

Nation-Building in Southern Caucasus: The Case of Azerbaijan (1900-1920)

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Abstract:

This article deals with the specificities of Azerbaijani nation-building between 1900 and 1920. To do this, first it explores the rise of nationalism and the main theoretical approaches trying to illuminate this process. Secondly, it investigates the scholarship about the Azerbaijani national movement in the beginning of the XXth century using first and second hand sources. It shows that, backed by the wealthy classes, the Azerbaijanis first looked for the recognition of their particularity in a colonial context to protect their rights and culture and that gradually the movement evolved from a rights-based reformism founded on religious identity to a secular political movement of national autonomy and independence. The article defends also that the success and popularity of the movement was due to its leaders' rich intellectual formation and political experience which enabled them to formulate a strong ideology rooted in the national identity, conditioned by regional political facts and a realistic understanding of western civilization including its modern political institutions.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, nation-building, reformism, autonomy, independence

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Introduction

The opening of the XXth. century was an important period for the Russian Azerbaijanis in terms of articulating their national aspirations. The Azerbaijani nationalism rose out of the unusual cultural and political atmosphere of Baku: liberal constitutionalism, nationalism and socialism were all acting in the same environment. The aim of this article is focusing on the specificities of Azerbaijani nation-building in the first two decades of the XXth. century.

The beginning of the century is chosen as a reference point because it symbolizes the crystallization of Muslim reformism. It also witnessed to a decisive phase in the rise of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia. The defeat of Russia by Japan in 1904 and the revolution of 1905 contributed to the acceleration and politicization of the national reformism. Then, from 1905 onward, Azerbaijan was subject to a sequence of major changes and crises that influenced its political development. One should mention the three revolutions in Russia, the Persian revolution of 1906, the Ottoman revolution of 1908, the First World War and also, the Ottoman and British occupations of the Azerbaijani territory. All these events had undeniable effects on Azerbaijani politics. The apogee of the national movement came in spring 1918 when the independence became a reality, and the overthrow of the nationalist government by the Soviet regime happened in 1920. Although the period of the independence was very short, the article claims and suppose to illustrate that the Azerbaijani example of nation-building lasted as an astonishingly rich and modern experience and remarkably inspired later generations. To do this, first of all we will try to explore the rise of nationalism in general and secondly we will focus on the Azerbaijanis' national movement.

The rise of nationalism

Although there are several different theories on the emergence of nationalism, most of them place its rise in the late eighteenth or the early nineteenth century. Progressively, nationalism became a shared "state of mind" on a world scale perspective¹. The nation is the most efficient form of social organization and accordingly the nation-state is

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¹ Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism, A Study in its Origins and Background*, 2d ed. (New York: Collier, 1967), ii.

the most popular political structure. From the age of revolutions on, the most important loyalty of the individual is the one towards his/her nation.

As Ernest Gellner pointed out, the age of nationalism does not consist of only a time period in which "awakening and political self-assertion of this, that or the other nation" took place, it constitutes the emergence of a "standardized, homogeneous, centrally sustained high culture" through education, published books and newspapers which were shared not only by an elite, but also by "entire populations".² It is obvious that this standardized higher culture was one of the most significant reasons of a nation's permanence and also of its transforming power. Based on the dichotomy between agrarian and modern societies Gellner's theory of nationalism posits a sociological understanding. Following the tradition of Durkheim and Tönnies he assumes that the development of society is from simple to complex structures, from static social roles to changing roles in functional complementarity.³ In this context, nationalism is seen as a necessary part of the process of transition from agrarian to industrial society. Modernity is distinguished by industry, mass education and standardized higher culture.

Historically speaking, nationalism first appeared in the countries having the signs of an early capitalist economy, namely Great Britain, France and Spain. Immediately after that it jumped into more complex and connected to that, more problematic areas like Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkan Peninsula, the Middle East and also Southern Caucasus in which several ethnic communities were living in rather smaller areas.⁴ From that time on, ethnic and regional conflicts, nationally justified violence and wars became popular subjects of daily life.

As a natural result of these centuries' long preparations, people as well as intellectuals began to talk about the rights of nations to live in a

² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (London: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 54-55.

³ Ernest Gellner, *Contemporary Thought and Politics*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 142.

⁴ Gellner argues that with the rise of nationalism, connected to industrialization, the standardized higher culture became predominant in a world scale. As a matter of fact, in other parts of the world "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist". See Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change*, (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), 168.

nation-state. Two revolutions took place one after the other. The American Revolution was followed by the French Revolution, the latter was obviously more significant with its long lasting influences and results: however the former one was the basis of the liberal thought. On the one hand the American Revolution caused the French, while the support of the French government to Americans in their fight for independence caused several economic problems in the country. These problems had an undeniable accelerating effect on the population's uneasiness in French society. On the other hand it showed to French intellectuals that their ideals could be achieved. Eli Kedourie stated:

*"A nation, to the French revolutionaries, meant a number of individuals who have signified as to their manner of their government. A nation becomes a natural division of the human race, endowed by God with its own character, which its citizens must, as a duty preserve pure and inviolable.(...) Nations are separate natural entities ordained by God, and the best political arrangement obtains when each nation forms a state of its own. The true and lasting state is one where a nation is formed through natural kinship and affection. States in which there is more than one nation, on the other hand, are unnatural, oppressive and finally doomed to decay.."*⁵

Although there was no consensus on the definition of nation, it is generally accepted that a nation -in the sense popularized by the French revolution- was defined on the base of sovereignty. Nationalistic ideas were spread all over Europe by Napoleon's armies. These ideas were even influential over the soldiers who were fighting against Napoleon. In Russia the Napoleonic invasion of 1812 caused a trauma from which a patriotic legend is created to transcend the previous internal divisions and fired up feelings that influenced the liberal Decembrist uprising of 1825 against the autocracy. Alexander M. Martin argues that "the war for the Fatherland had proved the Russian people's civic maturity and ought to have been followed by Russia's transformation into a liberal nation-state."⁶

At the beginning of the Napoleonic era, citizens of different countries started to express their allegiance to concepts such as nation, *la patrie*, the homeland and the fatherland. Scholars everywhere worked continuously in their archives to find out evidence of national glory.

