

# Definitions of national identity, nationalism and ethnicity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1990s

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## Abstract

This article examines the major political debates in post-Soviet Azerbaijan vis à vis the very assumptions of individual autonomy, equality, national culture and citizenship, and universalism upon which modern nation-states have historically been based. The information presented in this article is based on personal interviews conducted with the leading and influential members of the Azerbaijani political elite in 1998. The interviews were based on two broad themes. The first relates to the perceptions of the Soviet period and on what grounds the Azerbaijanis differentiate the new Republic of Azerbaijan from the former Soviet Azerbaijan. The second relates to their perceptions of both the outside world and themselves with regards to differing understandings of nationalism, national culture, and national/ethnic or local identities. The study of the Azerbaijani example of post-Soviet political culture may help us to understand the dynamics of nation-building on the basis of the major political debates and of conflicting national, ethnic and local identities in Azerbaijan.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan; national identity; nationalism; ethnicity; nation-building; national culture.

## Introduction

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, new political discourses have arisen in all the emerging republics emphasizing cultural norms, values and locality. This suggests that the development of the new nations and states in the area involves the reconstruction of cultural, political and ethnic space, which is characteristic of the twentieth-century nation-state formation. States in Western Europe were made by a minority class whereas 'late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century state-building

involved the participation of wider populations, and hence opened more space to ethnic and religious movements' (Hunt and Tokluoglu 2002, p. 623). As Smith (1986, p. 232) argues, the Third World states need to work hard to keep their various ethnic groups together, let alone the 'building' of a nation; 'nation-building' is the basic Third World ideology and project, and it provides the clues of what Third World elites are trying to do. Smith (1986, pp. 241–42) identifies four main historical patterns of state-and-nation formation, namely the 'Western', 'immigrant', 'ethnic' and 'colonial'. In the Western pattern, dynastic and territorial states are built up around a definite ethnic core where other ethnic and regional groups are successively attached by alliance, marriage, coercion and administrative intervention. In the ethnic pattern, however, 'ethnie' exists in varying degrees of self-consciousness prior to the development of the modern state and of nationalism. In this second form, what is demanded is the transformation of these 'ethnie' to nations with their own territories, economies, legal rights and education systems.

The Azerbaijani case combines elements from both patterns, classical and modern, since we witness the creation of a state and later a nation on the basis of prior 'ethnie' together with a state evoking elite nationalism which gives rise to a mass ethnic nationalism.<sup>1</sup> Although the emphasis on ethnicity and localism in Azerbaijan is a heritage from the Soviet system, it contributes more to ethnic nationalism (modern) rather than territorial nationalism (classical). As a result, conflicting national, ethnic and regional loyalties and identities come into play in Azerbaijan.

Based on the idea that nation and nationality refer to territorial boundaries whereas ethnicity and ethnic group to several cultural factors such as language, religion, identity and localism, I argue that state practices at the cultural level reveal significant information about the actual relations between the state and nation makers and those involved in the political process. Corrigan's (1980, p. 29) claim that it is important to consider the pressure from subsidiary national or ethnic groups is noteworthy, since the cultural aspects of nation-state-formation illuminate the character of the state in a more specific way. Similarly, Hall (1984, p. 16) draws attention to the potential role of previous state structures that may be capable of reasserting themselves at moments of crisis. Jessop (1982) supplements this position by suggesting that both support for and resistance to hegemonic projects are important for an adequate understanding of the state. Foucault (1980, p. 82) is also helpful in reminding us that the resistance to state-formation brings into play 'subjugated knowledges' which while present are disguised or muffled. This knowledge is always particular, local and rarely systematized. This requires that a population's historical past be reconstructed on the basis of local popular

knowledges, which may give rise to the development of ethnic and religious ideologies capable of mobilizing social action.<sup>2</sup>

I follow Smith (1981) and Shanin (1986) who view modern ethnicity as a continuation of past ethnic revivals. In their perspective, although ethnicity appears as distinguishable from nationalism, ethnic communities can move towards defining themselves as a nation. In this respect, ethnic communities are viewed as self-reproducing cultural entities. The perspective adopted in this study is that language and kin ties can become the sources for mythologizing past histories. This makes ties of ethnicity distinctive compared to other loyalties such as economic class since they can easily intersect with various other ideological sources – such as religion or regional and local histories – in the construction of present realities. In this respect, ethnicity can form the basis of competing political or territorial claims, since cultural values and processes are an essential part of the state and nation-building dynamic. The cultural field is where new identities are formed and shaped, and in times of social transformation these competing identities can become part of broader political conflicts and movements, which influence the direction of state and nation-building. Ethnicity is an ambivalent source in mobilizing local populations, and, in times of social disturbance, it is difficult to detect the forces that determine the direction of ethnic movements. In the Azerbaijani case the attempts to create myths of origin and myths of common destiny, language and ethnicity have contributed to the creation of a common culture in their own ways.

Within this context, this article aims to analyse the sources of the major political debates in post-Soviet Azerbaijan regarding the very assumptions of individual autonomy, equality, national culture and citizenship, and universalism upon which modern nation-states have historically been based. There are conflicting identities in post-Soviet Azerbaijan and the link between emerging identities and the former ones is rather complex since they are not fixed, but vary in relation to different conceptions of national culture, identity, ethnicity, and nationality. The study of the recent political debates in Azerbaijan paves the way to a better understanding of the dynamics of nation-building in post-Soviet Azerbaijan and the involvement of cultural, ethnic and political differences in this process.

A major source for this article derives from personal interviews conducted with the leading and influential members of the Azerbaijani<sup>3</sup> political elite. A total of twenty-two in-depth interviews, each lasting for an average of two hours and all tape recorded, were carried out in August 1998. These interviews included the party leaders and some of the influential members of the two major opposition parties (including the late Ebulfez Elcibey of Popular Front, Isa Gamber of Musavat Party, and Ali Kerimov, who at that time was Deputy

Chairman of the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan [PFPA] and now the leader of the *reformist* wing of the same party), as well as deputies, politicians, members of various other political parties, academicians and experts, also journalists. Given the affinity between the Turkish spoken in Turkey and Azerbaijani Turkish and the political and intellectual elite being competent in Turkey's Turkish, all interviews were conducted in Turkey's Turkish. Additionally, researchers who are fluent in Azerbaijan dialect did all the transcriptions. During these personal interviews, the aim was to explore the differences or points of diversion among the Azerbaijani political elite with regards to major political developments and processes. There were sharp contrasts as well as commonalities in the discourses or narratives of the government elites and the leaders and some influential members of the two opposition parties, which appears as puzzling.

The focus of this research was based mainly on two broad themes. The first theme relates to the perceptions of the Azerbaijani elite of the Soviet period and on what grounds they differentiated the new Republic of Azerbaijan from the former Soviet Azerbaijan. In this context, their perceptions of the state, statism and legitimate leadership in Azerbaijan were discussed with the interviewees during the field research of this study. However, this will be the topic of another paper since it is beyond the scope of the present study. The second theme relates to the perceptions of the Azerbaijani elite of both the outside world and themselves taking into consideration their conceptualization of nationalism, national culture, and national/ethnic or local identities. Based on that information, this study examines the conflicting narratives of national and ethnic identity among the political elite in post-Azerbaijan. The two major competing political discourses that were identified, namely the ideology of *Turkism* of the opposition and the ideology of *Azerbaijanism* of the government, may provide some basic information on the quest of identity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

For a contextualization of the recent political history in Azerbaijan, a short historical and political background must be provided including information about some key elite groups. The most important issue is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which gave rise to the creation of the Azerbaijan Popular Front [APF] that successfully mobilized the population against the Communist Party leadership in Azerbaijan in 1989 (Fuller 1996, p. 117). In this sense, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is central to any discussion of the development of the Azerbaijani national movement and national identity.

To begin with, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh is composed of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis and it has been a territory that has been part of Azerbaijan since 1921. Under the influence of the era of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh

first wanted to join Armenia, and later campaigned for total independence. In February 1988 the Armenian MPs appealed for a transfer of the territory to the jurisdiction of Armenia which triggered protests among the Azerbaijanis and led to the development of Azerbaijani nationalism. During 1988 and 1989 many clashes between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the two republics increased, leading to forced or voluntary migration of both communities from Azerbaijan and Armenia (Hunter 1994, pp. 67–8; Zinin and Maleshenko 1994, pp. 105–107).

Under these circumstances, in 1988 a group of representatives of the Azerbaijani elite, most of whom were scholars from the University and Academy of Sciences, formed a group named *Tesebbus* (attempt/initiative) which was the seed of the APF. In 1989, the *Tesebbus* group applied to the Parliament of the Azerbaijan Republic requesting its official registration. That same year the APF Congress was held in Baku where the administrative board was elected. At the same congress, Abulfaz Aliyev, who later took the name Elçibey, was elected as chairman of the APF executive board and the party charter and platform were ratified. The APF at that time was not yet an official political party. It was allowed to participate in the elections for the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet that was held in October 1990 where the APF managed to send twenty-five delegates to the Supreme Soviet. The APF was organized as a political party immediately before the 1995 parliamentary elections so that it could participate in the elections (Hunter 1994, p. 70; Altstadt 1997, p. 124; Balayev 2004, pp. 89–91). The initial purpose of the Popular Front was to facilitate *perestroika* in Azerbaijan and their slogan was the ‘independence of Azerbaijan’ without withdrawing from the USSR. Later, in response to the Karabakh conflict, political, economic and cultural independence of Azerbaijan was declared as the prime political activity of the movement. Among the other objectives of the APF was the establishment of a state based on law, and a society based on citizenship irrespective of ethnic, linguistic, or religious background. In addition to the call for full civil liberties and full cultural rights for all national groupings, territorial integrity (equated with the protection of Nagorno-Karabakh), the creation of a market economy, and environmental protection were also stated to be among the major goals of the Popular Front. Although the founding members of the APF were Azerbaijanis, there were also two Russian members at the beginning of the movement (Altstadt 1992, p. 223; Hunter 1994, pp. 68–9; Altstadt 1997, pp. 125, 134).<sup>4</sup>

The APF managed to lead and gather the masses who were involved in popular movements stemming from the Nagorno-Karabakh issue at the beginning of 1988. The Armenian claims over Karabakh moved thousands of people to the political platform who were previously

indifferent to politics. Territorial unity of Azerbaijan was of major concern for those involved in these protests. In response to Armenian claims of independence, anti-Armenian riots occurred in 1988 in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait. As a consequence, about 200,000 Azerbaijani refugees were expelled from Armenia and fled to Baku and other cities, which contributed to the Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes in Baku in January 1990.<sup>5</sup> It was under these conditions that the PFA brought together a wide range of movements and activists. The PFA criticized the Communist authorities on their handling of the Karabakh issue arguing for the renewal of Azerbaijan. Gorbachev, in response, sent Russian troops to Baku. When these troops entered Baku, Vezirov fell and Ayaz Mutalibov came to power as president of Azerbaijan. The entrance of the Russian troops into Baku ended with the death of many civilians. This event that took place in January 1990, and known as *Black January*, was the turning point in the political history of Azerbaijan. It caused an increase in pro-independence, anti-Russian and pan-Turkist feelings and tendencies among members of the APF. The Armenian part of the Nagorno-Karabakh leadership proclaimed a Nagorno-Karabakh Republic in the autumn of 1991 calling for its recognition. Azerbaijan became independent in December 1991 since the Soviet Union itself was dissolved. In March 1992 after the seizure of the city of Khodjaly in the territory of Karabakh, President Mutalibov resigned due to the pressure from his opponents. In June 1992 new presidential elections were held in Azerbaijan and the leader of the PFA, Elcibey, came to power who stated that his main task was to protect Azerbaijan's statehood and territorial integrity and to settle the Karabakh problem (Goldenberg 1994, pp. 116–20; Hunter 1994, p. 68; Zinin and Malessenko 1994, pp.105–107; Altstadt 1997, pp.118–19, 122).

