

AZERBAIJAN MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİ VE ERMENİLER:1905 -1920**Cengiz ÇAĞLA*****Özet**

Çok uluslu imparatorluklardan ulus-devlete geçiş süreci ülkelerin ve bölgelerin özgül niteliklerine koşut özellikler gösterir. Rus Çarlığının çöküş evresinde ortaya çıkan Cedid hareketi Müslüman ve Türk kökenli topluluklara yönelik kapsamlı bir toplumsal dönüşümü amaçlamıştır. Eğitim, kültür ve sosyal hayatta yaşanan değişim modern Azeri milliyetçiliğinin temellerini hazırlamıştır.

Azeri milliyetçiliği yerel aydınların öncülüğü ve burjuvazinin desteğiyle siyasallaşmış ve çok uluslu bir metropol olan Baku'nun olağandışı dinamik siyasal ortamında olgunlaşarak güçlenmiştir. Bu bağlamda rakip Ermeni milliyetçiliğinin etkisine dikkat çekmek gerekir. Her milliyetçilik bir diğerinin gelişimine sebep olur. Ermenilerin sahip oldukları güç ve ayrıcalıklar Azeri seçkinlerini kendi toplumları içindeki diğer katmanlarla yakın ilişkiler kurmaya sevk etmiş, şiddet ve savaş ortamı savunma amaçlı örgütler kurmalarına yol açmıştır. Ermeni tehdidine karşı örgütlü yanıt verme ihtiyacı ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, Azeri milliyetçiliğini, diğer niteliklerine ek olarak, bir "karşı-milliyetçilik" olarak da görebiliriz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Milliyetçilik, ulus-devlet

Abstract***The Azerbaijani Nationalism And Armenians:1905 -1920***

The transition from multi-national empires to nation-states differs according to specificities of countries and regions. The Jadid movement, which appeared in the disintegration process of the Russian empire, aimed at a comprehensive social transformation of the Muslim and Turkish communities. The change that occurred in educational, cultural and social spheres prepared the foundations of modern Azeri nationalism.

The Azeri nationalism, led by intellectuals and supported by the bourgeoisie, developed in the unusual political environment of Baku. In this context, the rival Armenian nationalism becomes crucial in defining the Azeri nation-formation process. As one nationalism begat a competing nationalism, the Armenians' claims to better positions and privileges stimulated Azerbaijani elites to strengthen the ties with the rest of the Azerbaijani people. The conditions of violence and warfare urged the Azerbaijanis to organize themselves for the purpose of self-protection and to answer the Armenian threat in an organized structure. In this respect, it would not be misleading to claim that, the Azeri nationalism, among its other qualities, was also developed as a "counter-nationalism" to the Armenian one.

Key Words: Nationalism, nation-state

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NATIONALISM AND AZERBAIJAN

Nationalism is one of the most important social phenomena of our age. Nation-state and nation became political norms shared by an overwhelming majority of political communities. Different historical processes determine the pattern of the shaping of national identities in different parts of the world. Scholars generally agree that the rise of nation and nationalism, as simultaneous and closely related processes, took place first in the European Continent and then were diffused to other parts of the world.¹

In the European process two main categories of nation arose: the one based on the territory (exemplified by the French case) and the one based on ethnic identity (like the German case). In each category, the nationalists' organized actions were of crucial importance and the formation of modern states coincided with the building of modern nations.²

The nineteenth century witnessed the prelude of disintegration of the multi-national empires including the Russian one. This process is explained partly by the diffusion effects of European ideologies like liberalism, socialism and nationalism. In this context Russian Muslims passed through significant cultural and social changes. The Turkish-speaking populations of Russia formulated their own reformism to resist the challenge of justification and to adopt themselves to the demands of the western world. This cultural renaissance started by the works of early reformers such as Abu-Nasr Al Kursavi³, Shihabettin Mercani⁴ and Kayyum Nasiri⁵ who

thought that Islam's survival was depending upon its adaptation to the needs of the modern world.

The cultural renaissance reached its peak with the Jadid movement⁶, the comprehensive work of Gaspıralı İsmail, including the renewal of Muslim educational system, creation of a common Turkish language, emancipation of women and the creation of social, cultural and local organizations. The Jadidism, backed by the commercial and industrial bourgeoisies of Kazan and Baku respectively, created the backbone of Turkish cultural nationalism. In Azerbaijan, intellectuals like Mirza Fethali Ahundzade⁷ and Ali Bey Hüseynzade⁸ explored Turkish history's glories, studied their own language as a strong component of one's own identity and tried to incorporate this identity with a western state of mind. In this perspective, the Azerbaijani reformism can be seen as a multi-dimensional civilization project developed by the rising intelligentsia who progressively assumed the leadership of its emerging community.