⁵ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 2d ed. (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1974), 58-59.

⁶ Alexander M. Martin, "Russia and the legacy of 1812", in *The Cambridge History of Russia, Imperial Russia 1689-1917, vol. 2.*, ed. Dominic Lieven, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 145.

This fervent wave of nationalism did not cause much problem in the so called "settled nations", because their populations were living in the same land for many centuries, they had a common culture and a shared history. If we take a controversial example, in the case of America the shared economic interests and the needs for security appeared as main factors on which the American nation was based. So, we can say that the approval of nationalism and the justification of nation-states are made differently by different groups of nationalists in each country related to its local specificities. Some nationalists brought about the common language and literature. Others were defending the significance of the territory, some others were emphasizing the common religion. However in a way or another, nationalists helped the masses to find out some common points, to catch a collective benefit under a new union. In the French meaning of the word the nation is seen as a population living in a defined territory, united around the common interest against particular interests, constituted by free individuals protected by law, who gave their approval to be ruled by the same state.⁷

Another typology of nationalism came into existence with the rise of German unity. Germany based its unification on ethnic nationalism according to which a nation should consist of a people who have a common language, culture and a proven capacity for conquest.⁸ Louis L. Snyder claims that German nationalism arose as a reaction to Napoleonic aggression. In his own words

"To forget their humiliation and despair, Germans turned to their past when the glorious German Empire had been the fulcrum of European power. Their poets and philosophers sought for an organic folk community wrapped in the old cloak of tradition. They would mobilize their heroic past with its folk songs, fairy tales, sagas and poetry, with an accent of imagination instead of the Western European 'philosophes'".⁹

As Hobsbawm argued, under German intellectual influence "Europe had been swept by the romantic passion for the pure, simple and uncorrupted peasantry and for this folkloric rediscovery of 'the people', the vernacular languages it spoke were crucial".¹⁰ This populist cultural

⁷ Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 102-105.

⁸ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870, Programme, Myth and Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 37-38.

⁹ Snyder, *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, 11.

¹⁰ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870*, 37-38.

romanticism went hand-in-hand with the idealized Hegelian state as the embodiment of a supreme moral idea.

As a matter of fact, in Europe the territorial and ethnic processes of nation-formation, reflecting the French and German experiences respectively, influenced all parts of the continent and progressively other parts of the world. Nation-states are formed with unified economies, territorial centralization, the provision of equal rights for larger strata and the growth of mass education systems.¹¹

This process also influenced the last three multi-ethnic empires - Russian, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian. The Russians progressively developed a national identity based on military resistance against Napoleon to sustain a communal sense of ancestry and national pride.¹² In this context, the self-expression of the non-Russian and non-Christian elements of the Russian Empire deserves special attention. As concepts of nation and nationalism became universal in the nineteenth century, both Russians as the dominant ethnic group and their subordinate communities were influenced through the process. The Tsardom tried to incorporate and assimilate in a better way numerous Muslim communities including Tatar and Azerbaijani populations of Turkic origin by policies of Russification and constitutionalism in the beginning of XXth. century. Nationalist ideas circulated among the local intelligentsias of both Russian and Muslim communities and stimulated reformist movements. Among several ethnic communities, Tatars from Volga and Crimea regions were economically the most advanced and culturally the most open-minded elements of the Tsardom. So, the Jadid movement, led by Gaspıralı İsmail Bey, started first as a cultural and social reformism. The Jadidist promotion of modern secular education, the emphasis of a common Turkish language and the opening of new opportunities of social mobility inspired self-respect to formerly despised Turkish speaking communities. In this respect, the Jadid movement illustrates a good

¹¹ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 138.

¹² For the importance of wars in the rise of Russian national consciousness see Michael Cherniavsky, "Russia", in *National Consciousness, History and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Orest Ranum (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975), 126.

example of the progressive evolution of "non-dominant ethnic group's" national movements¹³.

As Miroslav Hroch theorized it, this type of national movements rise first from an intellectual preparation including the creation of a national culture based on local language and the extensive use of this language in educational, administrative and economic life and then create "a complete social structure from out of the ethnic group including educated elites, an officialdom and entrepreneurial classes, but also -where necessary- free peasants and organized workers".¹⁴

As an intellectual source of inspiration, the Jadid movement influenced the All-Russian Muslims movement, the Azerbaijani nationalism and even the rise of nationalism in Ottoman Empire. For the purposes of this article we will concentrate more on its influence on the rise of the Azerbaijani national movement.

Azerbaijani Nation-Building: Historical and Political Facts

With the treaty of Adrianople (1829) Russia introduced its strategic control over Southern Caucasus. The Azerbaijani territory was firmly divided into two regions. The Russian Azerbaijan in the north was a region in which people were Turkic speaking and they considered themselves descendants of Shirvanshahs. Whereas the Iranian Azerbaijan was smaller and the majority was under Persian cultural influence, Russia preferred to strengthen its domination in the region and used Azerbaijan as a military outpost to control the corridor over Asia. Tadeusz Swietochowski noted "the rise of an Azerbaijani class of professional bureaucrats" in the process of the abolition of khanates and the formation of two provinces between the 1840s and the 1860s.¹⁵ These developments can be interpreted in terms of a nation-building process. As the "association with a specific territory" is a basic premise of this process¹⁶, the abolition of khanates and the adoption of

¹³ For Jadidism see Edward J. Lazzerini, "Ismail Bey Gasprinski and Muslim Modernism in Russia" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1973) and Cengiz Çağla, "The Jadid Movement and Nation Building in Azerbaijan" (PhD diss., Boğaziçi University, 2000).