Just as the Karabakh conflict led the APF to power, the same conflict caused its fall from power, giving rise to Aliyev's presidency. The defeat of Azerbaijan in the war with Armenia and the fall of the village of Kelbadzhar to the Armenians in April 1993 (by October 1993, one-fifth of Azerbaijan territory was under Armenian control), caused many people to question the legitimacy of Elcibey's rule. Combined with the issue of control over oil reserves in the region, which was making Russia uncomfortable, Elcibey's rule ended in June 1993 (Gunes 2004, p. 111). Although, the APF's rule during 1992-1993 has been regarded as a failure, the APF is equated with the accelerated development of the process of socio-political organization in contemporary Azerbaijan, just as the former Musavat Party<sup>6</sup> is equated with rising nationalism in Azerbaijan<sup>7</sup> that ended with the establishment of the first Azerbaijan Democratic Republic<sup>8</sup> between 1918 and 1920 (Balayev 2004, pp. 89–91).

Hunter (1994, pp. 64-5) identifies three distinct periods in Azerbaijan's recent political history. During the first period (between 1989 and 1992) there was an increase in pro-independence tendencies, cultural Turkism and pro-Turkish sentiments. During the second period (between 1992 and 1993) ultra-nationalist, pro-Turkish, pan-Turkist tendencies increased further. There also developed a pro-Western, anti-Iranian, and anti-Russian external orientation. Finally, during the third period (between 1993 and 1994)<sup>9</sup> there was general disappointment with the nationalists' policies and there was a move towards a more balanced external orientation beginning with the Aliyev period.

The APF's cultural policy is characterized as pro-Turkish, pro-West, anti-Russian and anti-Iran. According to Hunter (1994, pp. 83-5, 91-4), this pro-Turkish orientation was seen as useful for closer relations with the West, since both the US and European countries pointed to Turkey as their principal partner in their relations with the former Soviet Union. The anti-Russian tendency, on the other hand, was linked to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The anti-Iran attitude reflected the views of Elcibey rather than the whole of the APF leadership. Aliyev, on the other hand, mended ties with Russia, neutralized Turkish fears, and developed relations with Iran. As Goldenberg (1994, p. 123) and Shnirelman (2001, p. 137) note, Aliyev was in continuous contact with both Iran and Turkey and he opened the borders to both neighbours, signed treaties of cooperation, and won promises of foreign aid. He was also committed to a market economy and to guaranteeing the rights of the Russians, Lezgians, Talish, Kurdish and other minorities. This prompt shift from Elcibey's pro-Turkish, anti-Russian orientation to Aliyev's policy to strengthen ties with Iran and with Russians (Fuller 1996, p. 118), reflects the changing geopolitical context in terms of Azerbaijan's relations with key external actors including the USA, the West, Turkey, Iran and Russia.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this strengthening of external ties, what characterize the 1990s in post-Soviet Azerbaijan are two contrasting ideologies, namely Turkism and Azerbaijanism. The ideologies of Turkism and Azerbaijanism not only reflect the relations between various ethnic groups in Azerbaijan but also create new tensions based on ethnicity.

The PFFA<sup>11</sup> developed a conservative and ethno-centric (Turkistic) nationalism, supporting a strong state. The other party of the opposition, Musavat (led by Isa Gamber), adopted a pro-Western liberal nationalism emphasizing a pluralistic identity inclusive of various ethnic groups of Azerbaijan. In a similar way, Heydar Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party [NAP] also emphasized multi-ethnic Azerbaijanism embracing various ethnic groups (Tohidi 2000, p. 265). The silent drive among the Azerbaijanis to re-unify with South Azerbaijanis is another controversial issue. In Iran the largest ethnic minority

group is the Azerbaijani constituting about one-third of the population. As Saroyan (1996, p. 413) argues, towards the end of the 1970s' reintegration of ethnic experiences in the field of literature began to develop between the North and the South. This suggests that, a single Azerbaijani nation exists in spite of its division between two states. Shaffer (2000, p. 460) also argues that, the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991 challenged the identity of co-ethnics beyond the borders of the new state and many Azerbaijanis in Iran began to identify themselves with the Azerbaijani ethnic group though not necessarily with the state itself. These developments will have a considerable impact on the shaping of Azerbaijani national identity in the near future. *Yerlicilik* (favouring local loyalties) and regionalism are other reasons for tensions. It was argued that since *yerlicilik* dominates all political relations, it is far more important than ethnic divisions as a reason for uncertainty about the future of Azerbaijan. It is in this context that I now turn to the discussion of emerging cultural and political identities in Azerbaijan.

### **Post-Soviet cultural transformation: Modernization and dominant culture**

The respondents' definitions of modernity reveal how important cultural elements can be in the making of national identities that are exclusive of one another. The contrast between pro-Turk and pro-Russian influence and orientation is marked. Here too, there exist sharp contrasts as well as commonalities that correspond with the conflicting narratives of the government elites and the members of the opposition with regards to national and ethnic identity. This sheds light on some aspects of state formation in Azerbaijan, which was not yet seen as complete during the time the research was carried out. For example, the excitement about the independence of Azerbaijan and increasing freedom of individuals bridged some of the deep-rooted cleavages between government and opposition on other matters.

As a deputy (A) from the NAP stated and as most interviewees agreed, during the Soviet period being modern meant speaking Russian, visiting Russian cities, studying in Russian schools, and attending the performances of visiting foreign show groups. However, after independence, speaking English, having a job in a foreign oil company, and being part of international trade networks started to be considered as being modern. An academician (T) from the Baku State University supported this idea by saying, 'Previously those who could not speak Russian could not find a job whereas now those who cannot speak English face the same difficulty'. (A) also underlined that the dominant groups in Azerbaijan during the Soviet period were the Russians and Armenians who both spoke Russian and who comprised

the elite, but now these groups have been replaced by the Azerbaijanis. According to another deputy (V) from the government, being modern does not mean being a part of either Western or Eastern civilization; however, despite this one cannot ignore the positive influence of the Soviet rule on the modernization of Azerbaijan.<sup>12</sup> Criticizing those who are negative about the Soviet period and the Communist Party, he argued that the Soviet period was not as bad as many people say. Referring to the Soviet education system, Soviet research institutes, factories, sports, classical music, arts, museums, and the high level of literacy in Azerbaijan, which are all considered in relation to the former Soviet Azerbaijan, he stated that their government wants to use and preserve all that has been inherited from the Russians. The main understanding among the members of the government was to consider the Soviet heritage as the basis of the new Azerbaijani state which is yet to be developed. These views imply that assimilation into Soviet culture is no longer regarded as an indicator of modernization but calls attention to the fact that the modernizing impact of Soviet culture cannot be denied.<sup>13</sup>

Those in the opposite camp argue that there are no historical links between the Azerbaijanis and the Russians and that the Russian culture is totally different from that of their own. For example, (M), a leading member of the PFPA, refused the definition of Azerbaijan nation on the ground that they are historically part of the *great Turkish nation*.<sup>14</sup> He argued that both the Russians and the Turks forced them for many years to believe that Azerbaijanis constitute a separate nation and that they are not part of the *great Turkish nation*. As (M) argued:

It is easier for us to understand the Russians and their culture than it is for you. To understand the Georgians and the Armenians is easy too, since we have shared the same territory. But we are not historically bound to these groups. Our connection with these groups is due to being part of the same empire. The dominant culture in Azerbaijan is the common Turkish culture. From this emerged two different cultures; on the one hand, the Russian and Soviet culture and, on the other hand, the cultures of diverse ethnic groups living on the territories of Azerbaijan such as the Kurds, Lezgians and the Talish. These two cultures or better to say cultural understandings together have shaped the culture in Azerbaijan.

The controversial debate about the dominant culture in Azerbaijan is not new, since Azerbaijan has always been subject to conflicting arguments and policies between Russia, Iran and Turkey. As Swietochowski (1996, pp. 223, 225, 226, 228, 233) claims, the orientations towards outside powers shifted frequently; Azerbaijanis could at one

time be pro-Russian, at another time pro-Ottoman or pro-British, depending on which power happened to be dominant in Transcaucasia. This pendulum swing was also linked to their concerns about external security. Again, according to Swietochowski (1996, p. 223), although there has always been a commitment to Turkish culture in varying degrees, during the early twentieth century, even among the pro-Ottomans there were some people who were not enthusiastic about the idea of unification with Turkey. Such people did not accept the idea of Turkish sovereignty since they thought that a hundred years of Russian rule had brought about a civilization that was more advanced than the one in Turkey.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, commitment to Turkism that was not limited to the intelligentsia has always been on the agenda in Azerbaijan.

