâmât-i Ahmad 'Urabi Paşa dast dâda ast. Az paşa-yi musharâli ruja 't-i vâpûrhâ-yi jangî-yi İnglîs va Frânsah khâstah and va Devîş Paşa dar javâb-i ânhâ gufta ast kem an ba injâ barayi tilaqqî-yi nasîhat-i shumâhâ nayîmâdam bal mâmurîyat-i man tablîq va ijrâ-yi avâmir va irâdat-i malûkânah ast."

prevent the military entanglement of Ottoman forces in quelling the unrest.¹⁷⁴ There was also the question avoiding the Istanbul Conference that the European Powers convened on 3 June. The Sublime Porte had no intention of attending this conference as it anticipated that no agreement or decision favourable to the wishes of the Ottoman state could be reached. In this backdrop, Derviş Paşa was also sent to Egypt as a “pre-emptive measure to avoid entanglement in this conference.”¹⁷⁵

Akhtar was very outspoken in its treatment of the Istanbul Conference. On 13 June (27 *rajab*) it stated that “Now that Derviş Paşa has arrived in Egypt, foreign delegations will not insist on the convening of a conference in Istanbul” as Derviş was in Egypt “to ensure that an agreement be reached between all the different parties.”¹⁷⁶ However, as the Great Powers continued to insist on the presence of an Ottoman delegation at the conference that had first convened on 3 June, *Akhtar* published the following on 20 July (9 *ramazân*). The author (who does not publish his name) commented that:

[The Great Powers] demanded that the Sultan, who is the sovereign of Egypt, to organise a conference that would be held in Istanbul in order to reach a decision on Egypt. The Sublime Port rejected this offer, demanding that “if the governance of Egypt rests with us, what is the meaning of your interference in its affairs and what is the meaning of this conference? How can you explain the meaning of dispatching battleships to Alexandria and still ask for a conference?”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Deringil, Selim, *The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis*, pp.10-11.

¹⁷⁵ Deringil, Selim, *The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis*, p.16.

¹⁷⁶ *Akhtar*, 13 June 1892 (27 *rajab* 1299).

¹⁷⁷ “Hingâmah-i Misr va Mutâla‘ât”. *Akhtar*, 20 July 1882 (9 *ramazân* 1299). The article reads: “Badawlat-i ‘Usmânî ke malik-i Misr ast taklîf kardand kunfarânsî dar Îslâmîbûl tashkîl va dar khusûs-i Misr qarârî dada shavad dawlat musharalîhâ in taklîf râ rad kard ke agar idâra-yi Misr ba mâ râja’ ast mudâkhala-yi shumâ az chi râh ast va ma’ni-yi in kunfarâns chist va bî sûâl va javâb ba Iskandariya kashfîhâ-yi jangî firistâdan-i shumâ va hâl taklîf-i kunfarâns ba chi mulâhaza ast.”

Significantly this article was the first editorial piece printed on Egypt since September 1881. This editorial piece, entitled “Tumult in Egypt and Its Analysis” (*Hingâmah-i Misr va Mutâla‘ât*) was to be the first in a series of commentaries. It is doubtful that the editors of *Akhtar* were quoting these words directly from any official representative of the Porte. However, they do inform the reader of *Akhtar*’s own opinion on the conference, which does not contradict the Abdülhamid’s stance concerning the question of attending such a meeting. However, *Akhtar*, undoubtedly in an attempt to depict the Sultan as more unfaltering in his dealings with European powers than he possibly could have been, reported that such a bold statement had been made on the Sultan’s behalf when the Great Powers continued to insist that the Sublime Port attend the conference.

There is also a significant shift in *Akhtar*’s stance concerning the Khedive is in this issue. The author sums up the causes of the crisis in detail and states that:

Britain and France’s previous interference in Egypt first started some years ago in matters stretching from the law and court procedures to the management of financial issues, to the appointment of numerous [foreigners] to governmental posts and the flood of foreign nationals to Egypt and their employment in the country. [All this] has resulted in the humiliation of the men and women of Egypt in the hands of foreigners. It is evident to all that Tevfik Paşa, Khedive of Egypt, was only appointed only as a result of Britain’ design.¹⁷⁸

As for ‘Urabi Paşa, *Akhtar* states that, “the Great Powers demanded that he be summoned to Istanbul to facilitate the process, Abdülhamid ordered Derviş Paşa to

¹⁷⁸ “Hingâmah-i Misr va Mutâla‘ât”. *Akhtar*, 20 July 1882 (9 ramazân 1299). The article reads: “*Mudâkhalât-i sâbiqa-yi İnglis va Frânsah dar Misr ke az chand sâl bâ bîtaraf aghâz karda and chi az jihat-i ‘adâlat va chi az bâbat-i nizarât-i idâra-yi mâliya va ghayr va gumâsgha shudan-i mâmûrân-i bisyârîdar sar kârhâ-yi mamlakatî va pur shudan-i khârija dar khak-i Misr va istakhdâam kardan-i ânâ-yi har dûzân va dukhtârâ-yi mamlakat râ va zabûn shudan-i ahl-i mamlakat dar dast-i khârija va khâdim bûdan-i Tevfik Paşa khediv-i Misr ba khîyâlat-i İnglis va mutafar‘at-i in matlâb dar nazd-i hamagân ma‘lûm ast.*”

do so.” ‘Urabi would have acted on Derviş Paşa’s instructions, if only it was possible:

‘Urabi was sent his summons to Istanbul and invited to compliance. He was prepared to [comply with these orders]. However, Egyptian soldiers did not permit him to do so and a message reached the Sublime Porte informing [the Sultan] that Egyptian forces will not allow Ahmed ‘Urabi to budge [from his current position].¹⁷⁹

These two extracts are significant as they mark a significant change in the newspaper’s stance towards Tevfik Paşa, who is portrayed as Britain and France’s puppet in such unreserved terms for the very first time. This change must be attributed to the fact that by 20 July, the British had bombarded Alexandria, Derviş Paşa had returned to Istanbul (having largely failed his mission) and the Khedive was, at least for the time being, removed from his office. Whatever happened next, the decision to reinstate Tevfik Paşa would not be taken by the Sublime Porte. Therefore, the editors of *Akhtar* must have felt that, for the first time, it was safe to accuse the Khedive of allying with foreign powers. On the other hand, the newspaper felt the need to illustrate that ‘Urabi’s continued presence in Egypt at a time when the Ottoman Sultan had demanded that he come to Istanbul was out of no fault of his own but the result of the Egyptian army who would not release him of his obligations in Egypt. This interpretation of ‘Urabi’s refusal to come to Istanbul suggests that ‘Urabi was not guilty of undermining the orders of the Sultan. Indeed, *Akhtar* never ceased to argue that ‘Urabi was and had been loyal to the Sublime Porte.

Akhtar’s analysis of the Egyptian crisis is interesting from several points of views. First, it offers insight into how the Persian-language press reacted to one of

¹⁷⁹ “Hingâmah-i Misr va Mutâla‘ât”. *Akhtar*, 20 July 1882 (9 ramazân 1299). The article reads: “Amr-i ihzâr-i barayi û rafta da‘vat ba itâ‘at shud va ham amâdo bûd vali lishkariyân-i Misr naguzâshtand va javab ba dar bâr-i humâyûn-i ‘Usmânî risid ke Ahmad ‘Urâbî râ lishkariyân nakhâhand guzâsht harakat kunad.”

the first liberal-national revolutions against European control in the region. This coincided with concerns in Iran and the Persian-speaking world of a similar nature and was therefore relevant to the newspaper's readership outside of Istanbul and the Ottoman Empire. However, as *Akhtar* was an Istanbul-based newspaper and a strong advocate of pan-Islamism, matters were complicated by the fact that although the national movement was directed against European encroachment, it was also detrimental to the authority of the Ottoman Sultan who was the official suzerain of Egypt. This context in mind, *Akhtar*'s anti-European stance is clear and straightforward: It recognised that the Egyptian crisis was a result of the (mis)interpretation of British and French expatriates who chose to see "Egyptian-inspired anarchy everywhere" when in fact the only examples of genuine civil disorder in June had lasted for a few hours and the Egyptian government had been able to suppress the violence without difficulty.¹⁸⁰ It also demonstrated that the crisis and subsequent invasion of Egypt in September was a result of the concerns of European investors, diplomats and merchants who feared loss of property and influence in the country. The 'Egyptian story' (*dastân-i Misr*) was not different to the situation in Iran or India, to which many references are made, such as "Egypt too will become like India" (*Misr ham misl-i Hindûstân khâhad shud*).

However, its editors were a lot more cautious in their treatment of 'Urabi Paşa, the Khedive and the representative of the Porte, Derviş Paşa: As has been discussed and illustrated above, *Akhtar* made no attempt to conceal its approval of 'Urabi Paşa, who had had "to endure all kinds evils to protect the motherland and [its] honour and people" (*barâyi hifz-i nâmûs va vatan va millat har gûna musîbat ra bar khûd hamvâr kard*). What is noteworthy is that the newspaper's editors approved

¹⁸⁰ Cole, Juan, *Colonialism and Revolution*, p. 281.

of 'Urabi's actions in their portrayal of his actions as a military leader acting under the orders of the Porte. *Akhtar* wrote of an alliance between 'Urabi and the Khedive between early June and mid July, which coincides with the Derviş Paşa mission. They also wrote of his efforts to quell the disorder in Alexandria on 11 June and emphasised that 'Urabists had had nothing to do with the unrest.¹⁸¹ It therefore chose to highlight that the 'Urabi Paşa had acted according to the wishes and orders of the Porte and had remained loyal to the Khedive until the bombardment of Alexandria, when he was left with no choice but to "protect the Egyptian people". As the Ottoman Sultan never officially denounced 'Urabi as a rebel, *Akhtar*'s treatment of 'Urabi's actions could not be interpreted as out of touch with the Porte's policy. *Akhtar*'s treatment of the Khedive also follows a careful design, transitioning from loyal servant of the Porte to puppet in the hands of Great Powers: From roughly September 1881 to May 1882, the Khedive is depicted as the Sultan's loyal servant, whose approval of laws, appointment of the cabinet ministers and such is treated with great value and emphasised in the newspaper. From May 1882 onwards, *Akhtar* increasingly portrayed the Khedive as unable to act adequately in the face of escalating crisis. With the arrival of Derviş Paşa in June 1882 to negotiate a solution, Tevfik Paşa's status is reduced to kind of a symbolic figure acting under the orders of Derviş Paşa. As of July 11 and the bombardment of Alexandria he is stripped of even this symbolic value and is depicted as no more than a 'puppet' of foreign powers. The Egyptian crisis ended badly for all involved: The Ottoman Empire lost its hold over Egypt; Britain became isolated from other European states for its decision to occupy Egypt without consent; the first nationalist rebellion against an imperial power in the region was quelled before it could take effect and the Khedive's was

¹⁸¹ *Akhtar*, 13 June 1892 (27 *rajab* 1299).

completely stripped of the little legitimacy he had possessed to begin with. However, *Akhtar*'s is a success story: That it was able to keep the Sultan satisfied with the contents of its reports that were often critical of the Khedive and admiring of 'Urabi Paşa while concealing the movement's overtones of parliamentarianism but using the crisis to advocate its own version of Islamic unity against European imperialism is testament that the newspaper's editors knew well how to manipulate news in their attempt to reach a Persian speaking audience beyond the Ottoman capital.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICISM AND PRAISE: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN *AKHTAR* AND ITS READERSHIP