¹⁴ Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to Fully Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe", in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London and New York: New Left and Verso, 1996), 81.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 14-17.

¹⁶ This process can be called as "nation-formation" rather than the "nation-building". For this concept see Paul James, *Nation-Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*, (London: Sage, 1996).

two *gubernia* (prefectures) somehow contributed to define the territorial unit. The Azerbaijanis, especially the intellectuals started to visualize the core of their homeland.

The educational and administrative reforms were followed by the restructuring and the centralization of the judicial system. Till the beginning of the 1870s the changes in economic and social life followed a rather slow pattern. But the sudden increase of the extraction of oil in early 1870s opened a new era. A new native industrial bourgeoisie rose, Baku became a new center of interest with its multilingual population. In this process Azerbaijani Muslims, who were previously seen as the poorest elements of the society and who were also excluded from social life started to enjoy some economic and social power in society.¹⁷

Among the businessmen, investors and political figures Audrey Altstadt identified two dozen families as the very top elite of Baku's Azerbaijani community.¹⁸ Alexander Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quellejey distinguish the Azerbaijani intelligentsia from the Crimean one by the existence of an industrial bourgeoisie and a landed nobility who were interested in the development of their country.¹⁹ This new intelligentsia, having contacts with the European civilization, became a channel of transmission of western intellectual values and also it became the main agent for change.²⁰

When we have a closer look at Azerbaijani intelligentsia in the shaping process of national consciousness, we see that most of the pioneering works were done by Mirza Fethali Ahundzade (1812-1878) and Hasan Bey Zerdabi (1837-1907)²¹. A leading figure of the Azerbaijani bourgeoisie, Zeynel Abdul Tagiyef, financed the jadidist newspaper *Tarjuman* (Interpreter) for an extensive period. In this newspaper, Gaspirali Ismail Bey spoke of the existence of one Turkish

¹⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, "Nationalism and Social Class in the Russian Revolution: the Cases of Baku and Tiflis", in *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change*. ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, revised ed., (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996), 241-260.

¹⁸ Audrey Altstadt, "The Azerbaijani Bourgeoisie and the Cultural Enlightenment Movement in Baku: First Steps towards Nationalism", in *Transcaucasia*. ed. R.G. Suny, 200.

¹⁹ Alexander Bennigsen et Chantal Lemerrier-Quellejey, *La Presse et les Mouvements Nationaux chez les Musulmans de Russie avant 1920* (Paris and the Hague: Monton, 1964).

²⁰ Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan 1905-1920, The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 23.

²¹ See Tadeusz Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Azerbaijan, 1905-1920", in *Transcaucasia*. ed. R.G. Suny, 112 and A. Vahap Yurtsever, *Mirza Fethali Ahundzade'nin Hayati ve Eserleri*, (Ankara: Azerbaycan Kültür Derneği, 1950), 11-12.

nation, advocated the union of this nation in spiritual, linguistic and cultural realms which was summarized in his famous slogan "dilde, fikirde, işte birlik" (union in language, thought and work). The idea of creating a literary Turkish understandable to all Turks also strengthened the Azerbaijanis' search for self-awareness. Azerbaijani identity was defined then as Azerbaijani Turkishness, a concept having geographic and also ethnic content. The first Azerbaijani who used intensively the idea of a Turkish nation was Ali Bey Huseynzade (1864-1941). He studied in Baku, St. Petersburg and finally in Istanbul where he tried to spread the message of one single Turkish nation. He returned to Baku in 1904, started to publish the newspaper *Hayat* (Life) with the collaboration of Ahmed Bey Aghayev, Ali Merdan Bey Topchibashi and the financial support of Z. A. Tagiyef. Being the second national daily of Azerbaijan published in the Turkish language *Hayat* became the mouthpiece of the nationalist movement.²²

In the columns of *Hayat*, Huseynzade defined the Azerbaijani Turkish community as a part of the Turkish "nation", as a Muslim community who want to live in peace and prosperity along the borders of the Russian Empire.²³ He drew the attention to the needs of self-awareness of the Turkish nation with its history, language and civilisation. He claimed that the Europeans' science, education, literature and art were developed extensively and that the Turkish community also should have learned and enjoyed these developments. If the Turks could adopt a contemporary educational system in which students could study all these in the Turkish language without forgetting their own culture and past they could reach to the prosperity. Huseynzade argued that it was only in this manner that the Turkish nation could compete with other nations and he claimed that *Hayat* would try to contribute to this process.²⁴

In an article written on the City Duma²⁵ elections, Huseynzade underlined the basic preoccupations of the Azerbaijan bourgeoisie: autonomy for the Southern Caucasus region, economic development,

²² Bennigsen et Lemercier-Quelquejay, *La Presse*, 106.

²³ "Müselmanız, onun için dünyanın her neresinde heyrhani bulunduğumuz din gardaşlarımız terakki etse biz o terakkinin az canu din algışlardız! Türküz, binaaneleyh Türküz. Türkün her yerde terakki ve tekamül ile mes'udiyet ve refahiyet dileriz". See A. B. Huseynzade, "Gazetemizin Mesleki", *Hayat I*, (1905).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ City Duma is the local parliament and legislative branch of power in the Russian Empire. It exists as a legislative body nowadays as well.

protection of national languages and religious freedom.²⁶ Constituting the largest single ethno-religious group's speaker in Baku, the Azerbaijani bourgeoisie wanted to secure its position in relation to the Russian government also vis-à-vis the Armenian bourgeoisie. According to Audrey Altstadt "...the impetus for the Azerbaijani elite's turn inward to its own community must be seen as largely practical and defensive in the face of political discrimination and commercial competition from Christians."²⁷

Culturally distinct with its own language, script and church, economically advanced, the Armenian community had an unpronounced status of a privileged minority in the region. The Armenian Gregorian Church was powerful and respected and Armenians had almost always kept good relationships with Russian authorities in terms of religious proximity with the Russian Orthodox Church. The Armenian-Azerbaijani antagonism produced a permanent source of conflict between the two communities. Armenians were better educated and better prepared to take advantages of the growth of the regional economy. *Molla Nasreddin* drew attentions several times to this discrepancy.²⁸ In addition to cultural and religious differences there were apparent conflicts of interest between both Armenian and Azerbaijani bourgeoisies and the two proletariats.