The nation-building process of Azerbaijan followed a specific pattern having some similarities with the central and eastern European examples 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 *ümme* (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. Reformed Islam is portrayed as a force of

1 For example see Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism, A Study in its Origins and Background*, second edition, New York: Collier, 1967, p.vii.

2 Hans Kohn, *Prelude to Nation-States: the French and German Experience, 1789-1815*, New York: Van Nostrand, 1967, p.2.

3 Kursavi (1726-1813) was the first muslim reformist who insisted on the mass participation in the creative interpretation of the Qu'ran and the Hadith. See Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars, A Profile in National Resilience*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986, p.49.

4 Mercani (1818-1889) studied Kursavi's ideas and published a work criticizing the Central Asian scolasticism and defended that Islam's survival was depending upon its adaptation to the modern world. See Michael Kemper, "Entre Bukhara et la Moyenne Volga: Abd An-Nasir Al Qursavi (1776-1812) en Conflit avec les Oulémas Traditionnalistes", *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, vol. 17, no.1-2, 1996, pp. 49 and Alan W. Fischer, *The Crimean Tatars*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978, p. 100.

5 Nasiri (1825-1902) was a contemporary of Mercani. He introduced secular concepts in a predominantly traditional

context, renewed the old approaches to social problems and emphasized on the preservation of national identity and the development of national culture. See Rorlich, *ibid.*, p. 64.

6 For a general idea on the Jadid reformism see Edward J. Lazzerini, *İsmail Bey Gasprinsky and Muslim Modernism in Russia*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1973 and Cengiz Çağla, *The Jadid Movement and Nation-Building in Azerbaijan*, Ph. D. dissertation, İstanbul: Boğaziçi University, 2000.

7 Translator of the Viceroy of Caucasus, Ahundzade (1812-1878) was inspired primarily by the European enlightenment movement. His leading ideas were "the spread of education, the formation of a literary language comprehensible to the mass reader and secularism as a means of overcoming sectarian divisions". See Tadeusz Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Azerbaijan, 1905-1920", in Ronald Grigor Suny (ed.), *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change*, revised edition, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996, p. 112

8 Hüseynzade (1864-1941) was the first Azerbaijani who used intensively the idea of turkishness. He drew the attention to the needs of self-awareness of the Azerbaijani people with its history, language and civilization. See Alexander Bennigsen, *La Presse et les Mouvements Nationaux chez les Musulmans de Russie avant 1920*, Paris and the Hague: Monton, 1960 and Çağla, *ibid.*, p. 53-54.

progress and humanitarianism compatible with modernity. The Jadidism brought the Turkishness to the agenda. The defeat of Russia in 1904 by Japan and the revolution of 1905 accelerated and extended Muslim reformism to the political sphere. Muslims were organized in all-Russian Muslims basis and allied themselves with Russian liberals in order to protect their rights and culture. Azerbaijanis also participated to this process but they also created their proper political parties on a national basis.⁹

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. First imprisoned by the All-Russian Muslims movement, the Musavat Party became the spokesman of the Azeri nationalism. As a product of Baku's political environment it reflected several influences. Many founders of the party were from the socialist origin. Musavatists defended protective labour laws, land reform, decentralised government and cultural autonomy. In this context they collaborated with several socialist groups in the scope of labour movement. The framework of the 1905 Constitutional Manifesto determined the bases of their liberal/democratic messages and the struggle against aggressive Armenian nationalists, as we will see below, strengthened their national character.

THE ARMENIAN FACTOR: POLITICS AND NATION-BUILDING

When we look at the position of the rising Azerbaijani bourgeoisie we first observe that it was the numerically largest group's speaker in Baku. In the political atmosphere of 1905, the Azeri elite saw the opportunity to transform the anti-colonial cultural movement into a political one. Being colonial subjects of an empire that treated them for a long time with policies of discrimination and assimilation, this time the Azerbaijanis wanted to secure their position in relation to the Russian government and also vis-à-vis the Armenians.¹⁰ As it is generally accepted that the Armenian nationalism affected and

accelerated the Azerbaijani nationalist movement, we will try to recapitulate a part of the Armenian history and the influences of Armenian nationalism.