As has been discussed in some detail in the introduction, the impact of print culture, the telegraph and the popular press, as well as changing communications technologies were all significant in the emergence of public opinion in nineteenth century Iran. This in return helped give rise to an increasingly politicised civil society. The rise of a new stratum of politically aware newspaper readers and the impact of print culture had implications for social and political mobilisation and the growth of regional patriotism.¹⁸² In this context, *Akhtar* must be considered as an agent for change in Iran as it helped foster the exchange of ideas and formation of public opinion. This chapter will examine how the newspaper offered its readers a forum to voice their points of view by publishing letters written to the editor. These columns often became a space to vent out discontent and frustration towards issues such as the perceived backwardness of Iran, the inability of the state to enforce law and order, border problems as well as the violation of foreign powers of the country's economic and political integrity. These letters were often left unsigned, but in those instances when the author did not conceal his identity entirely, they were for the most part written by wholesale merchants (*tujjâr*)¹⁸³ and – albeit less frequently – by

¹⁸² Eisenstein, Elizabeth, *The Printing Press as an Agent for Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹⁸³ I believe it necessary to briefly explain what I mean by terms such as *tâjir* (pl. *tujjâr*), *bazârî* (shop owner in the bazaar), *asnâf* (guild) and more specialised terms as *bazzâz* (draper), *baqqâl* (grocer) or *dukkândâr* (small shop keeper), *sarrâf* (banker) and *dallâl* (broker). The Persian terms *tâjir/tujjâr* signify one group only, viz., that of wholesale merchants. *Tujjâr* were separate from other businessmen engaged in trade as they did not form guilds (*asnâf*) as did shop keepers, bankers and

smaller shop keepers. In this backdrop, the chapter will also analyse the overall situation in which Iranian *tujjâr* performed social and economic roles and how they reacted to the changes that threatened their socioeconomic position and sociopolitical power in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when Iran increasingly came under foreign encroachment as a consequence of concessions. It was precisely such economic and political dislocations, which were to a significant extent brought by Western contact that eventually contributed to the Tobacco Protests (1891-1892) and the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1906). Merchants in Qajar Iran ranked along with the 'ulema as the only two powers within Iranian society which were independent of the government. Furthermore, they were better educated than the rest of the population (with the exception of the ruling elite and the 'ulema) and according to Charles Issawi, up to ninety percent of merchants could read and write at the turn of the century.¹⁸⁴ Many merchants also travelled within and outside Iran at a time when increasing European encroachment and political control was resented within the country. Merchants and tradesmen who travelled to India, Transcaucasia and the Ottoman Empire witnessed in these places reforms taking place and became part of a public debate on governmental reform and self-strengthening policies. Merchants had contributed to the establishment of *Akhtar* in 1876 and formed the bulk of its readers, subscribing to the journal from India, the Caucasus different parts

brokers. *Tujjâr* were wholesale dealers, while all other groups were retail dealers and "arranged according to their profession in guilds" (See, Issawi, Charles *The Economic History of Iran: 1880-1914*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, p. 105-107). Although *tujjâr* were townspeople (like other members of guilds), contrary to other members of a particular *asnâf*, they were not all engaged in the same trade. Furthermore, they were much smaller in number than other businessmen, and constituted under one percent of the urban population in the mid 1880s (See, Floor, Willem, "The Merchants (*tujjâr*) in Qajar Iran," in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 126 (1976), pp.101-135). The letters to the editor in *Akhtar* were sent by *tujjâr* as well as leading members of specific guilds.

¹⁸⁴ This is in sharp contrast with two percent literacy rate among craftsmen and 0.2 percent literacy rate among peasants. Not only *tujjâr* but a majority of traders and shop keepers were also literate by the first quarter of the twentieth century. See Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran*, pp.23-24.

of the Ottoman Empire. Letters to the editor as published in *Akhtar* are therefore significant as they shed light on the issues that provoked political mobilisation among the merchant class and smaller tradesmen as expressed in their own words. Significantly, *Akhtar* not only published the opinions of its readership but also commented on some of the issues raised in these letters. Moreover, letters that criticised articles the newspaper had published in previous issues also appeared. It is therefore possible to trace a dialogue between the editors of the gazette and its readership through letters to the editor. These letters are also of some significance as they offered the newspaper's editors a forum to discuss matters relating directly to matters concerning public welfare: The editors generally refrained from direct criticism of the Qajar state and government, and could therefore address certain issues only through the publication of letters coming out of Iran.

For the purposes of this chapter, I have looked at issues published from December 1881 through to January 1883 and have analysed the content of over forty issues. In the newspaper's twenty-year history, this is a relatively short period of time. However, two points need be kept in mind: First, letters to the editor were not published throughout the twenty years *Akhtar* remained in publication and many issues, especially prior to April 1878 do not contain letters to the editor. After September 1892, letters that were sent to the editors of *Akhtar* very infrequently came from Iran. Anja Pistor-Hatam has already studied how Iranian merchants were badly affected by the fact that Iran had become a purveyor of resources to supply the newly established Russian industry, and within this context has referred specifically to letters that were sent to the editors of *Akhtar*.¹⁸⁵ However, although Professor Pistor-Hatam states in her article that she used issues published between 1877 and

¹⁸⁵ Pistor-Hatam, Anja, *Non-European Views on the Expansion of Europe*.

1882, she refers to a total of three letters published in *Akhtar* during this time period. These letters concern the export of cheap sugar to Russia where it was refined and then imported back to Iran to be sold for a much higher price. I intend to scrutinise in some detail letters that appeared in a shorter and more specific time period that deal with a variety of social, political and economic issues. 1881 through to 1883 seems to be an interesting period in general, as letters contain both criticism as well as praise, and explore a plethora of concerns; from Nasir al-Din Shah's new police force to the depiction of the 'ulema in *Akhtar*, from the ban on the import of tobacco to the question of the construction of dams in Iran, as well as discussion on topics such as resentment towards the effects of improved transportation or the rights to publish calendars within Iran.

The second issue at hand is that it goes beyond the scope of this chapter to deal with twenty years worth of letters to the editor. Moreover, such an analysis would miss the point of the study: I intend to highlight the very public nature of the discussion that was being carried out through the newspaper. As public opinion can be best described as a body of argument or discussion concerning the question of government (among other things) without being conducted within the limits of governing institutions or confined to a certain governing class, the published letters highlight the involvement of the newspaper's readership in a level of political activity that went beyond the private and domestic spheres. The fact that the newspaper had a readership that wished to be heard highlights that this very readership also believed that they had a legitimate right to express an interest in public affairs.

An interesting starting point to the discussion may be a three column letter that appeared in *Akhtar*'s 8 March 1882 (17 *rabi' al akhir* 1299) issue. Although the

letter was left unsigned, as its author speaks of Tehran, it may be safe to assume that it was sent from the Iranian capital. The author complains about the recently established police force which had been set up after Nasir al-Din Shah's most recent trip to Europe. Its author states that although both the Shah's trips to Europe were designed to understand the technologies and institutions of the West better and to provide the state with the opportunity to compare Qajar Iran to Europe¹⁸⁶, it had ultimately resulted in certain disruptions, namely in this case, the police force. Nasir al-Din Shah, by demanding that "European regulations, which represent an ideal in the eyes of the international community, become established in Iran" (*ke ârazû dâshtand nimûna-yi âz qavâyîd-i farhang ke imrûz sar mushq-i tavâyîf ast dar Îrân marsûm shavad*) had caused such public disturbance that the general public now felt that European regulations and institutions were ill-suited to Iranian way of life. This new police force's first chief was a European, the Austrian Conte di Monteforte, which was also a cause for great discontent:

The management of the police force, which is the main source of welfare in society, is considered more necessary and significant than most other things. With this good intention [a new police force] has been founded [...] Alas, we must regret a thousand times that contrary to the venerable intention [with which it was established], this force has become such a source of shame and affliction that Iranians no longer wish the implementation of any foreign rules or regulations [in Iran].¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Nasir al-Din Shah's first trip abroad was to the Ottoman Empire: In 1870, he visited the holy shrine cities of Iraq where he witnessed the reforms implemented by the governor of the Baghdad province, Midhat Paşa. The Iranian ambassador to Istanbul at the time, Mîrzâ Husayn Khan accompanied the Shah throughout his trip and used the opportunity to point out to Nasir al-Din Shah the benefits of reform as witnessed in the Ottoman Empire. The Shah was so impressed by Mîrzâ Husayn Khan that he insisted that he accompany him to Tehran without returning first to Istanbul to settle his affairs there. The second trip came in 1873 when the Shah travelled to Russia with various ministers, courtiers and women of his harem. This trip coincided with the infamous Reuter concession and the Russian authorities hostile attitude towards the concession. See, Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain*, pp.130-135.

¹⁸⁷ *Akhtar*, 8 March 1882 (17 *rabi' al akhîr*, 1299). The article reads:
 "Idâra-yi pulîs râ ke 'umda-yi asbâb-i tamaddûn va taraqqî-ye 'amma ast az hama chîz alzâmtar shimurda ba niyat va fatrat-i pâk nimûna-yi az ân dar pâ-yi takht-i mamlakat vaz 'farmûdand ke ravâj biyâd. [...] Vali hizâr afsûs ke bar khalâf-i maqsûd-i mubârak va maznûn-i 'amma in idâra tûvrî

The author then quotes from a poem by Hafez, referring to Iran's new (and Muslim) police force as being the future's foes: "If the Muslim man is as Hafez deems it fit/Then alas should there be a tomorrow after this day" (*Gar Musulmânî âz ân ast ke Hâfiz dârad/Vay agar âz pas imrûz bûvad fardâyî*), i.e. that if Muslims follow Hafez's (wine consuming) Islam, then it is better that they cease to exist; and should this new police force based on Western customs continue to be managed unsatisfactorily then it too must be disbanded. He explains his cause for feeling this way as thus:

In what country do the police have the right to intervene with the affairs of the people? It is true that it has been decreed [by Islam] that he who consumes wine shall be whipped seventy times. This decree too however, must only be carried after witnesses have come forth and a thorough examination has been made and if the man has caused others harm. Where is it customary that the police have the right to stop the passerby and smell his breath and take him to the head of the police and instead of following Islamic law, demand that this penniless and wretched man pay a fine?¹⁸⁸

What makes the crime worse still is that the police are in fact culpable, according to this man, of much greater crimes as they have "opened coffee shops where alcohol is sold and consumed openly" and "have allowed numerous brothels to appear right under their noses" all around Tehran. This new police force, "run by a foreigner" (*ke dar dast-i yek kharaji ast*) has become extremely wealthy through such clandestine means. The letter concludes that:

Many opposed to the Police Administration ask: In addition to the money that it receives from the Royal Treasury, anyone who is arrested – for greater and lesser offenses – must also pay a fine. Furthermore, what has happened to the

asbâb-i khijalat va nidâmat shud ke digar Îrânîyân abd al dahar tâlib-i qavânîn va qavâ'ad-i farhangî nakhâhand shud."

¹⁸⁸ Akhtar, 8 March 1882 (17 rabi' al akhir, 1299). The article reads:
"Pulis dar kudâm millat va qanûn haq dârad 'âdât va hâlât-i ma'amûla-yi mardum râ tafahhus kunad? Sharâb khâr bar 'usûl-i dîn-i mubîn haftâd tâzîyâna mujâzât dârad, ânham pas az shadâdat-i 'udûl va tahqiq-i bisyâr. Kujâ rism ast va pulis haq dârad ke dar hîyn-i 'ubûr dihân 'âbarîn râ istashmâl karda ânâ râ ba in ithâm ba idara-yi pulis babarad va ba jâ-yi had-i shar'î az bîchâra ke qût lâyamût nadârad jazâ-yi naqdî bigîrad?"

income that comes from all the weapons that have been confiscated from outlaws and bandits? It is unclear where all this money goes and which unknown person's pockets it fills. Is there no one who will demand an explanation?¹⁸⁹

On this note, the letter is concluded.