The competition with Armenians influenced the Azerbaijani elite to strengthen the ties with the rest of the Azerbaijani people. The Armenian competition was felt in economic and political realms so the Azerbaijani bourgeoisie needed the active and conscious support of the Turkic-speaking masses. Having the majority on the city дума they were especially concerned on the cultural enlightenment of the Turkish community. They supported jadidist schools, the theater and the press.

In this context, in the fall of 1905 Azerbaijanis founded a national clandestine political organization called *Difai* (Defence). If the socialist-oriented *Himmat* party is not taken into consideration *Difai* was the first nationalist organization of the Azerbaijani people. Writers of *Hayat* enthusiastically supported the movement. Ahmed Bey Aghayev, besides his articles, made long speeches in the mosques of Ganja to fire

²⁶ Huseynzade, "Baku Vilayeti Mebusları", *Hayat* 119, (1906).

²⁷ Audrey Altstadt, "The Azerbaijani Bourgeoisie", 202.

²⁸ For example in a caricature published in *Molla Nasreddin* 24, (1909), a well organized Armenian district of Tiflis is compared with Muslim districts of the city Ordubad which are dirtier and badly organized.

up nationalist feelings.²⁹ Huseynzade demystified Armenian anti-Turkish propaganda in the columns of *Hayat*. In an article entitled "Nationality and Humanity", he developed a humanistic understanding of nationality which would not oppress the other nations. He answered an Armenian writer who claimed that the Islamic world was backward and the Azerbaijanis could not reach to prosperity in their Islamic structure. Huseynzade first accused this writer to be narrow minded and then explained that there was an evolution of the history towards the nation-states without neglecting the religious identity.³⁰ In this period the main concern of Huseynzade was defining the Azerbaijani Turkish community as a part of great Turkish nation. In a long article published in *Hayat*, he tried to specify the origin and the glorious past of the Turks.³¹ He wrote that the communities called Tatar, Kirghiz, Azerbaijani, Uzbek, Turkmen, Uygur and Bashkurd were all of Turkic origin. It was a fallacy to accept them as separate individual nations. He underlined the lack of national consciousness among the Turkish communities. In his opinion, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane were to be considered as great heroes of Turkish history. Turkish people should create universities, assemblies and associations to conduct research on the origin and history of the Turkish nation. He provided numerous examples from Russian, Finnish, Danish and Hungarian universities and scientific institutions dealing with Asiatic peoples' history and languages. He cited the names of Shemsettin Sami and Najib Asim as pioneers in this field in the Ottoman Empire. Finally, he distinguished three different groups of Turkish communities living in the world at the beginning of the twentieth century; the Turkic peoples of Siberia, Turks of Anatolia and Europe and the Turks of Southern Caucasus.³²

Ophelia Bayramlı, who prepared the collected works of Huseynzade for reprinting in 1990s, proposes two basic factors to explain the inspirations of the nationalist action of Huseynzade: his relationship with the Ottoman Party of Union and Progress and the

²⁹ Naki Keykurun, *Azərbaycan İstiklal Mücadelesinin Hatıraları*, (Istanbul: Ekspres Matbaası, 1964), 14.

³⁰ Huseynzade, "Milliyet ve İnsaniyyet", *Hayat* 77, (1906).

³¹ Huseynzade, "Türkler kimdir ve kimlerden ibarettir?", *Hayat* 9-16, (1905-1906).

³² Huseynzade, "Türkler", *Hayat* 22, (1905).

impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905.³³ Concerning the role of the 1905 revolution Swietochowski argues that

"The upheaval of 1905 brought about the weakening of arbitrary government controls, one of the effects of which was release of the long-pent-up energies of the intelligentsia. Philanthropic educational theatrical and artistic associations mushroomed busying themselves with setting up new schools funding scholarships and organizing theatrical performances "³⁴

Baku became the capital of Muslim journalism in Russia. The dailies *Hayat* (published by Huseynzade, Topchibashi and Aghayev) and *Irshad* (by Aghayev), the literary review *Füyuzat* (by Huseynzade) and the Tiflis-based satirical magazine *Molla Nasreddin* (by Celil Memedkuluzade) marked this period of intellectual proliferation. Ahmed Bey Aghayev (Ağaoğlu), the leading figure of the *Difai*, was taking part in the regional political process in terms of stirring the Azerbaijani masses in the way of self-defence. His efforts were revolutionary enough for the people who were previously defining themselves only as Muslims. Besides dealing with direct politics, he struggled also against the backwardness of Islamic societies. He defended the improvement of women's rights and the modernization of education with the adoption of the Latin alphabet.³⁵ After co-editing the *Hayat* with Topchibashi and Huseynzade he started to publish *Irshad* with the motto of "Liberty, Equality, Justice". He struggled against the Tsarist oppression and even against the native capitalist class in the columns of *Irshad*. He predicted that the energy of nations oppressed under Russian administration could even generate events overshadowing the French Revolution.³⁶

According to Aghayev, the religion should be evolved and reformed in terms of the realities of the period.³⁷ Daily life was changing permanently. The history was evolving towards the growing nations. All nations had to pass through and live the stage called nationalism like the path followed by the English, French, Italian and German nations.³⁸ In this pre-set historical perspective, Aghayev tried

³³ Ophelia Bayramlı, "A. B. Huseynzade'nin Hayatı ve Türkçülük faaliyeti", in A. B. Huseynzade, *Kırmızı Karanlıklar İçinde Yeşil Işıklar*, ed. by O. Bayramlı, (Baku: Azərneşr, 1996), 37.