At this point, it is necessary to look closer at Turkism. According to Nerimanoglu 1998 (*Manuscript*, p. 7), who was one of the interviewees in this research and who is committed to the ideology of Turkism, the history of democratic ideas and statism in the Turkish world, the ideology of Islam-Turkism, and the ideas of M. E. Resulzade and Elcibey are some of the important sources of the national ideology in Azerbaijan. He also argues that the works of those who write about the general Turkish culture on the one hand, and the works of the leaders of the movement of Turkism, play an important role in the formulation of the national ideology in Azerbaijan. With respect to the second group, he refers to such authors as A. Huseyinzade, I. Gaspirali, A. Agaoglu, Z. Gokalp, Z. V. Togan, R. R. Arat, Y. Akcura, A. Caferoglu, and M. Ergin. In his view, when one examines the histories of the numerous Turkish states that were established in the past, it is possible to see that there has always been a 'unity' in the Turkish history. Based on this argument Nerimanoglu (*Manuscript*, pp. 8, 9) claims that, the 'superiority' of the contemporary Turkish, Azerbaijan, Uzbek, Tuva, Bashkurt, and Turcoman cultures rests on the commonly shared 'great Turkish culture'. What follows from this argument is that, all ethnic groups who live on the Azerbaijan land (territory) can be united under the roof of a single state where Islam and common traditions will be the major sources of national identity. Moreover, Azerbaijani Turkish, too, will unite the majority of these people (Nerimanoglu, *Manuscript*, p. 13).

According to a third view, which is neither pro-Turk nor pro-Russian, the dominant culture in Azerbaijan is a synthesis of different cultures that have always coexisted in the area. There were members of both the government and opposition who supported the idea of mixed culture.<sup>16</sup> Hunter (1994, p. 62) defines what I call 'mixed culture' as 'mixed ethnocultural legacy' where she poses the Iranian heritage together with the Turkic culture arguing that,

The fact is that Azerbaijan has a mixed ethnic and cultural background with both Iranian and Turkic elements. The challenge for the newly independent republic is and always has been the harmonious blending of these elements in order to form a unique Azerbaijani identity.

However, although Hunter (1994, p. 62) argues that those academics and other intellectuals in Azerbaijan who are aware of the Iranian influence on their history and culture have been discouraged from expressing their views both under the Soviet rule and by the new Azerbaijani nationalists to block Iran-Azerbaijan rapprochement, those interviewed in this research called attention to Russian-Turkish influence rather than Iranian-Turkish influence as discussed above.<sup>17</sup>

For example (H), who is an important figure from the opposition argued that the Azeri Turks have their own culture. In his view, 'Here we have Turkism, Islam, what remains from the Soviet period, capitalism, and what comes from the West. All these are mixed and we have become a nation'. A leading member of the Musavat Party (L), too, stated that in Azerbaijan the influence of the Turkish, Arab, Russian, and Persian cultures is apparent and that the Azerbaijani culture is the outcome of this mixture. Nevertheless, according to (L), the Azerbaijani culture is rooted in the Turkish civilization and tradition. A member from the government, for example (Y), who was an adviser to the president, defined his culture as 'Azerbaijani Turkish culture', implying that although it contains elements of Turkish culture, it is distinctive. In his view, this distinctiveness can be observed in Azerbaijani literature, music, painting and science. Another deputy from the New Azerbaijan Party (B), who defined the national culture in Azerbaijan as a mixed culture, said that, the Russians are half-European and Azerbaijanis are familiar with Europeans since they are historically linked to the Russians. In this respect, North Azerbaijan has a higher culture than South Azerbaijan because of the positive influence of Russia. As (B) argued:

My language of education was Russian. I know the Russian civilization better than I know Azerbaijani civilization... I know the Russian language better than the Russians. In this country some of us go to Russian schools, while others go to Azerbaijani schools. Those who prefer Russian schools, have a broader worldview than the ones who prefer Azerbaijani schools... Ninety per cent of the information about the outside world comes through the Russian language, through the translations from English and French. Those who went to Azerbaijani language schools cannot read these, but I can.

Depending on how the dominant culture in Azerbaijan is defined, different paths for modernization were identified. For example, Elcibey who was the head of the PFPA in 1998, argued that no one can deny the Western influence in Azerbaijan. However, he also claimed that the superiority of the Turkish nation and culture is a fact and that modernization certainly does not mean Westernization, since it is possible to protect a nation's own values under all circumstances. According to Elcibey, the Ottoman Empire developed by merging the Islamic and Eastern culture with European culture. In his words, 'Turkey is still going through the process of merging the two great cultures, the Eastern and Western. This is a considerable load but if Turkey succeeds, she will progress notably'. Elcibey, who called himself a 'soldier of Ataturk', emphasized that it is not possible to discuss the superiority of the Turkish nation and culture and the modernization process in that country only in terms of Westernization. (M), too, as an advocate of the pro-Turk perspective argued that in Azerbaijan modernization has been equated with Westernization but modernization should be built upon Islamic and Turkish values which are regarded as Azerbaijani national values. Again a pro-Turk academician (U) and a board member of Musavat (Z) argued that, new cultural values can gradually be adopted but cosmopolitanism should be avoided to protect Azerbaijani national culture. Among those who defended the third view as outlined above, analogous to the members of the opposition, many argued that modernization does not necessarily mean Westernization since it is possible to integrate with the broader world while preserving one's own national values and culture. In general, those who represented the government were more positive about the Russian impact but claimed that the dominant culture in Azerbaijan is a mixed culture containing elements of Turkish culture. As (B) argued, their government was trying to develop the Azerbaijani civilization adding that:

We have several national costumes. We share these with Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Georgians. We share more with them than we do with the Turks. For example, our national costumes are the same as Armenians' and Georgians'. Our mentality can be defined as the Caucasian mentality (the Chechen, Daghestan, Abkhaz, Adygei, and Circassian mentality) rather than the Turkish mentality.

However, there were others who were more critical of modernization. For example, (I) from the Turan News Agency who was in favour of the opposition, argued that modernization could be a very fearful process since the Azerbaijani state is weak. In his words:

As a result of modernization Azerbaijan can lose its national identity. If there is a strong pressure on a weak child, the child will be ruined. The Russian impact on Azerbaijan is still present. I went to a Russian school. So did my eldest son. However, Azerbaijani children are now attending English language educating schools, i.e., American colleges. They are becoming Americanized without being aware of their own identity. This is threatening. It is even more threatening than the Russian influence. Modernity used to come from the Russians, now it comes from the Americans. Azerbaijan is very weak but the pressure coming from the outside world is very strong. Russian influence was not that strong. During the past 150 years the Russian Empire was not able to make Azerbaijan a Russian-speaking country. America will be able to make Azerbaijan an English-speaking country in five years. There are several groups in Azerbaijan. The first is the Russian-speaking Azerbaijanis. Most of them do not understand the Azeri language. There are those who can be defined as the pro-Turkists. Another group sympathizes with the Persians. Then we have the pure Azerbaijanis who do not regard themselves as Persian-speaking, Russian-speaking or Turkish-speaking. These people claim that Azerbaijan is a unique country. Thus, it is difficult to argue that there exists a dominant culture in Azerbaijan. This became clear during the discussions about the name of the language in Azerbaijan. We know very little about our history.

The above argument reflects very well the expectation, hope and essentialistic view that there is/should be one history. In short, although there are variations both within the opposition and the government, those in the government argue that Azerbaijani culture is a synthesis of different cultures including Russian culture, which is considered to have had a positive influence, whereas the opposition defines Azerbaijani culture as Turkish culture. It is interesting to note that the official ideology of the short-lived Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which was established during the early twentieth century (between 1918 and 1920),<sup>18</sup> was ‘Turkification, Islamization, and Modernization’.<sup>19</sup> In this formulation, Turkification referred to the preservation of national values, Islamization to the preservation of Islamic values, and modernization to the transfer of technology and science from the West. The tri-colour flag of the Azerbaijan Republic symbolized this ideology. Blue on the top represented Turkism, red in the middle modernization (European civilization), and green at the bottom represented Islam meaning that modernization should be rooted in Islam seeking guidance from Turkic life. Although today Azerbaijan has the same flag, Turkification, Islamization, and modernization are no longer presented as the official ideology.<sup>20</sup>

To summarize, some interviewees strongly opposed the Soviet period whereas others admired it. This split parallels the ideological disagreement between the government and opposition. Those in the government argued that Azerbaijani culture is a mixed culture where Russian influence played a positive role. The opposition, on the contrary, claimed that the Azerbaijani culture is mainly a Turkish culture. Since the breakdown of the Soviet regime was a recent development at the time of the research, one can assume that these attitudes have and will become marginalized further in the long run, paving the way for more moderate positions.

What is noteworthy is that those members of the opposition, who were the advocates of the mixed culture argument, began to emphasize the importance of the great Turkish culture as soon as the discussion shifted to Azerbaijani national identity and vice versa. Discussions about the dominant culture in Azerbaijan are linked to the process of national identity formation, which should be defined as a process of re-formation or even de-formation of Azerbaijani national identity. The historical link with the Soviet period and the Russians on the one hand, and with the broader Turkic world on the other hand, are controversial issues as discussed further below.

### **Azerbaijanis versus Azerbaijani Turks<sup>21</sup>**

Members of the opposition emphasize common territory, territorial integrity and population size, attempting to develop these concepts further and make them part of the political discourse, arguing that even the term homeland does not exist in the Azerbaijani language. An Azerbaijani scholar (C) employed at the Caucasus University in Turkey at that time explained these views as follows:

Where there is a state, there is also the concept of homeland. Since there is no independent state in Azerbaijan and since we have been under Russian rule for more than 200 years, the concept of homeland has been transformed in Azerbaijan. The idea of the Soviet Union as a whole was imposed upon us as our homeland. . . This is why we have lost some of our land. Our people see their home as their homeland, not the land on which they live. . . The feeling to serve the land and to serve the military is very weak. People desert from the army. Although military service is an honourable duty, it is not regarded as such in Azerbaijan. Military service is regarded as a burden.

Many of those interviewed, for example a scholar (G), who was one of the advisers of Elçibey, claimed that there exists no Azerbaijani nation that can be associated with a specific territory since the word

Azerbaijani refers to all those groups who have been living on the land that has always been defined in geographical terms only.<sup>22</sup> As Saroyan (1996, p. 403) argues, in 1937 the majority of the population of the Azerbaijani republic, formerly known as Turk, was redefined as Azerbaijani.<sup>23</sup> This case demonstrates the logic of Stalinist national-state construction; the existence of an Azerbaijani nation was necessary for the formation of a Soviet republic named Azerbaijan.<sup>24</sup> In addition to the ethnic Azerbaijanis, the Talish, Kurds and other ethnic groups were also redefined as Azerbaijanis during the same period (Saroyan 1996). This is seen as a consequence of Soviet policy. The scholar (G) who sides with the opposition, argued that the term Azerbaijani as it is used by the government today does not have a historical root or a scientific base. In his view, there is no such nation as Azerbaijan since Azerbaijan is a geographical name and consequently, the concept of Azerbaijani refers to all those who live on this piece of land. In (G)'s words:

After the Turks came to this land they have always constituted the majority. Although they formed various states in the region, Mehmet Emin Resulzade formed the first democratic Azerbaijani Turkish state in the region. Although most of the formerly built states in the region were based on the Persian state system, Turks and Turcoman chiefs had always formed the backbone of all these states.