A modern police force modelled after European concepts was founded in Tehran by Nasir al-Din Shah after he returned from his second journey to Europe in 1878.¹⁹⁰ The organisation of the police in Iran before this date had essentially been "a continuation of the patterns found among the Safavids", with "a day and night police where each of the city quarters had its own police force."¹⁹¹ This new police department came to be known as *nazmiyyah* or *pulīs*, short for *idara-yi nazmiyyah va pulīs-i daru'l-khilafa*. The purpose of this reorganisation was to coordinate the then existing police forces¹⁹² and was equipped with a special uniform and weapons. According to one European observer, their uniforms were the same as those worn by the Viennese police force.¹⁹³ Also according to European travel accounts¹⁹⁴ both the

¹⁸⁹ Akhtar, 8 March 1882 (17 rabi' al akhir, 1299). The article reads:

"Barkhī az mu'atarzīn-i idāra-yi pulīs mīgūyand: tā kunūn 'ilāva bar vujūhātī ke az hazīna-yi 'āmira ba idāra-yi pulīs dada shuda ast harkas ke dast-i pulīs ba munāsabat-i taqsīr-i kullī yā juz'ī giriftār āmāda ast kamtar az yik tūmān jazāyī nagiriftand. Ma'alum nīst ke īn hama pūl ba kīsa-yi kudām shakhs-i majhūl mīravād. Āyā shakhsī hast ke īn hasābhā rā az idāra-yi pulīs bakhāhad yā nā?"

¹⁹⁰ Floor, Willem, "The Police in Qajar Persia," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 123 (1973), p. 299.

¹⁹¹ Floor, Willem, *The Police in Qajar Persia*, p.296. Up until 1852, at the head of the various police departments was the Mayor, i.e. the *begler begi* or the *kalantar*, who was often designated by European sources as chief of police or police magistrate (See, Wilson S G, *Persian Life and Customs. With Scenes and Incidents of Residence and Travel in the Land of the Lion and the Sun* Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1896). The *kalantar* was responsible for public order in the city. Therefore, the police were servants of individuals, i.e. the *kalantar* or *kadkhudas*, and not of an institution such as the police departments or Municipalities. They owed loyalty to their chief and not to the city or the quarter they were living in. For example, if a *kalantar* was dismissed, as a consequence his retainers went with him. In 1852, the institution of *qarāvuls* (guard houses) in large cities was established by Mīrzā Tāqī Khan. It henceforth became the duty of the *qarāvuls*, to maintain law and order in the city during the daytime as well as the night.

¹⁹² Mīrzā Husayn Khan, *Jughrafiya-yi Isfahan*, (ed.), M. Situda, (Tehran 1343), pp. 123-125.

¹⁹³ Floor, Willem, *Police in Qajar Persia*, p.299.

new police chief and the police itself made a good impression at first. One such observer reported that the head of the police, di Monteforte, "was exactly the right man on the right place. He got on with natives, in a few weeks established a character for honesty and shrewdness, detected many offenders, recovered much stolen property and established a regiment of policemen, well drilled, well dressed, honest, polite, and *refused bribes*" (emphasis is original).¹⁹⁵ However, this favourable impression did not last long: To the detriment of the population of Tehran, Di Monteforte soon started to extort money from prisoners, for himself and his master Nâ'ib al-Saltana, the governor of Tehran¹⁹⁶ and as the letter in *Akhtar* suggests introduced arbitrary taxes and promoted prostitution as a means of income.¹⁹⁷

In response to the above-mentioned letter, *Akhtar* expressed concerns and stated the following:

We are not able to authenticate what has been written in this letter. However, from the course of events it becomes evident that all these facts cannot be false. [...] We hope that the servant of the Sultan, Nâ'ib al-Saltana-yi Amîr Kabîr, as is his responsibility to the rules of government, will order that an inquiry will be held and will ensure with great care that these problems are overcome.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ See, Wills, C James, *In the Land of the Lion and Sun: Experiences of Life in Persia During a Residence of Fifteen Years in Various Parts of That Country from 1866 to 1881*, (London: Macmillan&Co. 1883); Wilson S Graham, *Persian Life and Customs: With Scenes and Incidents of Residence and Travel in the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1896).

¹⁹⁵ Wills, James, *In the Land of the Lion and Sun*, p.373.

¹⁹⁶ Floor, Willam, *Police in Qajar Persia*, p.302-304.

¹⁹⁷ Tehran's prostitutes were thrown regularly out of town at one gate and then allowed to re-enter the city through another. Their so-called expulsion was no more than a pretence as the prostitutes in Tehran were in fact under the patronage of the chief of police, di Monteforte, who did not wish to renounce his right to their annual payment of 14.000 *tumans*. These sources of income were unofficial emoluments and di Monteforte also received a hundred thousand *tumans* per annum from from the Qajar government. See, Floor, *Police in Qajar Persia*, p.303-304.

¹⁹⁸ *Akhtar*, 8 March 1882 (17 *rabi' al akhir*, 1299). The article reads:
 "Chanân ke dar 'unvân-i kâghaz nivishta ast mâ dar inbâb ba tûvr-i muvassaq âgâhî nadârim valî az ravash-i kâr ham ma'alûm mîshavad ne nabâyad inhama isnâdât durûgh va bî 'asl bâshad. Dar har

It is interesting that *Akhtar* singles out Nâ'ib al-Saltana and does not appeal to the Shah directly. This also suggests that the newspaper's editors were aware that Nâ'ib al-Saltana was in fact very much part of the problem: Kâmrân Mîrzâ Nâ'ib al-Saltana was Nasir al-Din Shah's third and favourite son, and had been named governor of Tehran at the age of six, made viceroy at the age of eleven, commander-in-chief of the army at thirteen, and honoured with the title of *amîr-i kabîr* at fourteen.¹⁹⁹ In many ways, Nâ'ib al-Saltana represented the corruption and abuse of power that underpinned Nasir al-Din Shah's final years of rule which led to such popular discontent across classes. According to Dawlatâbâdî, the *nazmiyyah* had become "the melting pot of despicable people" by 1883²⁰⁰ and another source, written by one of Nasir al-Din Shah's brothers, commented that Nâ'ib al-Saltana, under whose orders the *nazmiyyah* acted, "employed only a bunch of thieves" in this new force.²⁰¹ Ironically, Nasir al-Din Shah, in a note addressed to Nâ'ib al-Saltana while he was governor of Tehran complained about the government's inefficiency and inability at adopting reform and stated that "However much the government tries to bring some order to its affairs and endow offices and privileges (*imtiyâzât*), whether in the army or elsewhere, it does not succeed [...] Do you not see that the Persian government's prestige has been ruined through the bestowing of unreasonable titles, offices and

hâl umîdvârim ke bandagân-i hazrat-i sultân Nâ'ib al-Saltana Amîr Kabîr ba iqtizâ-yi vazîfa-yi mamlakatdârî ba tahqîq-, matlab hukm farmûda ba ihtimâmât-i kâmila-ye ân hazrat julû-yi în mu'âyib bigîrad."

¹⁹⁹ Yarsahter, Ehsan, "Observations on Nasir al-Din Shah," in Bosworth, Edmund and Hillenbrand, Carole, (eds.). *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983, p. 9.

²⁰⁰ Dawlatâbâdî, Yahyâ. *Hayat-i Yahyâ*. 4 vols, (Tehran n.d., vol. 1), pp. 49-50.

²⁰¹ Mulkârâ, 'Abbas Mîrzâ, *Sharh-i Hal*, (ed.), Nava'i, 'Abd al-Husayn, (Tehran 1325), p. 60.

medals (*nishân*)?”²⁰² In the same tone, the Shah then also complained to his son that official titles had become meaningless as those who filled these positions were not worthy of the posts. The points he raises in the letter to his son Nâ’ib al-Saltana, who was in fact the very epitome of the excessive and arbitrary granting of titles and honours, must be viewed in light of the Shah’s own contrary practice that had become common place in the Qajar bureaucracy.²⁰³

A complaint of a similar nature appeared in another letter sent to *Akhtar*, published on 13 September 1882 (29 *shavval* 1299) complaining about the lawlessness in Tabriz, and negligence of the government officials and insouciance of the members of the ruling class (*bî mabâlâtî-yi mâmûrîn va ashrâr dar muqâbil-i sharârat-i ashrâr-i*). The unsigned letter appeals this time to the Crown Prince, Muzaffar al-Din Qajar, who was the governor of the province of Azerbaijan from 1865 until he ascended the throne in 1896, to improve security in Tabriz. As it had done with the previous letter, *Akhtar* comments very briefly on the contents of this complaint, and its words are sharp: “It is cause for bewilderment and regret that the government of a province as large as Azerbaijan cannot deal with a small number of insurgents” (*mûjib-i taassuf va ta’ajjub ast ke hukûmat-i khattah-i buzurgî mânand-i Azerbaijan az ‘uhdah-i ma’dudî ashrâr bîrûn natavânad biyâyad*). The commentary then states that it is hoped that the government was able to resolve the matter and provide security for the people of Azerbaijan.

²⁰² Letter from Nasir al-Din Shah to Kâmrân Mîrzâ Nâ’ib al-Saltana, as cited by Yarshater, Ehsan, “Observations on Nasir al-Din Shah,” Bosworth, Edmund and Hillenbrand, Carole, (eds.). *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), p. 4.

²⁰³ Yarshater, Ehsan, *Observations on Nasir al-Din Shah*, p.9.

On 10 March 1882 (23 *rabi' al akhir* 1299) a letter signed by “a supporter of the state from among the Iranian people” (*dowlat-khâhî âz ahalî-yi Îran*) voiced similar unease concerning the arbitrary nature of the customs police in border areas: The letter spoke of the ban on tobacco and salt imports into Iran from the Ottoman Empire, stating that “the law passed on 1 *zilqa'dah* 1292 (29 November 1875) [...] stipulates that the Iranian state has banned the entry of Ottoman salt and tobacco into Iran and has the right to prevent the import of such goods.”²⁰⁴ However, the customs police had been admitting such goods, namely tobacco, into Iran in exchange for bribes. The letter describes the situation as thus:

A huge amount of tobacco is entering Iran from the Azerbaijan and Kurdish borders where the customs police do nothing to prevent this. Instead of demanding that seventy-five [*tumans*] customs fee be paid for every hundred *tumans* worth of goods or denying these imports the right of entry, in exchange for a small sum [the customs police] let these goods enter Iran.²⁰⁵

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century travel and the writing of travelogues attained a new place in the eyes of Nasir al-Din Shah and with the government's endorsement of these journeys represented yet another effort to integrate the country, leading to the realisation that lack of supervision in the periphery invited foreign intervention and smuggling, which in turn could result in loss of territory and illegal imports entering the country. The state therefore made a concerted effort to learn about the borderlands and eventually to police them.²⁰⁶ The import of tobacco had been made illegal as three types of tobacco were already being grown in Iran –

²⁰⁴ *Akhtar*, 10 March 1882 (23 *rabi' al akhir* 1299).