³⁴ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 56.

³⁵ Yusuf Akçuraoğlu, *Türk Yılı*, (Istanbul, 1928), 430-431.

³⁶ *Irşad* 283, (1906).

³⁷ Ahmed Ağaoğlu, "Türk Alemi", *Türk Yurdu* 2, (1328): 424.

³⁸ *Terakki* 16, (1909).

to create a synthesis between Islamic values and practices and a modern vision of nation. He wanted to prove that being a Muslim is not incompatible with being a Turkish nationalist.³⁹

A similar search for a synthesis between modernity and the past in an original style came from Ali Bey Huseynzade. He focused on the Turkish identity proposing to "Turkify, Islamicize, Modernize" (Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak).⁴⁰ He wrote that "*our publication's concern is focused on these issues: Turkism, Islam and European civilization. It follows that our system of thought seeks guidance from Turkic life and from the worship of Islam. It also calls for acquiring the benefits of civilization from contemporary Europe.*"⁴¹

In the columns of *Füyuzat* Huseynzade tried also to protect the native culture from the assimilating effects of Russian culture. In his opinion the Azerbaijani people were living in a chaotic environment dominated by currents like "neo-imperialism", "nationalism" and "socialism". There was a permanent struggle between progress and anachronism. The only possible alliance could be with the Ottomans who had their own modernization efforts in the era of Tanzimat.⁴² He interpreted Russian imperialism as a "wild horse" and the Armenian chauvinism as "the tail of this horse" and he alerted his readers against this two-fold danger.⁴³

Another intellectual who had a crucial importance in the nation-building process of Azerbaijan was Mehmet Emin Resulzade. Born in Baku in 1884, he joined social democratic circles of the city and contributed to several different reviews and newspapers. In 1903 and 1904 he was the president of the "Association of Young Azerbaijani Revolutionaries".⁴⁴ He wrote in *Himmet* (illegal, 1904-1905), *Tekamül* (1906-1907), *Yoldash* (1907-1908), *Irshad* (1905-1908), *Davet-Koch* (in Armenian and Turkish 1906), *Füyuzat* (1906-1907) and *Terakki* (1908-1909)⁴⁵.

³⁹ For this type of interpretation of Aghayev's work see Süleyman Seyfi Ögün, "Bir Türkçü-İslamcı Eklemlenme Figürü Olarak Ağaoğlu Ahmet", *Tarih ve Toplum* 116,(1993): 46-49.

⁴⁰ Huseynzade, "Bize hangi ilimler lazımdır?", *Hayat* 6, (1905).

⁴¹ *Füyuzat* 20, (1907), quoted as Turkic life in Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 59.

⁴² Yaşar Garayev, "Ali Bey'in Eseri ve Varisleri, in A. B. Huseynzade, *Kırmızı Karanlıklar*, 7.

⁴³ For Huseynzade's modernist symbolism, see *ibid.*, 8-9.

⁴⁴ Shir Memed Huseynov wrote in detail Resulzade's biography in the preface of his collected works. See Mehmed Emin Resulzade, *Eserleri (1903-1909)*, ed. by Shir Memed Huseynov, (Baku: Azərbaycan Devlet Neşriyatı, 1992).

⁴⁵ For a complete list of Resulzade's publications see Resulzade, *Eserleri*, 457-461.

Rezulzade's intellectual and political activity started with his sympathy to the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP) from 1900 on, and he continued with the foundation of an autonomous clandestine publication named *Himmet* (Endeavor) carrying as its motto the famous proverb of Muslim caliph Ali: "Joint efforts of men move mountains". Being the editor-in-chief and one of the main writers of this short-lived review, he made several appeals for national union. He opposed the fragmentation of the Azerbaijani youth like nationalists, democrats, socialists, moralists or jadidists. He claimed also that the premises of socialism and democracy were not opposing Islam.⁴⁶

Himmet transformed itself into a genuine social-democratic party, Rezulzade and his friends in the party took basically a modernist and anti-colonialist stand. Himmetists published also a bilingual Azerbaijani-Armenian newspaper called *Davet-Koch* (Call) as an organ of the Armenian-Muslim League and weekly review *Tekamül* (Perfection) edited by Rezulzade. In the first issue of *Tekamül*, Rezulzade discussed the nationality problem and claimed that when constitutionalists⁴⁷ were defending the equality among nations, the social democrats were distinguishing relations of dominance between nations. As a matter of fact, social democracy was not conflictual with a nation's progress in itself.⁴⁸ In several other articles, he defended "...a nationalism based on the principle of citizenship"⁴⁹, drew attention to

⁴⁶ "Bizim cevanlarımız biri milletperest, öbürü demokrat, etikperest, ceditperest olup da bu cür deste olmakta haramız özüne mahsus bir yol götürüp muayyen bir meslek ile getmekten hamimiz tek telef olur. Ve hiç birimizin eli öz muradına çatman (...) Birleşmeli, öz fikir ve fiillerimizden birbirimizi halli (haberdar) etmeliyiz (...) Ne sosyalizmin ne demokratizmin umde akideleri islam ile muhalif değil". See *Himmet* 3, (1905).

⁴⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century the Russian liberalism was represented mainly by the Constitutional Democratic Party shortly known as Kadets (an acronym formed by combining the first two letters of the Russian spelling of 'Constitutional Democrats'). Inspired by nineteenth century liberals like Alexander Herzen, Kadets were putting the individual liberty in the main axe of their thought. See Hans Kohn, *Le Panslavisme, Son Histoire et Son Idéologie*, trad. M. Matignon, (Paris: Payot, 1963), 148 and Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism*, revised ed., (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 8.