Based on this argument, the interviewee (G) concluded that, the 'nation of Azerbaijani Turks' (*Azerbaycan Turkleri milleti*) should be used in place of Azerbaijani nation.

The ideologies of pan-Islamism, Turkism and pan-Turkism, emphasizing the universal community of all Muslims, the ethnic identity of Turkic peoples and their cultural and linguistic unity, dates back to the decade preceding the 1905 Russian Revolution. The Young Turks movement in the Ottoman Empire supported Turkism and the Azerbaijani intellectual elite, committed to the ideas of Turkism, were propagating Turkism in their writings. However, since then, Azerbaijan has been torn between Turkey and Russia and, consequently, the content of Turkism and Azerbaijani nationalism in Azerbaijan has always been fluid and shifting in response to various domestic and international developments and concerns (Swietochowski 1985, pp. 59–60; Swietochowski 1996, pp. 213, 218–19). The pan-Turkic attitude and identity, which were fashionable in Azerbaijan in the 1920s, alarmed the Soviet bureaucracy. M. E. Resulzade published an essay in Istanbul in 1928 on the origins of the Azerbaijani people where he argued that the Turks played a crucial role in the formation of the Azerbaijani people. He excluded the

Albanians since they were Christians. However, the Soviet Azerbaijanis did not welcome these ideas, since they challenged their campaigns against the pan-Turkism launched in the USSR. This argument also defined the Azerbaijanis as recent migrants, which deprived them of the first-settler argument against the territorial claims of the Armenians and the Iranians. As a consequence, the terms Turks and Islam became unpopular in the USSR by the end of the 1920s (Shnirelman 2001, pp. 100–101).

The opposition now attempts to develop the concept of homeland with an emphasis on Turkism. This suggests that the concept of state is related to a population with a permanent place of settlement and that attachment to land is a powerful element in defining the attitudes and feelings mobilized around sovereignty (Hall 1984, p. 18). As a result, the opposition aims to redefine the concept of nation in political terms and distinguish it from ethnicity and ethnic group.

The academician (C) who supports the PFPA pointed out the fact that the Azerbaijani Turks constitute 80–85 per cent of the population and said, 'If you say Azerbaijani, then all groups will be united. But the majority are the Azerbaijani Turks and the state is theirs.' He claimed that the rights of the Turks are being violated. Another academician (E) from the Baku Institute of Political Science commented that, since the Turks constitute the majority, the opposition had developed the ideology of Turkism and Turanism<sup>25</sup> to win their political support. In his view, if the opposition comes to power they will drop Turkism and switch to Azerbaijanism. (E) claimed that, when the PFPA came to power under the leadership of Elçibey, they transformed these themes into the ideology of the government to gain Turkey's support. Consequently, the minority groups such as the Talish and Lezgians came to be perceived as a problem. In (E)'s view, it was at this point that Aliyev developed the term *Azerbaijani*. (E) commented that, the ideology of Azerbaijanism better fits the present conditions and it is through this ideology that Azerbaijan can develop itself.

The emphasis on Turkism can be considered as a measure against both internal and external threats. However, many of the interviewees pointed out that the emphasis on Turkism creates and will continue to create ethnic tensions in Azerbaijan. Some also argued that Azerbaijan would not benefit from siding with Turkey as they did with the Russians in the past. Siding with Turkey is grounded mainly on the perception that Azerbaijani culture is part of the broader Turkic culture. Based on their experience with Russia, who has played the role of 'elder brother' for years, they argue that Azerbaijan no longer needs another elder brother, namely Turkey, but just a brother.

The government's ideology of Azerbaijanism emphasizes a pluralistic identity inclusive of various ethnic groups of Azerbaijan. A leading and influential member of the Musavat (H), challenged the discourse

of the government saying that, 'Our nationalism asserts that Azerbaijan belongs to Azeri Turks. Others do not belong to our group. However, we do not aim to exclude other ethnic groups, since they have equal rights before the law'. In fact, both the opposition and the government's conceptualization of nationalism aims to create a political roof that will ensure the unity of all ethnic groups of Azerbaijan. In this respect, there is no fundamental difference between the government and opposition. A member of the opposition and a former minister during the Elcibey period (K), stated that during Elcibey's rule, the rights of Lezgians and Talish were secured and none of the other ethnic groups were excluded from society. In his view, since the concept of nation<sup>26</sup> is still regarded as an ethnic concept, many assume that the Azerbaijani Turks as the majority group will repress other minorities. Nationalism means building a common roof for all ethnic groups as a requirement of the nation-state. (K) differentiated the opposition's position from the government as follows:

Democratic rule is an ideal rule. We accept this. However, this does not mean that we will sit like the Europeans, or eat frog like the French. We all have our own foods. We all have our own culture and a corresponding civilization. Our nationalism means to develop and protect our culture. We also respect the values of other cultures. We do not question why the French eat frog. We preserve our own customs and traditions...This is how one should understand nationalism. Latin American soap operas and serials appear on our TV channels. These contradict our moral values...Cultural pressure coming from the West is not that good...Nationalism is necessary to prevent this influence...A national mentality should be developed to be able to create a nation-state. We need this.

The concern to protect the existing Azerbaijani national customs and traditions against the ongoing transformation in Azerbaijan fits into Elias' account of state formation. Elias (1982, p. 229) links state-formation to a civilizing process that is conceived as a change in human dispositions influencing conduct in directions, which are not the result of purposive human action. The civilizing process, as Elias (1982, p. 229) formulates, always produces counter-movements in which tensions of society come to the surface, which is especially true for the 'spread of civilization' beyond the West. To protect the Azerbaijani national culture from the process of post-Soviet modernization was a concern shared by many, although it was more emphasized by members of the opposition.

### **Nationalism and ethnicity**

Post-Soviet national identity formation is a process through which new Azerbaijani (national) identity is being re-defined. The present Soviet/Russian versus Turkish identity clash and the definitions of Azerbaijani Turks, Azerbaijanis and Azeris<sup>27</sup> reflect different political positions as discussed above.

The ethnic composition of Azerbaijan is complex, including the Azeris, Russians,<sup>28</sup> Talish, Lezgians, Kurds, Tats, Armenians,<sup>29</sup> and Avars among others.<sup>30</sup> During the fieldwork for this essay, the Lezgians and the Talish were the ethnic groups most frequently referred to.<sup>31</sup> As Curtis (1995, p. 103) notes, the Lezgians (Dagestanis) are one of the important ethnic groups and they are predominantly Sunni Muslims, speaking a separate Caucasian language. They have called for greater rights such as the right to maintain contacts with Lezgians in Russia. In October 1992 President Elcibey promised informally to change the border regulations in reply to these Lezgian requests. The majority of this ethnic group live across the Russian border in Dagestan and 171,000 of them resided in northern Azerbaijan in 1989 (Curtis 1995, p. 103). According to Yunusov (2001), the 1999 census data show that the number and percentage of the Lezgians in Azerbaijan has not changed since the 1989 Census. According to the 1999 Census their number is 178,000 or 2.2 per cent of the total population. However, based on their own expert data, Yunusov (2001) claims that the census data do not reflect the real number of Lezgians since their actual number in Azerbaijan should be within the limits of 250–260 thousand. Nevertheless, as Yunusov (2001) concludes, according to the 1999 Census the Lezgians are now the second largest ethnic group after the Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan.

According to Curtis (1995, p. 103), in 1989 another 262,000 people belonging to ninety other nationalities such as the Avars, Kurds, Talish, and Tats, lived in Azerbaijan. The Talish, another important ethnic group in Azerbaijan, is a group of Farsi-speaking people living in southern Azerbaijan and contiguous areas of Iran. Like the Lezgians, the Talish also called for greater rights following the independence of Azerbaijan.<sup>32</sup> In 1992 Elcibey issued an order that the government would defend the political, economic, social, and cultural rights and freedoms of non-Azerbaijanis to meet the demands of the minority groups. Their numbers vary from the official 1989 census figure of 21,000 to their own estimates of 200,000 to 300,000 (Curtis 1995, p. 103). According to Yunusov (2001), from the 1989 Census to the 1999 Census the percentage of the Talish increased from 0.3 per cent to 1 per cent (76,800) due to strong changes in consciousness. However, based on their own expert data Yunusov

(2001) claims that the number of Talish should be around 200- 250 thousand.<sup>33</sup>

Besides this information, the ethnic composition of Azerbaijan according to the 1999 population census data (total population 7,953,400) is as follows: Azerbaijani 90.60 per cent (7,205,500), Lezgians 2.24 per cent (178,000), Russians 1.78 per cent (141,700), Armenians 1.52 per cent (120,700), Talish 0.97 per cent (76,800), Avars 0.64 per cent (50,900), Turkish 0.55 per cent (43,400), Tatar 0.38 per cent (30,000), Ukrainians 0.36 per cent (29,000), Sakhur 0.20 per cent (15,900), Georgians 0.19 per cent (14,900), Kurds 0.16 per cent (13,100), Tats 0.14 per cent (10,900), Jews 0.11 per cent (8,900), Udins 0.05 per cent (4,200), and other nationalities 0.12 per cent (9,500) (*Statistical Yearbook of Azerbaijan 2002* State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan Republic).

Based on this information and in comparison with the 1989 census data, Yunusov (2001) argues that, in the 1989 census count there appeared 112 nationalities and small ethnic groups but that military-political, social and economic events caused mass movement of the population which has radically changed the demographic situation in Azerbaijan since 1989. As Yunusov (2001) notes, in ten years the number of Azerbaijanis has increased 8 per cent, whereas by the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the outflow of Russians and Armenians (the second and third largest groups following the Azerbaijanis) has been considerable. However, as discussed above, he claims that the 1999 census data on the number of Armenians, Lezgians, Talish and Kurds in Azerbaijan are questionable. Moreover, enormous labour population shifts may result in misleading figures on the ethnic composition of Azerbaijan.