The Armenians were the third nationality in terms of population (after the Azerbaijanis and the Russians) living in Transcaucasia. They had close ties with Armenians of Ottoman and Persian Empires. Being impressed by the Greek and Bulgarian secessions from the Ottoman Empire and also being inspired by western and Russian revolutionary ideas, Russian Armenians conducted a fragmented political activity in the last decennia of the nineteenth century.

It is generally accepted that geographical dispersion, cultural, economic and political divisions had determined the faith of the so-called "Armenian Revolutionary Movement"¹¹. The number of Armenians living in the Russian Empire in 1897 was given as 1.240.000.¹² They were dispersed in different regions of Transcaucasia and constituted a relatively distinctive element in the multi-ethnic social structure of the Russian Empire. They were numerous in peasantry, but they had also developed middle classes dealing traditionally with commercial activities. During the last decade of the nineteenth century also an Armenian industrial bourgeoisie appeared in big cities of Transcaucasia. In Tiflis, Armenians started to control the cotton production, leather and tobacco sectors whereas in Baku they were active in oil production. Parallel to their traditional engagement in commercial activities they had also an influential stratum of intellectuals who were widely influenced by western values including the nationalist ones. The sons of wealthy families who studied in Russian and European universities

⁹ See Çağla, *ibid.*, p. 166

¹⁰ See Audrey Alstadt, "The Azerbaijani Bourgeoisie and the Cultural Enlightenment Movement in Baku: First Steps Toward Nationalism", in Suny (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 202. Suny also argued that "one nationalism begat a competing nationalism. One nationality's claims to a better position stimulated rival claims by its neighbours". See R. G. Suny, *Armenia in the Twentieth Century*, Chicago, California: Scholars Press, 1983, p. 16.

¹¹ Scholars from Armenian origin are using the term "revolutionary" in two meanings. First one is referring to a secession from the Ottoman Empire. In this context, the first Armenian para-military groups who organized armed insurrections in Eastern Anatolia and terrorists who were responsible of attacks and sabotages are referred as "revolutionaries". For example see Arthur Beylerian, "Aux origines de la Question Arménienne du Traité de San Stefano au Congrès de Berlin", *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique*, no. 1-2, 1978, p. 31-32. When it comes to the second meaning, the use of the word is rather blurry. It refers almost to all Armenian political organizations, a wide range including the Dashnak and Hinchak Parties and also Armenian Bolsheviks. In this context, the word "revolutionary" becomes a curious mixture of nationalist, socialist and social reformist ideals. For such a use of the word as a rhetoric, see Anahide Ter Minassian, "Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1877-1912)", translated by A. M. Berret, in R. G. Suny (ed.), *ibid.*, 1996, pp. 141-186.

¹² Ter Minassian, *ibid.*, p. 143.

created the backbone of Armenian nationalist intelligentsia.

Culturally distinct with its own language, script and church, economically advanced, the Armenian community had an unpronounced status of a privileged minority in Transcaucasia. The Armenian Gregorian Church was powerful and respected and Armenians had almost always kept good relationships with Russian authorities in terms of religious proximity and with the Russian Orthodox Church. As a matter of fact, Armenians appeared to be an important element of regional conflicts among Russian, Ottoman and Persian Empires. The fact is also underlined by Anahide Ter Minassian. In her own words,

*"Since the late eighteenth century, Russian expansion toward the Black and the Caspian Seas had revealed the Russophile feelings of the Armenian population in the Persian and Ottoman provinces; they were the manifestation of an ecumenical Christian consciousness in the face of Islam. Counting on the benevolent protection of the Orthodox Tsar, the ordinary Armenians welcomed each appearance of the Russian Army (in 1829, in 1854-56 and in 1877-78) with demonstration of joy, followed by more or less sizeable migrations in the direction of Transcaucasia after its incorporation into the Russian Empire".*¹³

The two common Armenian revolutionary organizations, the Hinchak (Bell) and the Dashnaksutiun (Federation) Parties, were leaded mainly by the Transcaucasian intelligentsia functioning under the "driving spirit" of the Armenian clergy. Scholars working on Armenian nationalism underline the mixture of national, religious and socialist activities of both organizations.¹⁴ Ter Minassian argues that under the Russian and western influences Armenians developed political programs calling for "a broad democracy, political freedom, national

independence and socialism".¹⁵ They used various means and tools in their political struggle including terrorist activities. In the turn of the century the Dashnaksutiun became the leading political organization of Transcaucasian Armenians. In this context Ronald Grigor Suny states:

*"Together with a program of emancipation leftist Dashnaks adopted a socialist line. (...) Their tactic at that time was based on individual acts of terrorism which would instigate intervention by the European powers on behalf of the Armenians.(...) Dashnaks turned their attention toward Transcaucasia in 1902- 1903 and began a campaign of anti-tsarist activity when in 1903 the Russian government seized the lands of the Armenian Church. By 1905 the Dashnaks had penetrated the labor movement, particularly in Baku where they formed ten trade unions with a total of about two thousand members. Two years later the Dashnaks could claim 265 circles in Baku and its outlying districts. Besides their economic and political roles, the Dashnaks planned an important military role as the self-styled defenders of the local Armenian population."*¹⁶

In Transcaucasia, the competition with Armenians influenced the Azerbaijani Turkish 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 Turkish-speaking masses. Having the majority on the city дума, they were specially concerned on the cultural enlightenment of the Turkish community. They supported jadidist schools, the theater and the press.¹⁷ Armenians were better educated and better prepared to take advantages of the growth of the regional economy. **Molla Nasreddin**, a prominent humoristic journal, drew attentions several times to this discrepancy.¹⁸ In addition to cultural and religious differences there were apparent conflict of interests between both Armeno-Azeri

¹³ Ter Minassian, *ibid.*, p. 146

¹⁴ For example Onnik K. Keshishian argues that "the literary revival, the intellectual renaissance coupled with the equalitarian socialist current ideals radicalised the Armenians such that they become fully politicised. Numerous organized activities indicate the development of political organization and acumen, while most of Russia was resorting to individual, extra-legal terrorist acts." See Onnik K. Keshishian, *Integrative and Dysfunctional Factors in the Formation of the Armenian Nation*, Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Claremont Graduate School, 1974, p. 67. See also Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1963 and W. Wucinich (ed.), *Russia and Asia*, Stanford University Press, 1972.

¹⁵ Ter Minassian, *ibid.*, p. 150-151

¹⁶ R. G. Suny, *The Baku Commune 1917-1918, Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972, p. 21-22.

¹⁷ See Cengiz Çağla, "Les Fondements Historiques de l'Etat-Nation en Azerbaïdjan", *Cahiers d'Etudes sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien*, no. 31, janvier-juin 2001, pp.98.

¹⁸ For example in a caricature published in *Molla Nasreddin* no. 24, 1909, a well organized Armenian district of Tiflis was contrasted to Muslim districts of Ordubad which were dirtier and badly organized.

bourgeoisies and the two proletariats. In the context of animosities between the two communities, Swietochowski quotes remarks of a contemporary traveller:

*"...the Tatar hatred is directed against the Armenians more than against the Russians. The Armenians are permanent inhabitants; the Russians come as soldiers, officials, temporary employees and leave after a few years. The Tatars are also less afraid of the Russians."*¹⁹

With the closing of Armenian schools and the seizure of the Armenian Church lands, the activists of the Dashnaksutium became more aggressive towards Russian administration and the Azeri population. Influenced by Russian Socialist Revolutionaries' terrorist activities, they intensified the violence. The Armeno-Azeri clashes of 1905, reported usually toward the Armenians in western media, constituted one of the worst manifestations of the conflict over-existing between the two communities.

In February 1905, Baku became the battlefield of the two communities. The violence continued through the year and also to the following year; it evidenced by massive outbreaks in Erevan, Nakhichevan, Shusha and Gence. One of the least partial statements interpreting the so-called "Tatar-Armenian war" is still Swietochowski's:

*"The first outbreaks of Muslim-Armenian violence occurred in Baku. The immediate cause was the murder of a Muslim by the Dashnakists. On February 6, 1905 thousands of Azerbaijanis, many arriving from nearby villages attacked the Armenian sections of the city. There followed three days of killing and looting while the police and troops remained conspicuously inactive, as they would be during most of the clashes to come. (...) The fighting continued well into the next year, though with lesser intensity. Nor was it contained in the towns: An estimated 128 Armenian and 158 Tatar villages were pillaged or destroyed. The estimates of lives lost vary widely ranging from 3.100 to 10.000."*²⁰