²⁰⁵ *Akhtar*, 10 March 1882 (23 *rabi' al akhir* 1299). The extract reads: “*Dar sifahât-i hudûd-i Azarbâyjân va Kurdistân-i Îrân tâtûn-i bisyârî az khâk-i ‘Usmânî ba mamâlik-i Îrân dâkhil mishavad va ba jâyi inke bâlmuqâbilah-i sadî haftâd u panj gumruk az ânâ daryâft shavad yâ ânke man’ az dukhûl-i ân bashavad juz ‘î-yi rismî giriftah va dâkhil-i khâk-i Îrân mînîmâyand.*”

²⁰⁶ Kashani-Sabet, Firouzeh, *Fragile Frontiers*, p.221.

tumbak for smoking in waterpipes; *tûtûn* for pipes and a third type for making cigarettes –. The Ottoman Empire had been one of the main consumers of Iranian tobacco²⁰⁷ and it was therefore an important source of revenue: It would be highly detrimental financially that foreign tobacco should be exported from the Ottoman Empire into Iran.

The author further demands in his letter that the customs police be better supervised and managed, and asks that *Akhtar* “publishes in its pages [his] demand that government officials be reminded and made aware of this issue” (*khâhash dâram Akhtar dar zamn-i sahâ-yif-i khûd banivisad va kâr guzârân-i Dowlat-i ‘Aliya-yi Îrân râ yâdâvarî nimûda âz matlab âgâh sâzad*). That the author of the letter signed his appeal as a *dowlat-khâh*, i.e. supporter of the state, is worth some consideration as it suggests a significant departure from the previous letter discussed above: Although this letter too is an appeal to the officials of the Qajar state and demands that the question of the management of the border police be addressed, the appeal comes from a *well-wisher of the state* and is clearly not meant to challenge directly the state’s authority; it is in fact a reminder. Moreover, the author of this letter speaks in legal terms, quoting from “the law passed on 1 *zilqa ‘dah* 1292” in an attempt to substantiate his argument. On the other hand, in the letter sent concerning the police in Tehran, the author refers specifically to Islamic law. Whoever wrote to remind the authorities that the border police were not doing their job satisfactorily must have been affected by the illegal smuggling of tobacco in to Iran, which gives

²⁰⁷ Issawi, Charles, *The Economic History of Iran*. The Ottoman state imported tobacco from Iran because of its own low domestic production. This in return led to the domination of Iranian merchants and the Shi‘i ulema, who collected religious taxes from this trade, on the tobacco market in the Ottoman Empire. The import of this product was eventually granted to the *Soci  t   du Tombac* in 1891 which sharply reduced purchases of tobacco from Iran by the Ottoman Empire to raise the price. The establishment of the monopoly and the price policy would eventually contribute to smuggling and consumption of smuggled tobacco from Iran, decreasing the state’s income from tobacco trade.

rise to the suggestion that he must have been a tobacco merchant, or alternatively an official of the Qajar state, (hence, the signature *dowlat-khahi*) and an uneasy observer of this breach in the law. In any case, this letter sets out to remind government officials of their responsibilities and regards *Akhtar* as a suitable platform via which this can be done. Whereas in the letter concerning the police force in Tehran, the editors of *Akhtar* directly addressed Nâ'ib al-Saltana, the governor of Tehran, and demanded that he deal with the matter of lawlessness among the ranks of the *nazmiyyah*, there is no commentary following the second letter published on 10 March and therefore no way of knowing what the newspaper's stance on the contents of the matter was. However, some time after this letter appeared in *Akhtar*, on 3 October 1882 (20 *zilqa 'dah* 1299) another letter was published in the newspaper, sent from the Black Sea, as response to the above complaint. After making it clear that he was writing to comment on the letter published on 10 March, the author stated that:

It is obvious that whoever complained about the new customs police along the border did not know what they were talking about: The people who work for the customs police, an office which is a source of progress for our country, carry out their duties meticulously and never take money [that is not owed to them].²⁰⁸

There is evidence that suggests that the customs officers did indeed accept bribes in border areas and that there was indeed an influx of tobacco entering Iran via Azerbaijan and Kurdistan.²⁰⁹ However, significant here is the nature of the debate taking place between the readership through correspondence to the offices of the

²⁰⁸ *Akhtar*, 3 October 1882 (20 *zilqa 'dah* 1299). The letter reads: "Ma'lûm ast ke shikâyatî ke îshân 'adam-i itlâq va ghayr-i muhaq bâdah ast. Mardumânî ke barâ-yi gumruk khânah ke bâis-i âbâdî va tarqqî-yi mamlakat ast kar mikunand az kar âgâh hastand va hargaz pûlî ke be haq-i îshan nist qabul namikunand."

²⁰⁹ Bamdad, Mahdi, *Sharh-i hâlî rijâl-i Iran darqarn-i 12 va 13 va 14 hijrî*, (Tehran: 1968-1972), Vol. IV, pp.226-229.

newspaper. Both the readers who wrote to *Akhtar* on the issue of customs tax and the policing of border areas obviously considered the Istanbul-based newspaper a legitimate platform to voice their opinions and to defend their position on the issue as it enjoyed greater freedom than other legally recognised papers in Iran, which were for the most part owned by the state. The editors of *Akhtar* on the other hand once again refrained from comment.

A good example of the editors of *Akhtar* taking a staunch stance following their publication of a letter to the newspaper can be observed in the 4 April 1882 (10 *jumaada avval* 1299) issue. The letter was sent to their offices from Tabriz and discusses the question of the improvement and levelling of the road connecting Tabriz to Astara, a port city on the Caspian Sea, situated by the Iranian border to Azerbaijan. According to this letter, the commander of the Azerbaijan province, Amîr Nizâm,²¹⁰ had invited all the leading *tujjâr* to speak of the necessity and advantages of improving the road from Tabriz to Astara as such a project would ultimately have a positive effect on the influx of trade, which was the “only agent to bring about prosperity in the country” (*tijârat ke yigânah vâsatah-i âbâdî-yi mamlakat ast*). According to the letter, after explaining how, every year, a countless number of people and livestock perished on the Tabriz-Astara road, along with many valuable goods, Amîr Nizâm had explained to the *tujjâr* the advantages of financing such a project:

²¹⁰ Amîr Nizâm Garûsî (1820-1900) was given the command of the Azerbaijan army with the title Sālār ‘Askar (military commander) in 1881 and was then promoted to the governorship of Azerbaijan and became *pîshkâr* (chief steward) of the crown prince Muzaḡḡar al-Dîn Mîrzâ (r. 1896–1907) in Tabriz. For more on Amîr Nizâm Garûsî see, Eslami, Kambîz, “Amîr Nizâm Garrûsî, Ḥasan ‘Alî Khân,” Brill Online Reference Works , available at http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/amir-nizam-garrusi-hasan-ali-khan-COM_26338.

It is a shame that merchant or otherwise, no one has yet come forth to finance such a project. Everything aside, the population of Azerbaijan have an extraordinary need for this road to be constructed in order for their goods to reach Russian territory. This is especially the case now that the Russians have extended their railway from Poti to Baku. [...] All kinds of commercial goods could easily reach Russia via steam boats across the Black Sea. Goods sent from Istanbul would also reach their destination much sooner.²¹¹

The letter claims that the *tujjâr* present at the meeting, persuaded by Amîr Nizâm's reasoning, agreed to finance of such a project. The letter then states that a petition had been sent to the Shah, asking for permission to reconstruct the Tabriz-Astara road for the above-mentioned reasons. After expressing his hope that the Shah accept this proposal and singing Amîr Nizâm's praises, the author then makes one final appeal before signing off, asserting his wish that should this project benefit merchants and alike, other such construction projects also be undertaken throughout the country. The letter is signed "a merchant from Tabriz" (*tâjari az Tabriz*).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this letter is that the governor of Azerbaijan approached wealthy merchants from Tabriz to persuade them to finance the construction of the Tabriz-Astara road. This is the opposite of the expected norm, where merchants would approach the state for the undertaking of such public projects. Gad Gilbar has commented on the fact that "the phenomenon of big merchants in Iran – a local group playing a central role in the process of economic growth – was unique in the history of Middle Eastern economies."²¹² It was primarily

²¹¹ *Akhtar*, 4 April 1882 (10 jumaada avval 1299). The text reads:

"Tâ aknûn ke kasî az tujjâr yâ ghayrî dar sadad-i sâkhtan-i înrâh bar nayâmadah bais-i taassuf ast. Guzâshtah az ân âhâlî-yi Azerbaijan bajihat-i haml o naql-i imta'ah-i tijâratî bamamalîk-i Rûs ihtiyâj-i fowghala'adah ba râh-i mazkûr dârand, khusûsan aknûn ke khat-i râh âhan-i Pûtî râ dowlât-i Rûs ba langargâh-i Bâdkûbah rasânidah. Az râh-i mazkûr har gûnah mâl-i al-tijârah râ dar nihâyat-i suhûlat bavâsatah-i vâpûrhâ-yi âtashî az daryâ-yi Hâjî Turkhân bah amah-i mamâlak-i Rûs mîtavan naql kard. Nîz mâl-i al-tijârah-i kea z Islâmûl ba Îrân firistâdah mîshavad dar sûrat-i sâkhtah shudan az ân râh zûdtar ba maqsad mîrasad."

²¹² Gilbar, Gad, "The Opening Up of Qajar Iran: Some Economic and Social Aspects," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 49, No.1, In Honour of Ann K.S. Lambton (1986), pp. 84.

due to the investments and entrepreneurship of Iranian *tujjâr* that industries such as carpet-weaving increased in many rural areas – particularly among the tribal population – and such *tujjâr* also actively introduced modern industrial enterprises into the country by establishing glass, porcelain and silk reeling factories and cotton spinning mills in cities such as Tehran, Tabriz, Rasht and Sabzawar. In the early 1900s Iranian merchants also constructed several small electric power stations in Tehran. Significantly, Iranian *tujjar* also played an important role in improving means of transport in the country, as the above mentioned incident also confirms.²¹³

What the Qajar state lacked funds and resources to do, wealthy merchants could effectively carry out: The central government in nineteenth century Iran played only a marginal role in affecting developments in economic growth and modernisation.²¹⁴ The power of this distinct social class was, however, increasingly challenged after the series of military defeats Iran suffered in the two wars with Russia and the three Anglo-Iranian wars that ended with the Treaties of Turkmanchai in 1827 and Paris in 1857. These treaties opened the way for the dramatic influx of mass-manufactured goods into Iran, especially in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. As a consequence of these treaties, Iran experienced firsthand what Karl Marx has defined as the ‘heavy artillery’ with which Western capitalists “battered down all Chinese walls” in the non-Western world.²¹⁵ The cheap price of industrial

²¹³ Gilbar, *The Opening up of Qajar Iran*, pp. 83-84.

²¹⁴ I will not discuss here the implication of the term modernisation or the project of modernity that came into focus during the Enlightenment. In the context of this chapter, it denotes an adaptation of certain technical developments which in return had an effect on overall quality of life; I consider modernity to be a mode of space and time which redefined spatial relations through certain innovations in ways which ultimately reshaped the notion of time through improved communication networks, transport, rationalisation of one’s daily routine, etc.