The two major opposition parties, the Musavat and the PFPA, claim that Azerbaijani national identity is Turkish identity. Elcibey, who was then leader of the PFPA, said that, 'We are Turks; our homeland and our nation are both Turkish in origin'. (M), too, said, 'We managed to bring to the fore the idea that we are part of Turkish society. This has been forgotten for years'. The government's ideology, on the contrary, is not Turkism but Azerbaijanism, since Azerbaijan is a society composed of several different nations. As (Y), who was one of the advisers to the president Aliyev, and (B), who was a deputy from the government stated, 'The characteristic elements of Turks, Russians or other groups should not dominate the definition of Azerbaijani national identity'. As (B) suggested:

The Russians are leaving but the Lezgians and the Talish have always lived here. During the PFPA rule the official ideology was, a Turk does not have a friend other than a Turk. This is what Ataturk had said in the past. At that time this was true but now it is not. If I

say, a Turk is my friend but a Talish is not, then we will face separatist movements in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan was under the risk of being torn apart; they changed the name of the Azerbaijani language arguing that it was Turkish. When Heydar Aliyev came to power he changed the name back to Azerbaijani language. Our national ideology is Azerbaijanism. The Turks, Lezgians, Talish, Russians, and even the Armenians living in Azerbaijan are all regarded as Azerbaijanis. About 30,000 Armenians live here. Many people are married to Armenians,<sup>34</sup> and are regarded as Azerbaijanis.

The representatives of the government, for example (A) and (B), asserted that the ideology of Azerbaijanism as formulated by Aliyev has prevented the emergence of ethnic tensions between various groups whereas the opposition's emphasis on Turkism isolated them, providing the ground for further conflict.<sup>35</sup> However, it is interesting to note that within the Musavat there is a split as to the definition of Azerbaijani national identity. Some emphasize Turkism while others argue against this position. This, interestingly, parallels the split between the government and opposition on the same matter. In this respect, the Musavat's ideology comes close to the government's Azerbaijanism which can be defined as a pluralistic national identity inclusive of various ethnic groups of Azerbaijan. This, as Brubaker (1996, p. 63) puts it, is related to a broader question of whether citizenship will be held individually or by ethnic or national group membership in post-Soviet Eurasia. Many of those interviewed stated that they feared further ethnic tensions due to both internal and external threats. For example, (I) from the Turan News Agency said,

Ten years ago everyone thought that they were Azerbaijanis. Now when five people meet in a coffee shop they cannot be sure whether these people are Azerbaijanis, Turks or Lezgians. Formerly we were not aware of this issue, but today we think it is important.

He also noted that ethnic tensions in Azerbaijan became magnified, since the army is weak.<sup>36</sup> In his view, Azerbaijan needs a strong army and the Nagorno-Karabakh problem has to be solved. Only then can the ethnic issue in the country be handled rightly. At present, Azerbaijan can avoid ethnic frictions only by reassuring the cultural rights of all groups. Similarly (T), who is a scholar at the Baku State University, agreed with (O), a scholar from the Baku Business University, and said that, 'Both as Muslims and as Azerbaijanis we accept one another. What contributes to this is the widespread intermarriage among various different groups'.

On 22 December 1992, during Elçibey's rule, the Azerbaijan Parliament (Milli Majlis) ratified a law defining the Azerbaijani language<sup>37</sup> as Turkish language. When Heydar Aliyev took over the government Turkish language was replaced by Azerbaijani language.<sup>38</sup> The opposition claims that one cannot call the Talish language an Azerbaijani language. The same applies to ethnic Turks whose language is Turkish. Therefore it should be called Azerbaijani Turkish, not Azerbaijani language. A leading scholar (U) argued that, the government used the minorities to come to power and the minorities feel frustrated because they think the government is taking advantage of them. This argument implies that the present government does not acknowledge the rights of ethnic Turks. A leading member of the PFP (M) said,

We are ready to protect the rights of everyone; however, since we constitute the majority, the minorities should also respect our rights. All Turkish nationalists agree on one principle; that is, we should protect our rights while reassuring the rights of other ethnic groups.

Many of the interviewees pointed out that not only the identity debate but also the interference of neighbouring countries could fuel ethnic tensions in Azerbaijan. For example, the Azerbaijani Kurds are seen by some people, as a potential danger, since they assume that they have links with the PKK in Turkey. Moreover, Russia's support for the Lezgians and Iran's support for the Talish are sensitive topics with respect to security concerns. However, as an interviewer from the government (B) and another from the opposition (U) believed, these potential external threats would lessen as Turkey and the United States begin to play a more active role in Azerbaijan. For example, in (B)'s view, who was a deputy from the NAP, even at present, Turkey plays a role in Azerbaijan that helps deter ethnic tensions. He also warned that if the central authority in Azerbaijan weakens, the issue of ethnicity might become a real danger.

The difference between the concepts of *milletçilik* (patriotism) and *milliyetçilik* (nationalism) in Azerbaijan parallels the debate of Turkism versus Azerbaijanism. There is no agreement as to the content and meaning of *milletçilik* (patriotism) and nationalism. Sometimes nationalism can be synonymous with chauvinism and fascism and it is defined as perceiving one's nation as superior, not respecting or tolerating other nations. This is explained as the Soviet heritage. Thus, all political parties avoid being defined as a nationalist party for fear of being accused of chauvinism. For example (M), from the PFP argued that their enemies, namely the Russians and the Armenians, accuse their party of being nationalist since they emphasize Turkism. As in other Turkic republics, in Azerbaijan too,

nationalism means to attribute priority to one's national and cultural values, thus violating the rights of other nations. In (M)'s words:

Our nationalism is not a fascist type of nationalism. We do not humiliate other nations. We do not want to violate the rights of other nations. Our nationalism means to protect the rights of our own nation; not to enslave other nations.

As proof of his view, (M) stated that when they were in the government, they developed policies protecting the rights of the national minorities and ethnic groups, including opening schools and setting-up TV channels for them. He emphasized that it was not the communists but the Azerbaijani nationalists who took such measures. However (M) argued that although loving one's own nation does not necessarily mean claiming superiority, there are some radical and fanatic nationalists who consider the Turks as superior to other nationalities in Azerbaijan who use expressions like: 'Turks are good but the Talish are bad people'.

To associate nationalism with chauvinism, as expressed by (G) who was one of the advisers of Elcibey, is seen as an outcome of Soviet mentality. In (G)'s view, nationalism or Turkism is not an expansionist nationalist ideology. On the contrary, the PFPA's Turkism is a defensive Turkism. In fact, most of the other pro-Turk or Azerbaijani *milletci* (patriotic) movements are all forms of defensive nationalism. As an academician from the Caucasus University (C) stated:

In this country, natsia-nationalism has always been conceived as something negative. In Germany, fascism means nationalism, not *milletcilik* (patriotism). There is a difference of terminology. We express the same idea with different words.

(E) from the Baku Institute of Political Science argued that, following the collapse of the Soviet Union the Azerbaijanis first advanced the ideology of Turkism and later, when the PFPA came to power, they matured it further.<sup>39</sup> However, the party later defined itself as *milletci* (patriotic) since Turkism meant chauvinism. However, this was perceived by many as a play on words. Some members from both the government and the opposition shared (E)'s view.

The concept of *millet* (nation) needs further clarification in the Azerbaijani context. As argued by a member of the Musavat (K), a former minister during the Elcibey rule, the concepts of *millet* (nation) and *milliyet* (nationality) are interchangeably used and there is no clarity on the content and meaning of nation. Moreover, in his view, the difference between *millet* (nation) and *ethnos* was never clearly stated by the Soviet policy-makers.

In the 1950s Stalin stated that nations (societies) represent the ethnic structure of a given society and that ethnicity has an essence that is more permanent than any other structure such as class. Class and the ideology representing a class were regarded as temporary entities whereas nations were regarded as permanent (Slezkine 1994, p. 449). Consequently, ethnic identity began to be conceptualized as a self-enduring identity (Shanin 1989). Based on these ideas, the Soviet Institution of Ethnography developed the concept of *ethnos* in the 1960s under the leadership of Bromley. Ethnos exists independently of the Marxist stages of development as an outcome of objective-historical circumstances (Bromley and Kozlov 1989). As Tishkov (1997, p. 230) states, Soviet scholars defined nations basically in ethno-cultural terms, referring to a common history, culture, language and a certain 'ethnic territory' and the nation was the highest stage reached by an *ethnos* in its evolution to capitalism and socialism. In this respect, nationalism in Russia is understood as ethnic nationalism. Although it is a controversial issue, some argue that the Soviet policy was not based on assimilation, since traditional social identities that had been constructed around class, clan, tribe, and local patterns of urban and rural residence were rebuilt on identities based on ethnicity under Soviet policies. This argument is supported by the fact that the Soviet state further institutionalized ethnic identity in 1932 by introducing the internal passport system through which the state established itself as a regulatory agency for ethnicity (see Saroyan 1996, p. 403).

Within this perspective, the interviewee (K) referred to above said, there are no *millet*s (nations) but several communities called *ethnos* in Azerbaijan<sup>40</sup> and to avoid conceptual ambiguity, *millet* (nation) should be distinguished from *ethnos*. Another member of the Musavat (H) claimed that in Azerbaijani Turkish, the term *halk* (the people) is different from the term *millet* (nation) and that the meaning of the former is rather ambiguous. As Tishkov (1997, p. 265) argues, the term 'the people' is still the basic category with which ethnic Russians and other ethnic groups identify. Again as (H) emphasized, since the terms *millet* (nation) and ethnic group have the same meaning, they should be distinguished from one another where the definition of nation should be political rather than ethnic.