⁴⁸ "Sosyal demokrasiya külli milletlerin özü için terakki edip medeniyetleşmesine zıd değildir. Onların zıd olduğu o millettir ki özge milletleri naf (yok etme) ve müzmehlil (tedricen aradan çıkarma) etmek istiyir." See M. E. Rezulzade, "Milliyet Meselesi", *Tekamül* 1,(1906).

⁴⁹ *Tekamül* 9, (1907).

teachers' formation⁵⁰, defended "the nationalization of primary schools".⁵¹

In March 1907, *Tekamül* was closed down by the Pyotr Stolypin government, some of the leading Himmetists were arrested, Resulzade and others were exiled in Iran and Ottoman Empire. Resulzade, could return to Baku only in 1913 and joined the *Musavat* Party founded in 1912 by his ex-Himmetist friends Abbas Kasimzade and Korbelay Mihailzade. The word *Musavat* meaning equality symbolized the demand of equality among Russian and Muslim peoples of the empire. Kasimzade and Mihailzade had founded their clandestine party on the basis of the union of Muslims, worked for the independence of all Muslim countries and the creation of economic progress for the survival and welfare of them. The party published several proclamations in order to help the Ottoman Empire in the Balkanic war of 1912 and became more popular under the leadership of Resulzade.⁵²

Besides his political activity, Resulzade returned to journalism and started to concentrate on political theory. Following Cemaleddin Afgani's thought he dealt more intensively in nationality and national language. Swietochowski argues that

*"He guided its (the Musavat's) evolution from vague pan-islamism toward Turkism and in the process provided theoretical foundations for the growing but undefined national sentiments among the public. In an article published in the newspaper 'Dirilik' (Vigor) he tackled the still, for the Azerbaijanis, confusing terms umma and millet. There was, he insisted, a clear distinction between the two concepts. Umma carried an exclusively religious meaning and expressed the collective consciousness of all believers in Islam, whereas millet referred to a community based on the common language, culture, history as well as religion, the latter being only one of its attributes."*⁵³

This secular meaning of the nation shaped the ideology of the *Musavat*, otherwise called "Musavatism". Resulzade entered also into discussion of national language that was going on between those who were defending the Ottoman version of the Turkish language and the others defending the Azerbaijani vernacular. He refused both

⁵⁰ *Yoldash 1*, (1907).

⁵¹ *Terakki 107*, (1908).

⁵² Mirza Bala Mehmetzade, *Milli Azərbaycan Hareketi: Milli Azərbaycan Musavat Fırkasının Tarihi*, (Berlin, 1938), 34.

⁵³ Swietochowski, "National Consciousness", 220.

tendencies and took part in a simple, unifying language understandable by the largest possible masses. Local vernaculars could not be rich enough to become a national language and the Ottoman one was alienated from the Turkish.⁵⁴

In 1915 Resulzade started to publish *Achik Söz* (The Frank Word) in the columns of which he replaced the words of Tatar and Muslim by Turkish. This "Turkish Daily" started to propagate the national independence in an atmosphere marked by the conditions of the First World War. In the first issue of the newspaper, he proclaimed that the world map would be changed at the end of the war. It would take a new shape depending on the factors such as state organizations, power of armies, sacrifice of the citizens and also the rise of national ideals. He added that solutions denying the existence of national entities had to be short-lived.⁵⁵ *Achik Söz* quickly became the speaker of the Musavat Party among the intelligentsia and especially the Azerbaijani youth. Even Muslim students of Russian universities in other regions of Russia started to create their own organizations around *Achik Söz*.

The Russian Empire could no more withstand the pressures of the First World War. In February 1917, the Worker's and Army Soviets' uprising started, the State Duma demanded the resignation of Tsar Nicolas II. This event signified the end of the Romanov monarchy and the beginning of a new era of transformation. The Provisional Government offered different nationalities a declaration of rights, cancelling almost all restrictions previously imposed on citizens in religious and national matters⁵⁶. In this context, all political and social organizations tried to improve their structure and defend their interests before the authorities. Ronald Grigor Suny states that

*"In order to unify the Muslim community and create a single authoritative voice for all the Moslems of Baku, Azerbaijani leaders held several meetings in March to discuss the formation of a Moslem Council. Early in April the Council was formed and elected a provisional committee to lead it".*⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Shelale* 21 and 37, (1913).

⁵⁵ *Achik Söz* 1, (1915).

⁵⁶ Hellène Carrère-d'Encausse. "The Fall of the Czarist Empire" in *The Central Asia:120 years of Russian Rule*. ed. Edward Allworth (Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press, 1989), 214.

⁵⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune 1917-1918, Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 86.

Resulzade was considering the Council as a potentially powerful political force and proposed the territorial autonomy for different Muslim-dominated regions of Russia including Azerbaijan. The local social democratic party *Himmet* wanted to limit the role of the national political organization to cultural affairs⁵⁸. Finally the Council adopted a resolution demanding a Russian republic organized in a geographical federation basis and called for the creation of a new organization including the representatives of all-Russian Muslims⁵⁹.