²¹⁵ Marx, Karl, ‘The Communist Manifesto,’ in *Selected Works*, I, (Engels-Lenin Institute, 1933), p. 38.

commodities from the West caused the destruction of many handcraft industries – such as textiles – and “transformed carpet weavers into labourers working for pittance” as Iranian exports could not compete with cheap European imports. The industrialisation in Central Asia and the Caucuses in the last quarter of the century called forth the production of cash crops in the adjacent Iranian provinces; as a consequence the Iranian economy become more dependent on the exportation of resources such as cotton, opium, rice and tobacco.²¹⁶

This second issue, i.e. the blow of the ‘heavy artillery’ of the West, in other words cheap industrial commodities coming into Iran from Russia and other European countries is treated with great concern in *Akhtar*. The published letter is followed by a long response composed by the editors of the newspaper. Although it is hoped that Nasir al-Din Shah grants the permission for the reconstruction of the Tabriz-Astara road, *Akhtar* reminds its readers that Iran’s economic integrity has increasingly been threatened by an influx of Russian imports into Iran in the last thirty years, affecting also the total amount of Iranian exports to Russia:

All Iranians, especially merchants, know well that up until thirty years ago goods such as silk textiles, cotton and wool fabrics were transported from Iran to Russia [where they were sold]. Iranian merchants, landowners and artists made much profit through this. In exchange for these goods they received nothing but Imperial gold and silver. However, in these last thirty years [the Russians] have started to produce their own goods internally and no longer need Iranian goods. We observe with great regret that Iranians now need Russian products.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Pistor-Hatam, Anja, *Non-European Views on the Expansion of Europe*, p.108.

²¹⁷ *Akhtar*, 4 April 1882 (10 jumaada avval 1299). The text reads:
 “Hamah-i Irānīyān, khusūsan tabaqah-i tujjār bakhūbī mīdānand ke tā sī sāl pīsh az in imtā‘ah-i kullī az mamālik-i Irān az qabil-i mansūjāt-i harīr va panbah va pashmīnah va ghayrah ba khāk-i Rūs naql shudah, tujjār va malāk va sana‘atkārān-i Irān rā az in mamar manāfa‘-yi kullī hāsīl mīshud. Dar muqābil-i in hamah matā‘ bajuz imparyāl talā va manāt-i nuqrah chīzī namīgiriftand. Valī az sī sāl ba in tarāf Rūshā chanān ba sur‘at taraqqī kardand ke aknūn imtā‘ah-i Irān sahl ast az mitā‘-yi Ūrūp nīz bī nīyāz and. Afsūs mībīnim ke Irānīyān muhtāj bamatā‘-yi ishān shudah and.”

Indeed, with the improvement of infrastructure in Russia and the Black Sea opening up to navigation Iranian trade with Russia steadily increased in the wake of the 1860s. As Russia industrialised and built railroads into its Asian territories, economic penetration of Iran increased and important concessions were obtained in fisheries, road building, telegraphs and banking.²¹⁸ As a consequence, by the turn of the century “two-third of Iran’s trade was transacted with Russia and only twenty percent with Great Britain.”²¹⁹ However, as *Akhtar* also observes, the balance of trade imports and exports was not in Iran’s advantage with a surplus in total imports from Russia. By the late 1880s, Iran would suffer from such a deficit in its current account that it was forced to export large quantities of bullion (such as cotton, opium, rice and tobacco) in order to finance this surplus in imports.²²⁰ Exports of Iranian textiles to Russia, which had averaged six hundred and forty nine thousand *rubles* in 1875-78 fell to one hundred and ninety seven in 1885-1887 and declined still further during the 1890s.²²¹ Iran was in desperate need of modern transport due the country’s lack of navigable rivers, huge distances, short coastline and its far removed population and production in order to ensure closer proximity to external markets, not only Russia but the greater international scene. However, as late as 1914 Iran had less than 12 miles of railroads, no modern port, a few hundred miles of roads of any description (which were mostly built in the late 1890s and after the 1900), and a

²¹⁸ Foran, John, “Dependent Development as a Key to the Political Economy of Qajar Iran,” *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2/3 (1989), p.13. Furthermore, in order to prevent British goods from reaching northern Iran, the Russians secured an agreement in 1890 from the shah that no railroads would be built in Iran, and virtually none were right up to the 1920s.

²¹⁹ Pistor-Hatam, Anja, *Non-European Views on the Expansion of Europe*, p.108.

²²⁰ Gilbar, Gad, *The Opening Up of Qajar Iran*, p.76.

²²¹ Issawi, Charles, *The Economic History of Iran*, p.301.

foreign investment below thirty million pounds including the national debt.²²² After noting the alarming surplus in Russian imports, *Akhtar* also comments on the need for the construction of not only roads but also railroads in Iran:

Those who have never been abroad may think that it is difficult to construct the above mentioned road. However, those who are familiar with Western technologies will know that levelling a road is not a difficult task. [...] Now, due to the lack of roads in Iran, all the natural products that Iran could sell are being ignored by large companies.²²³

The commentary also adds that “more than one road must be built in Iran” (*bîsh az yik râh bâyard sâkhtah shavad*), and refers to the state of the road between Gaz and Shahrud which must also be leveled immediately and demands that “Amîr Nizâm and prominent public men such as merchants” do all that they can to ensure that some of the roads that Iran so badly need be leveled are reconstructed, ultimately “paving the way towards the railway across Iran (*ke bâlâkharah râh-i ahan ham dar mamlakat sâkhtah shavad*).”

In fact very few carriage roads were built in Iran prior to the mid-1890s and the early twentieth century. Furthermore, most of these roads were constructed in northern Iran with the southern plateau largely ignored. It was in the post-1893 period, when the Compagnie d'Assurance et de Transport en Perse, backed by the Russian government, obtained a concession which gave a Russian subject, Lazar

²²² Keddie, Nikki, “The Economic History of Iran, 1800-1914, and Its Political Impact an Overview,” *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2/3 (Spring - Summer, 1972), p. 59. Notwithstanding, steamships had come to Iran earlier with ships sailing in the Persian Gulf as early as the 1840s and a mail service between India and the Persian Gulf as of 1862 – set up by the British India Steam Navigation Company. The telegraph reached Iran in the 1860s, as the British were “thoroughly shaken by the fact that news of the Indian Mutiny had taken forty days to reach England” and resolved immediately to link the Indian network with that of the Mediterranean. See, Issawi Charles, *The Economic History of Iran*, p.152.

²²³ *Akhtar*, 4 April 1882 (10 jumaada avval 1299). The text reads: “*Kasânî ke mamâlik-i khârajah râ nadîdah and dar nazar-i ânhâ sâkhtah shudan-i râh-i mazkûr dushvâr minimâyad valî ashkhâsî kea z vaz' mamâlik-i khârajah âgâhî dârand mîdânand sâf kardan-i râh-i mazkûr naqlî nist. [...] Aknûn bamunâsibat-I nabûdan-I râhhâ aghlâb-I matâ' khusûsan mahsûlat-i tabî'î-yi khâk-I Irân râ dar nazar-i kharîdâran-i 'uzmâ bâqî namandah ast.*”

Poliakov, a monopoly of transport and insurance business for seventy-five years that such projects were undertaken.²²⁴ As a consequence, roads from Qazvin to Tehran, Qazvin to Hamadan, from the Caspian Sea to Tehran and another from Julfa to Tabriz – which was later extended to Qazvin by connecting it to the Tehran road – were constructed between 1893 and 1904.

The lack of infrastructure and poor transport constituted one of the most important obstacles to economic development in Qajar Iran but also led to problems in security in the periphery, especially in border areas as the . This was especially the case as Qajar Iran was a tribal country with over one quarter of its population belonging to one tribal group or another. The majority of these tribes predominated frontier zones.²²⁵ On 30 May 1882 (12 *rajab* 1299) a long-winded letter sent by a merchant from Astarabad²²⁶ vented out great frustration concerning the lawlessness that the population Astarabad had to endure and highlighted, in a similar vein to other published letters, that the authorities were unable to act decisively or effectively to solve this problem. He referred specifically to a recent incident where military forces were sent to put down Yamût Turkoman bandits in the countryside. However, military officials were unable to reach an agreement on a suitable course of action and had therefore failed in their mission, wasted the state's funds and their soldiers' time. The complaint is directed at the general lawlessness in Astarabad and surrounding areas as well as the ineffectiveness of corrupt government

²²⁴ Issawi, Charles, *The Economic History of Iran*, p.200. This concession was granted to the Company for an annual payment of 300 *tumans*, which would be raised to one thousand one hundred *tumans* at the end of twenty years.

²²⁵ Tapper, Richeard, "Tribes in Eighteenth and Nineteenth century Iran," Avery, Peter and Hambly, Gavin (eds.), in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Volume VII, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.507.

²²⁶ Astarabad is a city on the north-eastern border of Iran that no longer exists. It was situated in close proximity to current-day Gorgan.

officials in their dealings with the raiding Yamût Turkoman tribes. The letter outlines in detail how two army commanders, Sâ'ad al-Dowla – the governor of Astarabad – and Sahâm al-Dowla – the governor of Bujnurd – joined forces to march on the raiding tribes. With an army of over four thousand men, the author of the letter claims that they had an excellent chance of quelling the Yamût. However, the two men were then unable to act decisively:

Repeatedly, whatever was proposed by one, the other refused. What one deemed suitable, the other rejected. In the end, their disagreement obliged the standing army of soldiers with enough force to punish the Yamût and collect their weapons to withdraw. The huge expenditure the state had supplied for the punishment of these tribes which was an investment towards future security was completely wasted and no result was obtained.²²⁷

Instead, the two commanding officers were satisfied with fining seven of the chieftains belonging to the Yamût and collected four thousand five hundred *tumans*. However, “should the reader wonder what became of this sum of money”, then he would be “much disappointed still”, for the commander and governor of Astarabad had written to Nasir al-Din Shah claiming that:

I have punished the Yamût with such force that they will not dare lift their heads to commit mischief again [...] Therefore, your Royal Highness no longer needs to pay for a fortress to be built in Gurgan. Consider this a gift from this humble well-wisher of the state.²²⁸

The merchant concludes the letter by explaining that the people of Gurgan are in fact in desperate need of a fortress, especially as now that “for each *tuman* the governors

²²⁷ Akhtar, 30 May 1882 (12 rajab 1299). The text reads:

“Mukarrar dar mîyân-i in dû sardâr az har taraf izhârî shud az jinâb-i digar inkâr kardah shud. In yikî ân chi salâh did ân yikî istinkâf kard. Âb har chi râ mâyl bûd imtinâ' nimûd. Khulâsah ikhtilâf-i in dû sardâr ânâ râ majbûr kard ke bâ in isti'adâd-i kâfi az tanbih-i Yamût va giriftan-i islâhi-yi ânâ sarf-i nazar nimûdand. Makhârij-i gazâf ke dowlât ba jihat-i tanbih-i ashraf taba'ah-i khûd nimûdah bûd ke natîjah-i ân asbâb-i intizâm-i âyandah shavad az kîsah raftah hîch maqsûdî hâsil nashud.”

²²⁸ Akhtar, 30 May 1882 (12 rajab 1299). The text reads:

“Towri nazm o gûshmâlî ba Yamût dâdam ke dar in 'asr digar abadan ba khîyâl-i khûd sari va sharârat nakhâhand uftâd [...] Mablaghi ke dowlât-i 'aliyya irâdah dâst ba masraf-i sâkhtan-i qala'jât dar sahrâ-yi Gûrgân barasânad digar lâzim nîst. In dowlatkhâh ba dowlât masraf-i ânâ râ pîshkash kardah am.”

have claimed as punishment, the population of Astarabad and its surroundings will pay back with their property, security and lives.” His final remarks state that he has “just received word that another attack has taken place and three people have been slaughtered” (*khavar rasîd ja ‘mî az ashrâr-i Daz ahâlî-yi Kûtul râ rândand va se nafar maqtûl shudand*).