Based on these arguments, the academician (C) who supports the opposition argued that the Lezgians, Talish, Kurds, and Avars should not be considered as *millet*s (nations) since these groups are ethnic groups. According to him, there are certain requirements to consider a group as constituting a nation, and among these the possession of land is the most important. Since not all ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan possess land of their own, it is not possible to define these groups as constituting a nation. According to this criterion, the Lezgians, Talish,

Kurds, and also some other groups do not possess land (territory) whereas the Azerbaijani (Azeri) Turks do.<sup>41</sup>

A member of the PFPA (G), who has developed the term the *Azerbaijani Turkleri milleti* (the nation of Azerbaijani Turks), clarified the discussion summarized above. To begin with, he stressed that in Azerbaijan the concepts of *halk* (the people), *millet* (nation), and *milliyet* (nationality) are different from one another. *Halk* (the people) refers to all those who live in a specific region whereas *milliyet* (nationality) is a concept referring to the past and the future of the people who have been living in that specific region. The concept of *millet* (nation), on the other hand, has a political implication since it refers to a specific geographical territory and to the lifestyle of a given group who has been living on that specific territory. The definition of the nation of Azerbaijani Turks is based on this criterion. Consequently, the scholar (C) added that the term, the nation of Azerbaijani Turks, implies that the Azerbaijani nation is the name of the community that has been living on the land that belongs to the Azerbaijanis. This community includes all ethnic groups that live on Azerbaijani land. In this sense, as stated by the interviewee (C), the definition of the nation of Azerbaijani Turks is not different from the definition of the American nation since it aims to integrate, not to divide, all the groups that live in Azerbaijan. These arguments suggest that the concept of nation should be severed from its ethnic roots and be re-defined in political and territorial terms.

Based on an interview with a leading member of the Musavat (F), his party conceptualizes the term Azerbaijani nation both as a political requirement and as a political perspective, not as *ethnos* as Stalin formulated. According to Stalin (quoted in Saroyan 1996, p. 402), 'A nation is an historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.' Although Stalin's definition of a nation is subject to criticism, his emphasis on territory as an attribute of the nation is the least discussed point. The Stalinist period was marked by the production of cultural representations of ethnic identity in which the linkage of nation and territory was decisive (Saroyan 1996, pp. 402, 406). Thus, according to (F) as referred to above, Azerbaijani nation means the political unification of all citizens living in Azerbaijan. He stated that although he accepted himself as a Turk, he belonged to the Azerbaijani nation in political terms. Moreover, although the non-Turkish groups such as the Lezgians and Talish were not ethnic Turks, they did form part of the Azerbaijani nation.

These attempts to classify some groups as a nation and others as ethnic groups (*ethnos*) but recognizing others' rights, imply that those who form the majority strive for defending their rights because of their

being the majority. The member of the Musavat (K), a former minister during the Elçibey's rule, said:

We did not develop a nation. We are divided on the basis of groups, tribes, villages and cities. . . There were khanates in Azerbaijan and each khanate thought of itself as a state. Since these entities were not able to unite under the roof of a state, there has never been national unity. Nationalism means to create a national psychology and to create a nation. Take the USA. People from all over the world had come together and created not only a common culture, but also a nation based on this culture. They developed the notion of citizenship. People do not ask each other their ethnic origins. . . Including the Kurds, Talish, Azerbaijanis, Turks, and non-Turks we should all unite and protect our homeland. . . Nationalism is necessary and useful until the nation-states are built. Once they are built they are no longer useful.

As Brubaker (1996, pp. 55–6, 60) notes, the Soviet system of institutionalized multinationality produced two incompatible definitions of nationhood, one territorial and political, the other personal and ethnocultural. In the first definition the nation is conceptualized as a territorially bounded and self-governing collectivity. However, not every territorial polity is a nation. In the second definition, the nation is not dependent on political territory. The nation is an ethnocultural community, typically a community of language. In this respect political borders do not coincide with ethnocultural frontiers and nationality is carried by persons which is not territorially fixed. Thus, in the Azerbaijani case to argue that a nation should be defined in political rather than ethnic terms is an attempt to merge the Azerbaijani nation (which is defined as an ethnocultural community) with a politically defined territory. Moreover, the endeavour to define a nation in political terms is an attempt at national unification around the dominant ethnic or national group suggesting that other minority groups belong to the dominant nation. To identify the state in relation to the dominant nation and to have special claims on the state as the dominant nation is a move towards conceptualizing the state as a nation-state in Western terms, which also requires a common perception of a unitary Azerbaijani nation.

There are two major lines of argument regarding the discussions of ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijani people: conservative and revisionist. The former includes the *Median concept* aiming to legitimize the unity of northern and southern Azerbaijanis (claiming the Iranians as the ancestors of the Azerbaijanis) and the *Caucasian/Albanian idea* promoting the territorial integrity of Soviet Azerbaijan in opposition to Armenian territorial claims (declaring the Azerbaijanis as the direct

descendants of the ancient inhabitants of the country, i.e. as an indigenous ethnic group). Both theories isolate the Azerbaijanis from the Turkic world. For the conservative school, cultural and biological features are the main characteristics of a people and this school emphasizes political and cultural continuity. The latter, revisionist school, is the pan-Turkic debate aiming at the consolidation of the Azerbaijanis on the basis of language where the language issue played a much more important role than it did for the conservatives. This school associates ethnicity with language affiliation. Loyalty to the Turkic language means the strengthening of the relationships with the Turkic world, especially with Turkey. The revisionist school began to develop in Azerbaijan in the 1960s in opposition to the ideas imposing Iranian ancestry (Shnirelman 2001, pp. 127, 144–46).<sup>42</sup>

The revisionist views became popular during the late 1980s and early 1990s when they were encouraged by both APF and the Communist Party of Azerbaijan [CPA] leaders, who used the same pan-Turkic slogans that were spread by the major Azerbaijani scholars. Elcibey, who promoted Turkic nationalism and referred to the great Turkic heritage in his public speeches, shared the ideas of the revisionist school. He was also negative about Iran, calling for the establishment of Greater Azerbaijan (see Shnirelman 2001, pp. 134, 137), which was an idea in line with the revisionist school. Although the ideas of the revisionist school are reflected in the narratives of the national identity debate of the members of the opposition, the government elite does not offer an explicit ethnogenetic theory with respect to the issue of nation-formation in Azerbaijan. However, the ideology of Azerbaijanism and the mixed culture argument recalls the *Caucasian Albanian* version of ethnogenetic theory of the conservative school, i.e. conceptualizing the Azerbaijanis as an indigenous ethnic group who are territorially integrated.

### ***Yerlicilik* (local loyalties) and regionalism**

Based on an interview with an academician (C) from the Caucasus University, tribalism ended in Azerbaijan towards the end of the nineteenth century. During the 1920s and 1930s, *yerlicilik* (meaning loyalty to localistic tendencies and/or favouring local ties) replaced tribalism in a different form. In tribal societies, according to the interviewee, individuals were connected to one another through economic ties where economic and kin networks were considered as lineage networks as formulated by the interviewee. *Yerlicilik*, on the contrary, refers to the clustering of the people living in the same region to seize power in the government. As the same interviewee (C) stated:

*Yerlilik* is our biggest problem at the moment. There are more than 7 million people in Azerbaijan. There are more than about 150–200 thousand people who live in each region. It is not possible to base the Azerbaijan economy on a single region. There are people from other regions who can be useful to this country. It is not good to exclude these people from the government; it will cause a lot of trouble. There is an even more serious problem than *yerlilik*; the people spread slander against one another for their own personal benefits. If the people from one region do not want others to come to power, they slander against their ethnic origin. For example, in the area where I was born there live more than 1 million people. This is the most densely populated area where the 170–180 thousand of the population are Talish and the rest are Turks. But some slander against those who live in this region claiming that they are all Talish.

During the interviews regionalism was sometimes used in place of *yerlilik*. According to an academician (T) from the Baku State University, *yerlilik* can be named as Soviet regionalism since it is the outcome of a Soviet policy that aimed to keep the various peoples of the Soviet Union apart from one another. Many of those interviewed claimed that those in the government foster regional favouritism by excluding others from the labour market. In other words, it was argued that Aliyev has replaced the former clientalist network with his own.<sup>43</sup> An academician (O) from the Baku Business University who supports the opposition also argued that regionalism has expanded rapidly following Aliyev's arrival in Baku in 1969. According to (T), networks built up through favours and personal ties, enabling those who are close to the government to accumulate wealth, alienates the Azerbaijani poor from the system. Moreover, political cleavages overlap with *yerlilik* in a rather complex way and this causes the poor to long for the Soviet period. In other words, according to (T), as long as regionalism continues to exist, nostalgia for the Soviet period will not disappear.

The interviewee (I) from the Turan News Agency who supports the opposition also argued that one of the most important cleavages in Azerbaijan stems from *yerlilik*, since the existing regional and sectarian identities prevent the Azerbaijanis from thinking of themselves as Azerbaijanis in self-reference. Besides, it was claimed that all political parties were established on the basis of *yerlilik* and that this further deepens the already existing cleavages. In (I)'s view, this was regarded as a threat to the future unity of Azerbaijan. *Yerlilik* was also considered as a restraint to democratization. A leading member of the PFPA, (M) noted that regional cleavages are deeper than ethnic ones. He also argued that regionalism is a deep-rooted issue stemming from the khanate system of the past<sup>44</sup> and the present regional

divisions overlap with the historical territorial divisions of the khanate system. Each region in Azerbaijan has developed its own elite group that is regarded as a continuation of the khanates. Consequently, those from the same region support one another and loyalty is given first to kinship groups or intimate friends. As (M) argued, in some areas regional divisions overlap with ethnic divisions while in other areas regional divisions are primary. This indicates that, regional divisions do not always overlap with ethnic divisions and that the former is perceived as more damaging, having a destructive impact on Azerbaijani politics.

### **Conclusion**

The processes of forming new identities including sub-national, national and supra-national, and also the emergent strategies of how to govern and oppose reveal the dynamics of the process of nation-building in Azerbaijan after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The conceptualization of Azerbaijani national culture and identity is influenced by the Soviet mentality of governance, suggesting that Soviet concepts of nationalism and ethnicity have been deeply internalized by the Azerbaijani elite, who are the main actors in the process of nation-formation. The development of post-Soviet identities and the competing ideologies resting on these emergent identities presents an interesting case where we see the crystallization of cultural norms and values with an increasing emphasis on locality in the process of nation-formation. The Turkish identity on the one hand and Azerbaijani identity on the other, appear as two mutually exclusive identities. However, we also witness a process whereby ethnic, regional, and local ties and loyalties appear as sources of principal attachment all of which are continuously being defined and re-defined in line with changing conceptions of nation-state, nationalism and ethnicity. This suggests that the existence of conflicting old and new identities is a major obstacle for national unifying policies that rest on a sense of common history and destiny to its members. Although the Soviet heritage plays a part in this process, the Azerbaijani case fits into the pattern of the twentieth century state-and-nation formation where ideological and cultural aspects come to the fore.