When the *Musavat* thesis was adopted, Resulzade and his friends became the leaders of the largest political force of Azerbaijan. This time the conditions were quite different compared to earlier Congresses of all-Russian Muslims held between 1905 and 1907⁶⁰. The first period was led by Tatar intellectuals who were for the union in the Russian Empire whereas the years of the World War imposed new conditions: interests among the rising local bourgeoisies were differentiated enough to defend local autonomies. In May 1917 a new all-Russian Muslims Congress was held in Moscow. The delegates from Turkistan, Kirgizistan, Bashkurdistan and Crimea supported the Musavat's "territorial autonomy" and self-rule principles whereas the Volga Tatars who lived in a variety of dispersed areas defended the thesis of "cultural autonomy" claiming that Russian Muslims' interests should be represented in a higher and central level. Socialists linked to the Russian Revolution were also sharing the Volga Tatars' approach for not to strengthen the positions of local landowners and capitalists. Resulzade arose as the main defender of the territorial autonomy thesis and recalled that they were living from then on in a world evolving through a world of nations and the Azerbaijani people were already seeing themselves first as Turkish second as Muslim. To limit the autonomy program with the all-Russian Muslims' united organization would be unjust for the Turkish peoples developing their own national consciousness. He claimed also that "there should be different sections for Turks, Iranians and Arabs in the big Muslim house".⁶¹ The Congress ended with the victory of Resulzade and Musavat:

"The final vote on the question adopted territorial autonomy rather than purely cultural autonomy by more than a two-thirds majority. They

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁹ Mehmetzade, *Milli Azərbaycan Hareketi*, 49.

⁶⁰ For the first two congresses see Serge A. Zenkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), 41-43 and Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars, A Profile in National Resilience*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 111-118.

⁶¹ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 72.

adopted proposal stated: 'The form of government that is most capable of protecting the interests of the Muslim peoples is a democratic republic based on the national, territorial and federal principles, with national/cultural autonomy for the nationalities that lack a distinct territory'.⁶²

The year of 1917 witnessed also the unification of Musavat with the Ganja-based "Turkic Party of Decentralization" led by Nasib Yusifbeyli. Yusifbeyli was a consistent jadidist, inspired by Gaspirali, who worked also in Istanbul in "Türk Derneği" (Turkish Association) and collaborated with Resulzade in Azerbaijan. His party was powerful especially in rural areas and among the local nobility.⁶³ Both parties were defending a secular nationalism and "a vision of Azerbaijan as an autonomous republic in association with a Russia reorganized into a federation of free and equal states".⁶⁴ The new party was called the "Turkic Party of Decentralization/Musavat", adopted the federalist program in the First Congress held in October 1917.⁶⁵

Among the other actors influencing the Azerbaijani political process one could mention the Islamist *Ittihad* (Union), the pro-Bolshevik *Himmet*, the Bolsheviks constituted by Russian and Armenian socialists and Armenian Dashnakists. When Russian Bolsheviks overthrow the Provisional Government in St. Petersburg in October, Musavatists welcomed the revolution thinking that Lenin's slogan of "national self-determination" could be interpreted as a broad territorial autonomy for Azerbaijan. With this aspiration they supported also the Russian and Armenian-dominated Soviet in Baku and also the foundation of a supreme authority over Southern Caucasus in the form of regional parliament, called the Seim. For the Musavatists, the Seim seemed somehow the immediate fulfilment of their ideal of federalism. But, the Baku Soviet, who took the power in the city in October 1917, openly undermined the national demands of Azerbaijanis, entered into direct command of Lenin and refused separatism from revolutionary Russia. Although the Musavatists were represented in the Muslim Faction of the South Caucasian Seim, they were not able to control all the Azerbaijani territory and as the Baku Soviet transformed itself to a Bolshevik/Dashnakist dictatorship, the

⁶² Alan W. Fischer, *The Crimean Tatars*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 114.

⁶³ Swietochowski sees this party as the inheritor of *Difai*. See Swietochowski, "National Consciousness", 221-222.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 222.

⁶⁵ For the details of this program see Mehmetzade, *Milli Azerbaycan Hareketi*, 52-53.

tension existing between Musavatist Azerbaijanis and Baku Soviet forces became antagonistic. According to Swietochowski, the violence started like a Musavat-led uprising on the 31st. of March, 1918. He states that

"The show/down was as much ideological as national in character. It started as a coup against the rule of the Soviet staged by the Azerbaijani nationalists who were assisted by counter/revolutionary Russian officers. Within three days the fighting turned into the familiar pattern of intercommunal massacre that claimed at least three thousand muslim lives as the troops of the Armenian Dashnaksutiun Party, allied with the Soviet, went into action".⁶⁶

The so-called dictatorship of the proletariat was instituted by the Bolshevik Soviet of the People Commissars. The Baku Commune "had consistently demonstrated its willingness to underrepresent the Muslim citizens of Baku⁶⁷, defenders of Musavat were seen as culturally inferior⁶⁸ and Musavat as a counter-revolutionary party threatening the existence of the revolutionary democracy⁶⁹.

The Soviet power was overthrown by another dictatorship, the one of the Socialist Revolutionaries (known as SRs), which stayed only six weeks. There was another process going on in regions outside of Baku. As Swietochowski puts it

"the Seim proclaimed on April 22 the Transcaucasian Federation, an ephemeral union of Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, which was dissolved after four weeks of internal strife and external pressures on the part of Turkey and Germany."⁷⁰

After the failure of the Transcaucasian Federation, Georgia proclaimed its independence. Two days later, the 28th of May, 1918, Azerbaijani deputies of the Seim created their own National Council led by Resulzade, which turned to be the Azerbaijani Republic with its temporary capital Ganja.⁷¹ This proclamation of an independent

⁶⁶ Tadeusz Swietochowski, "The Himmät Party, Socialism and the National Question in Russian Azerbaijan, 1904-1920", *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, vol. 19, no. 1-2, (1978), 125.

⁶⁷ Suny, *The Baku Commune*, 139.

⁶⁸ Swietochowski, "The Himmät Party", 126.

⁶⁹ Suny, *The Baku Commune*, 221.

⁷⁰ Swietochowski, "The Himmät Party", 126-27.

⁷¹ Mehmet Emin Resulzade, *Kafkasya Türkleri*, (Istanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1993), 45.

republic was the announcement of the birth of a new nation-state. The proclamation had six articles:

“1/ Azerbaijan, as a totally independent state, contains the southern and eastern part of Southern Caucasus.