The northeastern frontiers did indeed constitute a major problem for the Qajar government who had to “carry out constant military activity in their attempts against the Turkoman and other slave raiders” throughout the nineteenth century.²²⁹ The complaint in *Akhtar* concerning security in the peripheral zones was a chronic problem the population of Khurasan and Gurgan had to endure for much of the Qajar period, even though many tribal leaders’ power in other regions was curbed during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah. However, the Turkoman’s expeditions continued to seriously depopulate the northeastern province of Khurasan and disrupt the important trade networks of the northeast throughout this period. The Yamût Turkoman tribes also captured Iranians and then sold them as slaves: Although Muslims are not allowed to enslave Muslims, the Turkoman tribes justified this by claiming that they were true Muslim Sunnis and that Iranians were Shi‘i and therefore unbelievers.²³⁰ Although Russian victories in Turkistan in the 1860s terminated raids into Iran from the North, the Yamût continued to resist domination by the Qajar as late as the twentieth century and the loss and sale of Iranian girls and women continued to be a cause for concern in the provinces of Khurasan and Gurgan.

²²⁹ *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Volume VII. p.520.

²³⁰ Keddie, Nikki, *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah: 1796-1925*, (Costa Mezda: Mazda Publishers, 2009), p. 33.

The letter to *Akhtar* also expresses disappointment towards the behavior and leadership of the two governors. The frustrated merchant states that “I personally trusted and believed in these two commanders and had no doubt that they would succeed”; however, he concludes that “they *too* were undeserving of their position” (emphasis my own). The underlying suggestion is that these two governors were unworthy of their positions, like *others* in similar official stations. This brings us back to complaints of a somewhat similar nature, concerning the urban police in Tehran and Tabriz, where officials were unable to carry out their responsibilities to the due to their incompetence, a feature of the Qajar bureaucracy under Nasir al-Din Shah where unwarranted and “unmerited titles and offices were bestowed on any good for nothing person.”²³¹

Strikingly little attention was given to the creation of a standing army along modern lines by Qajar Shahs in general and that the Iranian was known more for “its almost total disorganisation and for the sale of offices to incompetents who neglected their drill and training.”²³² In fact, apart from the Cossack Brigade that was established under Nasir al-Din Shah’s rule, the government had to rely on tribal forces in the absence of a standing army. In this context, although it is in fact true that although Nasir al-Din Shah managed to curb the power of many tribes across Iran, local authorities still got away with doing little to curtail raiding activities along the frontier zones of Khurasan and Gurgan as this was part of a “policy of maintaining a frontier strip of endemic tribal disorder” as a defense method used

²³¹ Yarshater, Ehsan, *Observations on Nasir al-Din Shah*, p. 4.

²³² Keddie, Nikki, “Iran under the Late Qajars,” Avery, Peter and Hambly, Gavin (eds.), in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Volume VII, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.176.

against the Russians.²³³ According to Richard Tapper, local governors were sometimes even said to be reaping a share in the proceeds of Turkoman raiding activities. When punitive expeditions were commissioned from Tehran, local officials often chastised a handful of culprits from an accessible group to demonstrate that some action had been taken.²³⁴ However, as the above-mentioned letter also demonstrates, the little action that was taken was often very symbolic and resulted in backlashes from the Yamût. This particular letter to the editor not only speaks of the political dislocations in Gurgan that was a direct result of bad local government but also highlights the impossibility of conducting successful business transactions within the province. What this letter has in common with other letters discussed in this chapter is that its author makes an appeal to *governmental representatives*: He asks for the Shah in Tehran to be informed of the misconduct of his officials in the provinces and hopes that the situation in Astarabad can thus be resolved.

There is glaring silence on the issue of constitutionalism and how it is addressed – or rather not addressed – in the newspaper. Not only is there no in depth discussion on the question of constitutionalism in articles published by its editors, but what is missing is also a lack of any mention or demand for parliament voiced in the letters to the editor. Following the proclamation of the constitution in the Ottoman Empire, *Akhtar* not only translated the constitution into Persian within weeks and wrote on the compatibility of constitutional government in Muslim societies, but it also commented on the Ottoman parliament, how it functioned, how often it was

²³³ Tapper, Richard, "Nomads and the Commissars of the Mughan Steppe: the Shahsevan tribes in the Great Game," Tapper, Richard (ed.), *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, (London: Croom Helm Publishers, 1983).

²³⁴ Tapper, Richard, "Nomads and the Commissars, pp.81-82.

convened and the matters that were discussed among its members. However, after parliament was suspended by Abdülhamid in 1878, discussion on similar issues concerning constitutional rule and parliamentary regimes became extremely limited and infrequent. This silence can perhaps best be explained as an attempt not to give Ottoman officials observing the contents of the paper cause for alarm or reason to believe that *Akhtar* was showing signs of agitation or subversion. The silence on the question of constitutionalism seems to be the price *Akhtar*'s editors had to pay to ensure that the newspaper remained in publication. This can perhaps be described as the greatest silence of all, but there were others: For example, there is no mention in *Akhtar* of the Armenian massacres that took place in 1894-1896. Neither did the newspaper report on the Ubeydullah Revolt of 1880-1881.

Based on the letters sent from the newspaper's readership to the editors a number of interesting observations can be made: First, in the eyes of its readership, the letters to the editor were a medium of making known the problems in the country to higher authorities; it was a means of *becoming visible*. On occasion, *Akhtar* commented on the content of the letters it published and seconded the opinions expressed in them and demanded that those responsible use their power in order to resolve raised problems. The discussion was a public one demanding from the state that reforms be carried out: It did not demand a change of regime and there were no demands for a constitutional government in Iran.²³⁵ Let us note here that there was nothing radical in the modern sense about the demands made in *Akhtar*, which avoided any direct criticism of the state. It published letters containing complaints but refrained from condemning the state for its faults directly and instead asked for

²³⁵ No direct demands for a constitutional government would have been made in the newspaper until after the Tobacco Regie. If any such letters were sent to the offices of *Akhtar* they were not published as I have not come across any mention of a constitutional government in Iran, even though the newspaper often wrote of the advantages of constitutional government elsewhere.

improved government. The state was treated as legitimate, but its government reproached for misconduct and ineptitude. Whether the newspaper's readership considered faults in government as a manifestation of the illegitimacy of the Qajar state is another question which cannot be treated here.

Secondly, the readership's act of communicating complaints, requests and points of interests to the newspaper through correspondence must be considered in the backdrop of the political role the newspaper took on in Iran as well as abroad: The plethora of concerns the newspaper's readership communicated in their letters, some of which have been studied above, highlight the rise of a political culture in which Iranian merchants and the educated middle class carried out public discussions on issues such as security, lack of infrastructure, foreign encroachment, the misuse of official positions, etc. The study of such discussions as considered in this chapter is significant as it attempts to fill in some of the gaps in the study of the Iranian press' relationship with politics, as well as with its readers. As the letters to the editors appear to have been linked with the section of the population outside the ruling elite, – which can be considered to constitute the 'the public' –, these must be seen as an indicator that despite exclusion from government, public opinion was being formed and encouraged through the medium of the press, and in this case, *Akhtar*. These letters are the manifestation of the formation of public opinion, i.e. the body of argument concerning government, but conducted outside the confines of that government or its institutions, in nineteenth century Iran. In this context, they illustrate many of the concerns that would ultimately lead to the Constitutional Revolution and the demise of Qajar rule.

A note must be made that most of the letters sent to the offices of *Akhtar* were sent either from the capital, Tabriz or the Azerbaijan province as well as the

neighbouring provinces of the north such as Gilan and Gorgan. This is an illustration of the newspaper's influence in Azerbaijan, and its strong readership base in this region. Tabriz and its surrounding province of Azerbaijan made up an advanced body of the movement as it was much more modernised economically and involved in international trade with well established contacts with Turkish-speaking areas of Istanbul and Russian Transcaucasia, "where thousands emigrated temporarily or permanently every year, and from whence arms were imported."²³⁶ This is significant in the backdrop of the rise of politicised public opinion and the demand for reform which culminated in the Constitutional Revolution and can explain why the newspaper received letters from the northern parts of the country. In comparison to the central plateau and southern parts of the country, which were much more cut off from the Ottoman Empire and Russian Transcaucasia, Tabriz, Azerbaijan and the neighbouring province of Gilan were much more political, and more advanced economically and socially.

A quote from the famous Iranian poet Hafez, as referred to in the closing lines of one letter sent to *Akhtar* by a merchant from Tehran concerning the rights to publish calendars in Iran, is emblematic of the readership's letters to the newspaper. After giving a long-winded account on why he believes that it is wrong that one man in Iran, Najm al-Mulk – and only he – have the right to publish calendars (and that he does unsatisfactorily) he writes:

Hafez! Your duty is to pray and nothing more

*Wonder not whether it has been heard or not*²³⁷

²³⁶ Keddie, Nikki, *Iran under the Late Qajars*, p. 204.

²³⁷ The poem reads:

"Hafez! Vazifah-i tu du'a gûftan ast o bas/dar band-i ân nabash ke nashinîd yâ shinîd."

In the context of the Constitutional Revolution and the role that merchants partook in its realisation in 1905, the articulation of opinions and concerns as expressed in *Akhtar* serve as an excellent means to recognise the rising discontent of the propertied middle class and modern intelligentsia. Although nothing ‘radical’ was published in *Akhtar* (unlike Malkum Khan’s *Qanun* in London) the letters to the editor demonstrate its readers’ general concerns regarding issues ranging from the lack of infrastructure in the country to foreign encroachment, problems in security and the arbitrary bequest of governmental posts. Such actions are particularly significant as during the protests that would ultimately trigger the Constitutional Revolution in 1905, protesters would sum up their grievances to a correspondent writing for the *Habl al-Matin*, the Persian language newspaper published by Iranians residing in Calcutta and demand that the “government reverse its disastrous policy of helping Russian merchants and manufacturers at the expense of Iranian businessmen.”²³⁸ Although *Akhtar* was no longer in circulation by this period, the tradition of articulating concerns relating to public matters by the literate classes in newspapers must be considered a practice that was first attempted in *Akhtar* some twenty years prior to the Constitutional Revolution.

²³⁸ Abrahamian, Ervand, *Causes of the Constitutional Revolution*, p.404. These grievances were published in *Habl al-Matin* on 19 June 1905.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The press, along with public spaces such as coffee houses, Masonic lodges, theatres and the like have helped foster the exchange of ideas and the formation of public opinion.²³⁹ Newspapers have featured prominently in the processes of social and political change since the late eighteenth century and although the pace of change and the development of politicised public opinion in nineteenth century Iran were relatively slower in comparison to the Ottoman Empire and Europe, with direct political participation at most social levels nominal even in the nineteenth century, the contents of *Akhtar* illustrate nonetheless the existence of a literate sphere in Iranian society very much engaged with matters concerning public welfare, economic development, national integrity, etc. As the 'real press' of Iran could only exist outside Iran during much of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign, I maintain that the study of *Akhtar* as a source of public opinion is necessary due to the effect of the pervasive presence of censorship within Iran at the time. This is especially the case as the newspaper's readership, i.e. the propertied merchant class and modern intelligentsia were the most prominent groups in society that ultimately pushed towards the Constitutional Revolution, along with the 'ulema. Although the newspaper was initially meant to be an extension of the Qajar state in Istanbul – where a significant number of Iranian subjects resided and where many Iranian dissidents and intellectuals had fled to from Iran – *Akhtar* became the first Persian language newspaper published out of the immediate reach of Qajar censorship laws and was

²³⁹ Remnek, Miranda B, on Russia, in Barker et al., (eds.), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America 1760-1820*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 225.

able to publish material that concerned matters of government and politics without having to concede the strict censorship laws that existed in Iran.