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## Notes

1. For a discussion of the consequences of ethnic nationalism in the Soviet Union, see Tilly (1991).
2. The theoretical model discussed above is in line with the critique of some of the current theories of nation and state formation as discussed in Hunt and Tokluoglu (2002).
3. The term Azerbaijani has been used in this article in place of Azeri, Azerbaijani Turk or Azeri Turk since it is the most widely used name by the Azerbaijanis themselves when referring to themselves. The members of the opposition mostly define themselves as Azerbaijani/Azeri Turks as will be discussed in the text.
4. As Fuller (1996, p. 122) argues, the APF was successful in mobilizing the masses but there was also a three-way split within the ranks of the APF. The first faction was the European-oriented moderates advocating the building of a democratic Azerbaijan state within the USSR who later broke with the APF in early 1990 and formed the Social Democratic Group. The second faction was the national democrats who proposed secession from the USSR and the Unification of the Northern (Soviet) and Southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan. This was the group which came to power in 1992. The third faction was a number of religious and ultra-leftist groups who sided with the APF for tactical purposes.
5. For more detailed information about the clashes between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians and the different phases of the Karabakh issue, see Dragadze (1996, pp. 282–86).
6. The Musavat (equality) Party, the small group of ex-Himmatists, was first organized in 1912. In 1913, Resulzade became the leader of the Musavat. He guided its development from vague pan-Islamism toward Turkism. The secular definition of nationalism later became the essence of the ideology of Musavatism (see Swietochowski 1985, pp.74–5; Swietochowski 1996, pp. 219–20).
7. For a discussion of the nature of Azerbaijani nationalism during the early twentieth century, see Cagla (2002).
8. The formation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic between the period 1918 and 1920 is extremely important for all in Azerbaijan since it is always a point of reference for the idea of national sovereignty. The period between 1930 and 1990 is seen as a process during which the national culture in Azerbaijan has been repressed and gradually lost most of its elements (see Nerimanoglu, *Manuscript*, p. 3). Balayev (2004, p. 89) also notes that during the same period the activities of all socio-political organizations were repressed. Also, for a further discussion of the factors that led to the establishment of the first republic in 1918 including the nature of the Azerbaijani elite at that time, see Altstadt (1997, pp. 110–114).
9. For an updated political history of Azerbaijan, see Ergun (2002).
10. For a fuller discussion of Azerbaijan's relations with Turkey, Iran and Russia during Elcibey and Aliyev's rule, see Fuller (1996, pp. 131–39, 152–53) and Hunter (1994, pp. 84–5, 93–4).
11. In 1998 the PFFA was not yet divided into two wings, namely the *traditionalists* and the *reformists*. This separation took place after the death of Elcibey.
12. During the interviews the words 'Russia/Russian' and 'Soviet' were used in a contradictory way. Sometimes they were used interchangeably (e.g. Russian or Soviet culture, Russian or Soviet period), at other times, 'Soviet period' was used to refer to a historical era. However, when cultural and linguistic issues were being discussed they preferred to use 'Russian culture', 'Russian Empire', and 'Russian imperialism'. The members of the opposition at the beginning of the interviews frequently used the expression 'Soviet period' but when they started commenting on the negative aspects of the same period, they began to use the word 'Russian'.
13. In one of his speeches Aliyev (1997a, p. 169) said, 'You should know that Azerbaijan's development in the twentieth century is associated with Russia. European science and civilization came to Azerbaijan from Russia'.
14. A board member of Musavat and also a former minister during the Elcibey period, (K), claimed that during the Soviet rule the Russians tried to isolate the Azerbaijanis from the

Turkish and the Muslim world. In his view the people are now aware of the fact that all of the existing Turkish states are similar. For example, the languages spoken in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan are the vernaculars of the same language. Based on this, (K) argues that since the nation-state is the only powerful political organization, Azerbaijan must immediately form its own nation-state. However, forming a nation-state does not solve the problems. European states are in the process of integration and the Turkish peoples of the Caucasuses and Central Asia should create a common Turkish language or at least develop economic integration in order to have a say in world affairs.

15. Shnirelman (2001, p. 82), too, following Swietochowski and Altstadt, argues that, there was no all-embracing fanatic pan-Turkism. Although some authors did write about the unity of all Turks, what they had in mind was the unity of the Turks in northern and southern Azerbaijan and they referred to intellectual and cultural unity rather than political.

16. Interview with (L) who is a leading member of the Musavat Party, a board member of Musavat as well as a former ambassador during the Elcibey period (H), another leading member of Musavat (F), a member of the government who was one of the advisers to the president (Y), (R) from the Presidential Apparatus, and a deputy from the NAP (B).

17. For a discussion of the birth of the Azeri nation and the influence of Iran, Arabs, Turks, and Russians in historical context, see Shnirelman (2001). Shnirelman (2001, pp. 79–91) argues that, the formation of the Azeri nation was based on two models that were connected with external political orientations: conservatives and liberals. The conservatives emphasized the religious life following Iran and the liberals aimed at friendship with the Ottoman Empire. However, the Azeri elite later attempted to ally with the Kazan' Tatar jadids (Shnirelman 2001, p. 82).

18. Hunter (1994, p. 63), referring to the two tendencies within Azerbaijan pulling in the direction of Iran and Turkey, asserts that what shaped the behaviour of the Azerbaijanis in 1918 was the immediate security concerns, personal interests, and international power equations, rather than sentimental and cultural attachments. Hunter (1994, p. 63) also argues that, the same holds for the post-Soviet Azerbaijani republic where, for some ultranationalists, ideological and cultural factors play a more significant role.

19. This trilogistic programme was developed by Ali Bey Huseinzade, a well known Azerbaijani Turkist during the early twentieth century. His programme was further developed and popularized by a Turkish nationalist Ziya Gokalp (for further details, see Swietochowski 1996, p. 219).

20. In the *Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic* (1999), in Article 23, which is titled as 'Symbols of the Azerbaijan state', there is no reference to the ideologies associated with the colors of the Azerbaijan flag as discussed above. This article describes only the colors and shape of the Azerbaijan flag (*Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic* 1999, p. 9). However, in *Musavat Partiyasinin Sorğu Kitabı* 1998 (Questionnaire Booklet of the Musavat Party), there exists information about the history of the Azerbaijan flag and about the association between the colours of the flag and the ideologies of Turkification, Islamization, and Modernization (*Questionnaire Booklet of the Musavat Party* 1998, pp. 9–12). Moreover, in the same booklet it is noted that Musavat's first party programme had an Islamic character whereas after 1913 the program was developed further by the ideology of Turkism (*Questionnaire Booklet of the Musavat Party* 1998, p. 17). In *Musavat Partiyasinin Programı ve Nizamnamesi* (Musavat Party's Program and Charter), Turkism appears as one of the ten principles of Musavatism, which is defined as the basis of the rapprochement and cooperation between the Turkish peoples and states (*Musavat Party's Program and Charter* 1997, p. 5).

21. Turks in popular usage in Azerbaijan are often the Miskheti/Ahiska Turks who fled to Azerbaijan in 1988 and 1989. In other Central Asian Turkic communities, too, Turks are mostly thought of as Ahiska Turks.

22. As Shnirelman (2001, p. 98) notes, the Russian historian V. M. Sysoev treated the history of Azerbaijan not as an ethnic history but as the history of various political bodies each with a different language and cultural traditions. In this respect, Azerbaijan was a political and geopolitical rather than an ethnic concept.

23. Swietochowski (1996, p. 220) notes that in the last years before 1914, the term 'Turkic' with regard to the Azerbaijanis was openly coming into use side by side with the old appellations 'Tatars' or 'Transcaucasian Muslims'. Moreover, Shnirelman (2001, p. 82) claims that at the beginning of the twentieth century, literate people began to call themselves 'Turks' without being sure whether they needed a literary language and a nation-state of their own. Astourian (1994, p. 53) shares the views of the two scholars of Soviet Muslims, Bennigsen and Wimbush, who assert that even in the mid 1980s the Azerbaijanis were not yet completely 'consolidated' as a nation.

24. In 1904 the young members of the intelligentsia formed the Muslim socialist organization called *Himmat* (Endeavour). The *Himmat* defended Muslim solidarity against the Russian pressure and contributed to the upsurge of pan-Azerbaijanism. In 1920, Moscow took measures against this movement; there was to be one Communist organization for all nationalities inhabiting Azerbaijan. The name *Himmat* was replaced with Azerbaijani. The term Azerbaijani carried both territorial and national connotations (see Swietochowski 1996, pp. 214, 230).

25. Turan is the imaginary homeland for all Turkic peoples and it was an idea that was developed during the late Ottoman Period. Today the idea of Turan is still supported by some extreme nationalists in Turkey especially by members of the Nationalist Action Party some of whom are actively involved in Azerbaijan.

26. The concept of nation will be discussed further in the following section with reference to its usage in Azerbaijan compared to its usage in English or in Western history.

27. Some argued that the definition of Azeri refers only to those groups who are considered as Turks. Thus the people react to this definition, but there is insufficient information to test this argument.

28. Russians in Azerbaijan made up only one-tenth of the urban population and their proportion in the rural population has always been very low. In other words, by 1989 Azerbaijan had lost almost all its Russian population. Today in all three Transcaucasian countries Russians do not constitute more than 6 per cent of the population (see Anderson and Silver 1996, p. 493). As Yunusov (2001) notes, in the 1989 population census there were 392,300 Russians in Azerbaijan (5.6 per cent of the population) whereas in the 1999 Census their numbers decreased to 141,700 (1.8 per cent).

29. According to Suny (1996, p. 386), the rate of population decline of Armenians in Azerbaijan was 1.9 per cent between 1970 and 1979 (from 484,000 to 475,000). By 1979 Azerbaijanis constituted just over 78 per cent of the population of the republic. Since there has been little migration, in 1979, 86 per cent of all Soviet Azerbaijanis lived in their home republic. As Yunusov (2001) notes, in the 1989 Census the number of Armenians living in Azerbaijan was 390,500 (5.6 per cent) where the majority of Armenians lived in former NKAO (145,500) and capital Republics (179,900). After the Karabakh conflict the number of Armenians decreased sharply and now they basically live in Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the 1999 Census, 120,700 Armenians live in Azerbaijan. However, Yunusov (2001) argues that, with a close study of the statistical data of the 1999 Census it is possible to see that this number (which, in fact, is a rough overestimation) shows the Armenians who in fact live in Nagorno-Karabakh. In Yunusov's (2001) view, the number of Armenians in Azerbaijan is 645 (36 men and 609 women) and more than half (378 or 59 per cent of Armenians in Azerbaijan) live in Baku and the rest in rural areas. In practice, the real number of Armenians outside of Nagorno-Karabakh should be within the limits of 2–3 thousand as many have changed their surnames and have not been counted as Armenians in the census.