2/ The form of government of the independent state of Azerbaijan is the democratic republic which is a state-of-law.

3/ Azerbaijani Democratic Republic is determined to have friendly relationships with all states and nations, especially with its neighbors.

4/ Azerbaijani Democratic Republic guarantees all civic and political rights of its citizens living in its frontiers independently of their ethnic, religious or class origins and professional or sexual differences.

5/ Azerbaijani Democratic Republic supports the free development of all nations living in its frontiers.

*6/ Till the formation of the Constitutive Assembly, the supreme authority in Azerbaijan is the universally elected National Council. The Provisional Government is responsible to the National Council”.*⁷²

Azerbaijan became the first Muslim state of the world founded on secular principles. The Ottoman Empire supported the new state with special conditions. In this process Resulzade played a mediator role between the Ottomans-supported Islamists and the anti-Ottoman socialists. Swietochowski argues that the Ottoman intervention to the newly born Azerbaijani state encouraged the independence tendency of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia who were previously -at least partly- for a panturkist union with the Ottomans. The independent Fethali Han Hoyski formed his government, Resulzade was forced by the Ottoman General Nuri Pasha to represent the new state in Istanbul. Baku was taken by the Islamic Army of the Caucasus jointly constituted by eight thousand Ottoman and seven thousand Azerbaijani soldiers. Two months later, as the Mudros Armistice ended Ottoman participation in the war, the Ottoman army in Azerbaijan was immediately replaced by the British. The Musavat-led government was able to go on with the schedule of nation-building: educational, administrative and military restructuring. The National Council proceeded to transform itself into an interim parliament with the participation of the new representatives of national minorities and other political parties. The degree of representativeness was openly raised and the Han Hoyski's government was accepted as the only legitimate authority by the British troops' commander, General W. M. Thomson. Resulzade once more emphasized the federalist and nationalist principles of this party,

⁷² "Milli Azerbaycan'ın Onbeş Yıllığı, *Azerbaycan Yurt Bilgisi* 17, 1933, 113-14.

expressed the disillusionment created by the so-called Bolshevik internationalism⁷³, raised the nations as the basic unities of the newly forming world hoping "for the eventual establishing of a world order by the League of Nations" recommending close regional ties with other Southern Caucasian republics and Daghestan. He also pronounced the famous phrase which became later a motto under clandestinity and exile in the Soviet period: "*The flag once raised will never fall!*"⁷⁴

As the Russian Bolsheviks were winning the war against the Whites, occupation became senseless for Britain in the after-war period, British troops left Baku in August 1919. Deprived from the support of their most appreciated western ally, the Azerbaijani independence looked for an international recognition in order to guarantee its survival. Following many efforts of Ali Merdan Bey Topchibashi, in January 1920 the independence of Azerbaijan was recognized by the European powers represented in the Paris Peace Conference.⁷⁵ But on the regional political level, there was another crucial development: Kemalist government of Ankara and Bolsheviks of Moscow agreed on a power-sharing deal in which Ankara was granted political control over the area and Moscow free passage to Baku and a monopoly on oil output. Under these new conditions imposed by the Soviet/Turkish Entente, the Musavat-led government resigned and the Azerbaijani communists -having full support of the Eleventh Red Army- took the power. Several leading Musavatists were killed, some other entered into clandestinity and Resulzade this time was forced to be a guest in Moscow. This time the communist intelligentsia in power was led by Neriman Nerimanov, who was of Himmetist background as Resulzade and who would try to harmonize the aspiration of national independence of the Azerbaijani people and Soviet Russia's strategic interests in the region. In this context, "the best deal attainable" was a Bolshevik form of autonomy⁷⁶.

⁷³ Bennigsen and Lemerrier-Quelquejay underline also Resulzade's disappointment of the October revolution. In their opinion this experienced politician understood that the proletarian internationalism was quickly transformed into a 'great-Russian neo-chauvinism'. See Alexander Bennigsen et Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *Sultan Galiyev, le Père de la Révolution Tiers-Mondiste*, (Paris: Fayard, 1986), 5.

⁷⁴ For this historic speech delivered to the parliament on the 13th of December 1918 see Mehmetzade, *Milli Azərbaycan Hərəketi*, 105-109.

⁷⁵ This process is described in details by Cemil Hasanlı. See Cemil Hasanlı, *Azərbaycan Tarihi 1918-1920*, (Ankara: Azərbaycan Kültür Derneği, 1998), 353-375.

⁷⁶ Swietochowski, "The Himmät Party", 134.

Conclusion

The nation-building process of Azerbaijan followed a specific pattern in which the rise of nationalism was based on ethnic identity and it preceded the nation-state formation. In the beginning, the Islamic identity as the *ümmet* (or *umma*) became the reference point of the Azerbaijani search for identity. Backed by the wealthy classes, Azerbaijanis looked for the recognition of their particularity in a colonial context. The defeat of Russia in 1904 by Japan and the revolution of 1905 accelerated and extended Muslim reformism to the political sphere. Muslims were organised in an all-Russian Muslim basis and allied themselves with Russian liberals in order to protect their rights and culture. Azerbaijanis also participated in this process but they also created their proper political parties in a national basis.

Azerbaijani nationalism rose out of the unusual cultural and political atmosphere of Baku: liberal constitutionalism, the proliferation of socialist factions and Armenian nationalism were all acting in the same environment. In the second decade of the XXth. century the Musavat Party became the spokesman of the Azerbaijani nationalism. This success and popularity was possible largely due to its leaders' rich intellectual formation and political experience which enabled them to formulate a strong ideology rooted in the national identity, conditioned by regional political facts and a realistic understanding of western civilization including its modern political institutions. Although the independence was short-lived and ended by the return of Russian hegemony to the region, the Azerbaijani experience of nation-state lasted as one of the particular examples of nation-formation and undeniably inspired later generations.

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