We think that this ongoing conflict with Armenians, the conditions of permanent violence and warfare and heavy losses created an undeniable stimulating effect on the shaping of

Azerbaijani national identity.²¹ The Azerbaijanis felt themselves obliged to answer Armenian threat in an organized structure. In the wake of inter-communal violence, a secret Azerbaijani organization called *Difai* (Defence) was founded in Gence. If the socialist-oriented Himmet Party is not taken into consideration *Difai* was the first nationalist organization of the Azerbaijanis. According to Audrey L. Altstadt,

*"Difai was created by local intellectuals as a counter-terror organization in response to the well organized Dashnaksutium and the Russian support for the Armenians. Among the founders were prominent Ganje intellectuals Aliekper and Halil Khasmemetli, Nasib Yusufbeyli and Dr. Hasan Ağaoğlu. These men were among the community leaders who had taken the lead in ending the conflicts between their own community and the Armenians. The Ganje Azerbaijanis argued that the Dashnaks could not operate so freely without Russian backing and that the Administration in fact provoked inter-communal clashes."*²²

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our claim that the Azeri national identity was fostered by the rise of Armenian nationalism can be substantiated by works of several theoreticians of nationalism who emphasized the importance of external conflict and war in the nation-formation process. For example Anthony D. Smith argues that,

*"The war has been a powerful factor in shaping certain crucial aspects of ethnic community and nationhood."*²³

With the intensification of Armeno-Azeri competition the likelihood of violence and armed conflict became more apparent. Armenians became a permanent element of the Azeri nationalist discourse. Ali Bey Hüseyinzade wrote continuously on the existence of "two separate nations in Transcaucasia" and referred to Armenians as the nation "disturbing the peace and welfare of the Transcaucasian peoples".²⁴ The so-called "Armenian Danger" contributed to

19 L. Villari, *The Fire and Sword in the Caucasus*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1906, p.166, quoted in Tadeus Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920, The Shaping of National Identity in A Muslim Community*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 39-40.

20 Swietochowski, *ibid.*, 1985, p. 41.

21 Social scientists working on Transcaucasia unanimously observed this fact. See Swietochowski, *ibid.*, 1985, p. 41-42, Altstadt, *ibid.*, 1996, p.66-67, Suny, *ibid.*, 1972, p. 37-38.

22 Altstadt, *ibid.*, p. 67.

23 Anthony D. Smith, "War and Ethnicity: the Role of Warfare in the Formation, Self Images and Cohesion of Ethnic communities", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4, October 1981, pp. 375.

24 Ali Bey Hüseyinzade, "Tiflis Ermeni-Müselman İhtimaine Dair Bir Kaç Söz", *Hayat*, no. 68, 1906.

the formation of the need to belong to a comprehensive identity, better defined and better structured around effective organizations. Smith underlines the functions of war and the threat of war in the formation of ethnic communities and their self-images. He believes that violence can foster ethnic cohesion and states that,

*"The historic consciousness that is so essential a part of the definition of what we mean by the term of 'ethnic community', is very often a product of warfare of the recurrent threat thereof, even where the war concern third parties."*²⁵

As the name of the Azeri political organization Difai suggests, the Azeris were organized to defend themselves against Armeno-Russian alliance. The threat of physical annihilation urged to transcend the local and sectarian loyalties, former divisions lost their importance. Azeris had to be more crowded in cities and countryside to defend themselves and they had to coordinate their efforts around their common goals. As Swietochowski recalls,

*"Throughout the countryside bands of peasants waged guerrilla warfare; from their ranks emerged such heroes as Yusuf and Deli Ali."*²⁶

The rise of heroes of inter-communal conflicts creates an important source for the common imagery of the future nation. A prominent historian of nationalism argues:

*"The heroes of the past are joined by ties of blood and the language to the men of the present. Their link is a sort of guarantee that the men of the present can rise to the challenges as their ancestors did."*²⁷

As a matter of fact the Azeri nationalism was also developed as a counter-nationalism to the Armenian one. Thus, to be anti-Armenian, among other factors, contributed to the rise of Azeri nationalism as an ideology transcending other cleavages and divisions in Azerbaijani society.

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²⁵ Smith, *ibid.*, 1981, p.379.

²⁶ Swietochowski, *ibid.*, 1985.

²⁷ John Breuilly, **Nationalism and the State**, second edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 67.

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