30. According to Dragadze (1996, p. 273), in 1979, the population of Azerbaijan was 6,025,500. The ethnic composition was said to be roughly: Azerbaijanis 4,708,000; Armenians 475,000; Russians 475,300; Daghestanis 205,100; Jews 35,500; Tatars 31,400; Ukrainians 26,400; Georgians 11,400; others 57,100. Dragadze (1996, p. 273) comments that, since the successive local governments in Azerbaijan have been nervous of the potential autonomy claims of ethnic minorities, little attention was paid to ethnic groups like the Talish, the Tats, Muslim Georgians and other minorities who until recently had to declare

themselves as Azerbaijani. Moreover, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh changed the ethnic population figures due to the influx of Azerbaijani and Armenian refugees from both countries. Fuller (1996, p. 147) notes that many Russians and Jewish members of the technical intelligentsia of Azerbaijan emigrated. A total of 115,000 people left Azerbaijan between January 1991 and June 1992, of these more than 5,000 went to Israel and 2,500 to the United States.

31. According to Suny (1996, p. 385), Transcaucasia witnessed greater ethnic homogeneity in each republic. By the end of the Soviet era Georgians were nearly 70 per cent of the population in Georgia, Azerbaijanis nearly 80 per cent in Azerbaijan, and the Armenians about 90 per cent in Armenia.

32. A Talish Mugan' Republic was declared in 1919 which was ended by Ottoman troops (Shnirelman 2001, p. 84). In 1993, a local commander, Akram Himatov, once again briefly declared it but this movement was put down (Hunter 1994, p. 105). For further information about the Lezgians and Talish minorities, see Fuller (1996, pp. 144–45), Altstadt (1997, p. 143), and Shnirelman (2001, pp. 84, 90–91).

33. Anderson and Silver (1996, p. 487) argue that the census figures by nationality from the region should be treated with some caution, especially in 1989. However, referring to the Talish, they claim that the census count of the smaller nationalities in 1989 appears to have been more comprehensive than previous census counts.

34. Tohidi (2000 pp. 259, 260 footnote 9) notes that out of every ten young married men, at least one is married to a non-Azerbaijani woman, usually a Russian or a member of an ethnic group close to Russians. It is also noted that, the official rate of inter-marriage in Azerbaijan in late 1980s was about 14 per cent in urban and 2 per cent in rural areas.

35. In Aliyev's speeches the idea of Azerbaijanism appears predominantly in the period of late 1993. The concept of Azerbaijanism is mainly formulated in accordance with the principles of plural-democratic society. For example, referring to the attempts to create a Talish-Muhan Republic, Aliyev (1997a, p. 97) said,

As you know, our Azerbaijan is unified Azerbaijan. All citizens are subject to equal rights. Until now there has never been a distinction in Azerbaijan among Talish-Azerbaijani, Turk, etc. This is something put forward artificially. All Talish people as Azerbaijanis, as loyal citizens of Azerbaijan, lived and unified within the united family of Azerbaijan for hundreds of years.

In another speech Aliyev (1997a, pp. 302–303) said,

Azerbaijan is a multi-ethnic republic, multi-ethnic country. For centuries many nations had lived, are still living, and will continue to live together here. All Azerbaijan citizens from different nations were born in our republic and Azerbaijan is the homeland for all of them. All people are subject to equal rights.

With reference to the Avars, Aliyev (1997a, pp. 110–111) argued that,

In the Balaken rayon...conflicts between Azerbaijanis and Avars are artificially created... However, there, neither the Avar nor the Azerbaijani will oppose each another. This is true for other areas as well. In Azerbaijan no one can create conflict or opposition between nations, between ethnic groups...Azerbaijan is unified. Azerbaijani people are unified.

For similar definitions, see Aliyev (1997a, pp. 75, 76, 102, 460) and Aliyev (1997b, pp. 568–69). In the *Constitution of Azerbaijan Republic* (1999) the concept of Azerbaijanism does not appear. In Article 25, it is stated that, 'Rights and liberties of a person, citizen cannot be restricted due to race, nationality, religion, language, sex, origin, conviction, political and social belonging'; in Article 44, 'Everyone has the right to keep his/her nationality. Nobody may be forced to change his/her nationality'; in Article 45, 'Everyone has the right to use his/her mother tongue. Everyone has the right to be educated, carry out creative activity in any language, as desired. Nobody may be deprived of the right to use his/her mother tongue'

(*Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic* 1999, pp. 11, 16). In Aliyev's reply to the appeal of the Azerbaijan intelligentsia, which requested him to guide the *NAP*, Aliyev (*Programme and Charter of the Party New Azerbaijan* 1995, p. 18) said,

There appeared dangerous tendencies aiming to split Azerbaijan... Azerbaijan has become the homeland for all citizens that lived on its territory for decades and centuries. To preserve and develop the united whole Azerbaijan on democratic principles – that is the main task in the strengthening of the independent Azerbaijan state.

To summarize, in these views that can be associated with the ideology of Azerbaijanism, there is no reference to a majority or to minorities as there is in the ideology of the opposition. For example in *Musavat Party's Program and Charter* (1997, p. 8), it is noted that,

Azerbaijan Republic is a state where the majority of its people are the Azerbaijan Turks. However, if we express in M. E. Resulzade's words, this does not give them extra priority, on the contrary, it gives the Turks additional responsibility in maintaining national unity.

36. According to Fuller (1996, p. 127), there are two main reasons for the lack of an effective Azerbaijani army. First, there was no reserve of trained native military personnel on which to draw. In the Soviet army there were only 700 Azerbaijani officers, of whom 500 agreed to serve in the embryonic Azerbaijani armed forces. Second, there was a lack of training and discipline among the rank and file and many young men deserted to avoid military service.

37. During the interviews Azeri Turkish, Turkish language or Azerbaijani (*Azerbaycanca*) were used informally. Sometimes Azerbaijan Turkish was used to distinguish it from the Turkish in Turkey. There is not enough evidence to argue that there was a systematic difference between the government and the opposition.

38. In relation to the discussions regarding the new constitution of Azerbaijan in 1995 Aliyev (1997c, pp. 462–63) stated in one of his speeches,

Our language has been named as Azerbaijan language from 1936 until today... In the Constitution of 1978 it was stated that Azerbaijan language is the state language. Today we all say that our language is Azerbaijan language... In our territory, within the borders accepted by the United Nations, those who live in the Azerbaijan Republic are all Azerbaijanis... The state language of the independent Azerbaijan Republic is Azerbaijan language.

39. A scholar, (T), who has been to Turkey pointed out that, the perspective named as Turkism is much more powerful in Azerbaijan than it is in Turkey. As he noted,

We went back to historical sources and put forward the idea of Turkism. However, Moscow is trying to take advantage of this development. Our Turkism is not against other ethnic groups who live here. Mehmet Emin Resulzade, Ali Bey Huseyinzade said that Azerbaijan is the Turkish homeland. However, we accept the existence of other ethnic groups and we are not against them, all citizens of Azerbaijan should improve together. There is a return to Turkism.

40. Tagizade (2003, p. 154) argues that, during the period before Gumilev the term *ethnos* was not used for a long time in Soviet literature. Instead, terms such as *kabile* (rod-tribe), *halk* (narod-the people), and *millet* (natsiya-nation) were used, each pointing to a more developed state of human communities. This idea was formed on the basis of Stalin's definition of *milliyet* (nationality). As Tagizade (2003, p. 155) explains, the term *ethnos* formulated by Bromley was used as a scientific concept and the formulation of this concept was regarded as an important scientific development since *ethnos* was regarded as a reality whereas *millet* (nation) as a tool for political manipulation. This is why there have been controversial debates about the content of the term *millet* (nation) for a long period. Today the concepts of *ethnos* and *millet* (nation) are used interchangeably but the concept of *millet* (nation) refers to an *ethnos* that has reached to the status of a state. Since the concept of

*millet* (nation) has a political content, the researchers who study ethnic problems mostly use the concept of *ethnos* in Russia today. Moreover, as Tagizade (2003, pp. 156, 158) notes, theories of ethnogenesis (genesis of *ethnos*) are also not fully accepted by scientists. Gumilev's theory of ethnogenesis, which is the first theory of ethnogenesis, is a good synthesis of various diverse areas such as biology, history and space science among others. However, Tagizade (2003, p. 162) claims that, theories of ethnogenesis are used for political purposes although they are useful sources that can provide answers to many different questions (see also Tagizade 2002).

41. Atabaki's (2000) perspective regarding the origins of Azerbaijanis in terms of whether they are Turks, Azeri or Azerbaijani and whether they constitute a nation or an ethnic group support this argument. As Atabaki (2000, p. 12, emphasis in original) argues,

Regarding Azerbaijanis as a *nation* or as an *ethnic group* implies that one has a working definition of both these socio-political terms...the essential question will be how the notion of Azerbaijanis' being a *millet* (nation) rather than merely a *qowm* (ethnic group) gained ground, at least among a fraction of the politically minded Azerbaijanis, which was to have important consequences for the autonomous movement in Azerbaijan.

42. For a detailed discussion of the two schools, see chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12 of Shnirelman (2001) and Smith *et al.* (1998, pp. 50–3). For a more detailed elaboration of the *Median* (and *Atropatenian*), the *Caucasian Albanian* (or *Autochthonous*), and the *Turkic theme* and the variations within each perspective, see Astourian (1994).

43. For the details of favouring local ties in Azerbaijan, see Suny (1996, pp. 378–83). See also Suny (1993, pp. 118–20), where he argues that corruption and (ethnic) favouritism characterizes normal Transcaucasian political and economic practices. Altstadt (1997, p. 142), too, argues that, in the Soviet environment, important political and economic figures tended to establish long-time friends from their home regions and Aliyev also appointed Nakhjivanis from his home region and excluded others, especially those from Ganje who were the traditional rivals.

44. One of the most important consequences of Russian rule in Azerbaijan in the long run was the gradual dismantling of the khanates' structures characterizing the traditional society of Azerbaijan. The traditional policies disappeared during the 1830s and 1940s weakening deeply-rooted local particularisms. A uniform Russian territorial administration was introduced, and by the 1850s Azerbaijan was consolidated into two provinces, Baku and Elizavetpol (Ganja) (Swietochowski 1996, p. 212).

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