Similar to the situation in Iran, the press was also strictly censored in the Ottoman Empire, where “the first steps toward a systematic, strict censorship regime in the Ottoman Empire came after the accession of Abdülhamid”, who suspended the Press Law by an order authorising the immediate suspension or suppression of any newspaper without stating the cause following the Russian declaration of war on the Ottoman Empire.²⁴⁰ However, as the publication of *Akhtar* coincided with Abdülhamid’s policy of promoting pan-Islamism in an attempt to impose his legitimacy through the title of Caliph, *Akhtar* managed successfully to avoid the censorship laws which had led to the prohibition of so many other newspapers across Ottoman lands. This was achieved by endorsing the Sultan’s pan-Islamic policies. *Akhtar*’s reportage on the Turko-Russian War as referred to in Chapter Two and the its coverage of the Egyptian Crisis (Chapter Three) serve as good examples of the newspaper’s espousal of the Sultan’s pan-Islamic policy. However, far from being a mere tool for propaganda in the hands of the Hamidian regime, the newspaper managed to promote causes such as the necessity for political action against foreign violation and the resistance of arbitrary forms of government. The newspaper’s treatment of the Egyptian Crisis constitutes an excellent example of how the editors were able to promote the Ottoman Sultan’s interests while reporting on sensitive issues such as the right to national integrity and denial of foreign intervention, to the dismay of Nasir al-Din Shah in Iran. The study of *Akhtar* is also important in the backdrop of the intellectual interaction between Ottoman and Iranian reformists and intellectuals that had started to take place earlier in the nineteenth century, especially

²⁴⁰ Cioeta, Donald, *Ottoman Censorship*, p. 170.

after the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876). *Akhtar* was, after all, a product of this ongoing debate and contact, offering a forum for the exchange of ideas in the public sphere.

In an attempt to integrate the role of *Akhtar* as one of the first Persian-language newspapers to appear outside of Iran with some, if not significant, influence on the formation of public opinion within Iran and the Persian speaking diasporas outside Iran, this study has taken a variety of approaches: It looks at the structure of the newspaper and those involved in its publication (Chapter One); the methods used by the Iranian and Ottoman authorities to control the newspaper (Chapter Two); the journalistic texts themselves – in the treatment of the one specific political crisis in Egypt in 1881-1882 – and finally, the role the newspaper took on within the public sphere, through the publication of letters written by its readership. I have tried to shed some light on who owned the newspaper; how it was funded and have attempted to assess what kind of a readership it may have had. I believe these questions to be significant factors in the context of each of the above-mentioned approaches. This is especially the case as the printing press cannot be treated in isolation from the broader political and social contexts in which it exists.

This dissertation was initially meant to be a study of the Iranian community in Istanbul in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I anticipated that the discussion of the Persian language newspaper *Akhtar* would provide me with a sound base for future research on this community as its offices became the meeting point of most Iranian activists and intellectuals either residing or passing through Istanbul. This was especially the case in the context of the role of the Ottoman Empire – and particularly its capital Istanbul – as an important outpost for Iran in its connection to the West and the transmission of ideas from and to Iran during this period. In the

Introductory Chapter, I have discussed some of the significant literary and political figures involved in the publication of the newspaper and how their social and political backgrounds may have influenced the nature of the messages *Akhtar* contained. However, as the work started to take shape, I realised that the newspaper itself, with its content and its approach to certain political events was a subject matter that needed to be understood and studied in its own right. I therefore thought it reasonable to also concentrate on 1) how the newspaper reacted to one very interesting moment in history, the Egyptian Crisis, in an examination of the newspaper's journalistic material itself (Chapter Three) and 2) the letters sent to the journal's offices (Chapter Four) and the nature of the discussions in *Akhtar* as determined by published letters to the editor. The choice of following the reports on Egypt from late 1881 through to the Autumn of 1882 was a deliberate one, as the political crisis in Egypt at the time presented in microcosm some of the most chronic problems in the region that had a profound effect on the political sensibilities of Iranian reformers and activists both within and outside Iran. On the other hand, I chose to study letters to the editor as they offered a fresh perspective on news coming out of Iran and proved good reference points to certain issues discussed in the secondary literature on the period as well as the contents of European travelogues contemporary to *Akhtar*. They also point to certain questions that have not been studied or scrutinised in great detail in the extant literature. Moreover, these letters are also illustrations of the rise of political sentiment and the increased importance of popular politics during the final years of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign and the period leading to the Constitutional Revolution. The fact that the majority of these letters were sent by discontent merchants who wished to see change is particularly significant as these provide information on their thoughts concerning the economic

and political conditions that shaped their political identity and stance vis à vis the Qajar state.

Although I have commented on some of the more active members of the newspaper and traced the how *Akhtar* came to be established in Chapters One and Two, due to limitation of time and space, I was unable to dwell in more detail on the question of how the offices of *Akhtar* became the major meeting point for the Iranian community in Istanbul, situated in the *Valide Hanı*, which was the very heart of Iranian commercial and intellectual activities in the Ottoman Capital. The ‘where’ in such a question signifies the *hows* concerning those individuals involved in the newspaper; the intellectual and political background that shaped their opinions and hence, what they wrote. I believe this study will pave way for further research on questions such as where the opinions – as expressed in the newspaper – were coming from and how they were shaped through common interaction and communication with Ottoman opposition(if any), as well as external pressures. It is my hope that this study may open up further avenues for research on the Iranian literary and intellectual scene in the Ottoman capital in the late nineteenth century.

Akhtar was circulated for a period of twenty years, from 13 January 1876 (16 *zilhicca* 1292) through to 4 August 1896 (24 *safar* 1314). However, I have studied issues that cover the period until early 1883. I am aware that this constitutes another limitation to the present study. However, due to the restrictions on time and space, this was inevitable. I hope that this dissertation is able illustrate nonetheless that the content of the paper is not only interesting but also significant from a political and social standpoint and that it did indeed act as one of the precursors to the Constitutional Revolution. This was achieved by means of the political message put across in the newspaper’s articles as well as the act of publishing and encouraging

letters to the editor. As has been discussed in Chapter Four, the act of writing to *Akhtar*, i.e. the very act of voicing discontent or articulating one's opinion by communicating to the newspaper's offices became a political tool for the first time, and would be a method used by protestors against the Qajar state both immediately before and during the Constitutional Revolution. This made it possible for the newspaper's readership to actively contribute to discussions on matters concerning government and society.

One outstanding issue concerns the clarification of the question of how I define the political public sphere. The idea that politicised public opinion was borne directly from the public literary sphere based on public institutions such as coffee houses, clubs, theatres, and above all, literature (which are in fact all institutions of the Enlightenment) suggests that anyone with access to print was part of the political public sphere.²⁴¹ Such a definition of the public sphere in Iran is essentially egalitarian²⁴² and assumes that the formation of such public opinion is in effect bourgeois, as it must have been sociologically separate from the ruling Qajar family and the people who lacked the education and skills to have access to the print. I maintain that this treatment of the formation of a politicised public sphere can be justified through the treatment and demands of the Constitutional Revolution as it was led by the discontent national bourgeoisie that had become, as of the mid nineteenth century, "a sociopsychological class as well as a socioeconomic class, a class 'for itself' as well as 'in itself'."²⁴³ I have argued in Chapters One and Four that that the newspaper's readership and audience was indeed this relatively new literary

²⁴¹ I borrow this conceptualisation of the formation of the political public sphere in relation to access to the press directly from Habermas.

²⁴² Barker et al., *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere*, p. 11.

²⁴³ Abrahamian, Ervand, *The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran*, p. 393.

and politicised middle class; a propertied middle class with close ties to the 'ulema and the modern intelligentsia. In this context, I would also like to note that this thesis has not commented on the close relationship between the merchant classes and 'ulema and their joint role in the realisation of the Constitutional Revolution. Neither is there a discussion in the thesis on the portrayal of the 'ulema and religion in the articles published in the newspaper or in the letters sent to the editors. This was not due to lack of material but rather due to a lack of time and space. However, I believe that a discussion on the 'ulema and religion as reported and portrayed in *Akhtar* would make for interesting research in the future.

On a concluding note, I believe that it is only appropriate to highlight once again that *Akhtar* is without precedent: It is to be considered the first example of a stable and relatively freer Persian-language newspaper with a significant readership both in and outside Iran. It also demonstrated to Nasir al-Din Shah and the Qajar state the power and significance of the expansion of what was to become political journalism, a feature of the modern press that had not yet been experienced within Iran due to strict censorship laws within the country. Although the expansion of a politicised press (and its readership) may not have been the direct cause for the realisation of any single political event, the way in which the literate strata became closely linked to political trends and exposed to the ideas promulgated by the editors of the newspaper must have facilitated the practice of a more unified national politics.

APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL PERSIAN TEXTS AS QOUTED FROM AKHTAR

Footnote 63:

این کازت از حوادث گوناگون و از سیاسیات و پولتیک و از تجارت و علم و ادب و دیگر منافع عمومی سخن خواهد گفت. هر گونه مواد مفیده عامه مجاناً قبول و طبع خواهد شد."

Footnote 77:

... منتی است بر خود مخمر نموده ام روزنامه دار الخلافه را مطالعه نمیکنم خیلی به ندرت می فرستند و هر وقت هم که می فرستند بدون مطالعه به اتباع سفارت می دهم زیرا که از مطالعه و مقایسه آنها با روزنامهجات مطبوعه در اسلامبول بجز آنکه اسباب کدورت من شود ثمری نمی دهد... مکرر معایب این قسم روزنامه و تکلیف روزنامه نویس و نتیجه ای که از این کار خواسته اند به دولت عرض نمودم. ثمری ندیدام. زورم به خودم رسید که دیگر مطالعه ننمایم...

Footnote 95:

اشخاصی که سابقاً روزنامه را ناخوانده در آتش انداخته میسوزانند و هرگز به مطالعه آن رغبت نمیکنند - حال این روزنامهجات را با کامل عتقا و التفات جمع و مجلد می نمایند. لکن بعضی چیزهاست که هنوز تکمیل نشده... هنوز بر منشیان روزنامه مشتبه است که الفاظ مغلقه و عبارات مسجع و مقفا در روزنامه مستحسن و پسندیده است. و حال آنکه هر قدر عبارات روزنامه صاف و بی اغلاق باشد بهتر و پسندیده تر خواهد بود.

Footnote 105:

شش دولت بزرگ بعنوان صلاح جویی و خیر خواهی در ضمن رفع غاوله های داخلی دولت علیه عثمانی وقایع حال خونریزی خصوصی یا عمومی پس از مغلوبی و پریشانی جمعیت سربها و خواهش متارکه از جانب فحیمه روس تکلیف انعقاد يك مجلس کونفرانس را بمیان آورده... [تکالیف چند که وزرا مشارالیه بمیان آورند آشکار و مسلم بود که آن کار اساساً مداخله کردن بامور داخلی دولت علیه عثمانیه و رخنه انداختن به بنیان استقلال يك دولت بزرگ است که خود آن دولتها متعقا و یکان یکان تعهد و ضامن استقلال آن دولت شده اند.

Footnote 106:

این هفته شرحی از قریحه خویش در حال دولت علیه و روسیه نوشته و چنان بهم زده که اصلاحش در کامل اشکال است کمترین بعضی از نسخه را جمع کردم. حاجی رضا قلی مدیر اداره و آقا محمد طاهر صاحب امتیاز را ملامت کردم. چون بستن روزنامه بجهت اینکه اتباع عثمانی شریکند و نظارت عمومی آن در دست حکومت است ممکن نخواهد بود و لابد از نسخه ایصال شده در روزنامه های دیگر نقل میکنند. دور نیست از طرف روسها بمقام گفتگو بر آید.

Footnote 116:

امیدواریم که بزرگان ملت ما نیز اسباب آبادی مملکت را که نعمتهای آن هستند فراهم آورده بیش از این مملکت را خوار و بیمقدار نینسند. راستی نمینیم حاصل اینهمه سیاحت و گشت وگذار اولیای دولت علیه ایران در ممالك اروپا چه شد؟ آیا مرابط آزادی و روشنایی آن بلاد را چشم بینندگان و تماشا کنندگان را خیره میساخت ندیدند؟ [...] آیا واسطه کار هیچ وجدان ندارد و پیش خود نمی اندیشد که این امتیازات متضمن حقوق عمومیه است باید امثال این کارها بمشورت وزرا و ملت که وکلای ملت اند صورت ببندد. در صورتیکه همه این گونه کارها عمده در پرده خواهد شد پس معنی (دار الشوری کبری) چیست؟

Footnote 135:

[...] بنابراین باید اردوی مصر را متفرق ساخته بجای آنها از عساکر انگلیس و فرانسه و عثمانی بقدر لازم داخل مصر نموده بواسطه این عساکر مختلطه نظم و آسایش خطه مصر را نگاهداری نمود!!!

Footnote 137:

چنان بقلم میدهند که باید عساکر مصر را متفرق نموده برای نگاهداری آسایش عساکر مختلفه اروپا بانجا گذاشته که این خود از تصورات قدیمی یکی از دشمنان دوست نمایی مصر نه بلکه عداوت کبر تمامی جهان است

Footnote 139:

بدیهی است که عساکر مصری هیچ سبب و جهتی بمقم ترمرد بر نمیابند. بالفرض کنیم که این صحت دارد در انصورت دخول عساکر انگلیس و فرانسه بمصر لازم نمآید چه عساکر مصر خود تابع اوامر سنیه اعلا حضرت پادشاهی و در جرك عساکر عثمانی است و اسکان آنها راجع بدولت علیی است در صورتیکه مصر خود از اجزای متممه دولت عثمانی است دخول عساکر انگلیس و فرانسه بانجا مستند بکدام دلیل و حقانیت است.

Footnote 150:

باید بدانیم که در میان پادشاهان اسلام یکی باید رئیس و بزرگتر باشد و همه او را بسمت بزرگی بشناسند در حالتیکه به طائف بزرگی قائم باشد. و چون چنان شد حدود و شروطی برای این نکته قرار داده شود. فی المثل پادشاه ایران را یک پادشاه مستقل دانسته همان احتراماتی را که از جناب شاهنشاه اسلام پناه در حق امپراتر های اروپا در معاملات دولتی معمول است استعمال مافوق آنرا در حق پادشاه ایران جائز بدانیم. [...] بدین مسلك يك رشته بزرگ اتحاد اسلام بدست آید

Footnote 157:

بعضی از متعصبین و متملقین

اسلامبول ذهنی سلطات کردهاند که چون دول فرهنگستان مصمم هستند عثمانی را از جاك رومالی بکلی بیرون بکنند بجهت تلافی چنان شکست عظیم چاره منحصر است که دولت عثمانی رجوع به حقوق و قدرت خلافت بکند و به زور آن اسبابی که باقی مانده حقوق و تسلط مسند خلافت را از مصر تا هند و هند و بخصوص در ایران و آسیای وسطی جاری بکنند. در این باب بعضی کتابچه ها نوشته و یک روزنامه مخصوص هم بر پا نموده و آلان در اسلامبول گرم این خیال هستند. خیال واقعا خیلی عالی است اما غفلت و بی کفایتی اسلامبول بالاتر از هر نوع خیال است.

Footnote 164:

شریف پاشا از قبول این معنی استنکاف کرده اظهار داشته است که هرگاه مجلس شورای ملت در رسیدگی و تصدیق موازنه مالییه اصرار بکنند از ماموریت خود استعفا خواهد کرد. هرگاه مشارالیه استعفا بکند مظنون است وزیر جنگ بجای او بریاست هیئت نظار معین بشود.

Footnote 173:

امروز چهار نفر از علمای مصر از جناب درویش پاشا دیدن نموده اظهار داشتند که خلاصی مصر از تسلط اروپایان باهتمامات احمد عربی پاشا دست داده است. از پاشای مشارالیه رجعت واپورهای جنگی انگلیس و فرانسه را خواسته اند و درویش پاشا در جواب آنها گفته است که من باینجا برای تلقی نصیحت شماها نیامادم بل ماموریت من تبلیغ و اجرای اوامر و ارادت سنیه ملوکانه است.

Footnote 177:

بدولت عثمانی که مالک مصر است تکلیف کردند کنفرانسی در اسلامبول تشکیل و در خصوص مصر قرارهای داده شود دولت مشارالیه این تکلیف را رد کرد که اگر اداره مصر بما راجع است مداخله شما از چه راه است و معنی این کنفرانس چیست و بی سوال و جواب مخابره بامابلنگرگاه اسکندریه کشیدها ی جنگی فرستادن شما و حال تکلیف کنفرانس بچه ملاحظه است.

Footnote 178:

مداخلات سابقه انگلیس و فرانسه در مصر که از چند سال با بیطرف آغاز کرده اند چه از جهت عدالت و محاکمات و چه از بابت نظرات اداره مالییه و غیر و گماشته شدن مامورین بسیاری در سرکارهای مملکتی و بر شدن تبعه خارجه در حک مصر و استخدام کردن آنها هر دوزن و دخترهای مملکترا و زیور شدن اهل مملکت در دست خارجه و خادم بودن توفیق پاشا خدیو مصر بخیالات انگلیس و متفرعات این مطالب در نزد همکنان معلوم است.

Footnote 179:

امر احضار برای او رفته دعوت باطاعت شد و هم آماده بود لی لشکریان مصر نگذاشتند و جواب بدریار همایون عثمانی رسید که احمد عربی را لشکریان نخواهند گذاشت حرکت کند.

Footnote 187:

اداره پلیس را که عمده اسباب تمدن و ترقی عامه است از همه چیز الزمتر شمرده به نیت و فطرت يك نمونه از ان در پی تخت مملکت وضع فرمودند که رواج بیاد. ولی هزار افسوس که بر خلاف مقصود مبارک و عامه این اداره طوری اسباب خجالت و ندامت شد که دیگر ایرانیان ابد الدهر طالب قوانین و قواعد فرنگی نخواهند شد.

Footnote 188:

پلیس در کدام ملت و قنون حق دارد عادت و حالات معمولانه ردم را تفحص کند؟ شراب خوار بر اصول دین مبین هفتاد تازیانه مجازات دارد آنهم پس از شهادت عدول و تحقیق بسیار. کجا رسم است و پلیس حق دارد در حین عبور

دها عابرین را استشمام کرده آنها را باین اتهام برده و بجای حد شرعی از بیچاره که قوت لایموت ندارد جزای نقدی بگیرند.

Footnote 189:

برخی از معترضین اداره پلیس میگویند تا کنون علاوه بر وجوهاتی که از خزانه عامره اداره پلیس داده شده است هر کس که دست پلیس بمناسبت تقصیر کلی و جزئی گرفتار آمده است کمتر از يك تومان جزای نقدی نگرفته اند و معلوم نیست که اینهمه پول به کیسه کدام شخص مجهول میرود. آیا شخص هست که این حسابها را از اداره پلیس بخواد یا نه؟

Footnote 198:

چنانکه در عنوان کاغذ نوشته است ما در اینباب بطور موثق آگاهی نداریم ولس از روش کار هم معلوم که نباید اینهمه اسنادات دروغ و بی اصل باشد در هر حال امیدواریم که بندگان حضرت سلطان نایب السلطنه امیر کبیر باقتضای وظیفه مملکتداری بتحقیق مطلق حکم فرموده باهتمامات کامله آن حضرت جلو این معایب بگیرند.

Footnote 205:

در صفحات حد اکثر بایجان و کرستان ایران توتون بسیاری از خاک عثمانی بممالک ایران داخل میشود و بجای اینکه بالمقابل صدهای غنای و پنج کمرک از آنها در یافت شود یا آنکه منع از دخول آن بشود جزئی رسمی گرفته و داخل ایران مینمایند.

Footnote 208:

معلوم است که شکایت ایشان از عدم اطلاع و غیر محقوده است. مردمانی که برای گمرکخانه که باعث آبادی و ترقیملکت است کار می کنند از کار آگاه هستند و هر گپولی که حق ایشان نیست قبول نمیکنند.

Footnote 211:

تا اکنون که کسی از تخار و غیری در صدد ساختن این راه بر نیامده باعث تاسف است. گذاشته از آن اهالی اذار بایجان بجهتتحمیل و نقل امتعتجارتی بممالک روس احتیاج فوقالعده براه مذکور دارند. از راه مذکور هر گونه مال التجاره در نهایت سهولت بواسطه واپورهای آتشی از دریای حاجی ترخان بهمه ممالک روس میتوان نقل کرد. نیز مال ال تجاره که از اسلامبول تا ایران فرستاده میشود در صورت ساخته شدن از این راه هم زودتر بمقصد میرسد.

Footnote 217:

همه ایرانیان خصوصاً ببقه تخار بخوبی میدانند که تا سی سال پیش از این امتعه کلی از ممالک ایران از قبیل منسوجات حریر و پنبه و پشمینه و غیره بخاک روس نقل میشود. تجار و ملاک و صنعتکاران ایران را از ازیات ممر منافع کلی حاصل میشود. در مقابل این همه منافع بجز امپریال طلا و نقره چیزی می گرفتند. ولی سی سال به این طرف دولتو مت روس چنان سرعت ترقی کردند که اکنون امتعه ایران سهل است از منافع اروپ نیز بی نیاز شدند. در افسوس می بینیم که ایرانیان محتاج بمنافع ایشان شده اند.

Footnote 223:

کسانیکه ممالک خارخه را دیده اند در نظر آنها ساخته شدن راه مذکور دشوار مینماید ولی اشخاصیکه از وضع ممالک خارجه آگاهی دارند میدانند صاف کردن راه مذکور نقلی نیست. اکنون بمناسبت نبودن راه ها اغلب منافع خصوصاً محصولات تطیعی خاک ایران را در نظر خریداران عظمی باقی نمانده است.

Footnote 227:

مکرر در میان این دو سردار از هر طرف اظهار شد از جناب دیگر انکار کرده شد. این یکی هر آنچه صلاح دید آن یکی استنکاف کرد آن هر چه را مایل بود این امتناع نمود. خلاصه اختلاف این دو سردار آنها را مجبور کرد که با این استعداد کافی از تنبیه بموت و گرفتن اسلحه آنها صرف نظر نمودن. مخارج گزاف که دولت بجهت تنبیه اشرار تعبیه خود نموده بود که تنبیه آن اسباب انتظام آینده شود از کیسه رفته هیچ مقصودی حاصل نشد.

Footnote 228:

طوری نظم و گوشمالی به بموت دادم که در این عصر دیگر ابدا بجبال خود سری شرارت نخواهد افتاد. مبلغی که دولت علیه اراده داشت بمصرف ساختن قلعات در صحرا گرگان برساند دیگر لازم نیست. این دولتخواه به دولت مصرف آنها را به دولت پیشکش کرده ام.

Footnote 237:

حافظ وظیفه تو دعا است و بس / در بند آن نباش که نشنید یا شنید.

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