BETWEEN TURKEY, RUSSIA, AND PERSIA: PERCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN AZERBAIJAN AND ARMENIA AT THE TURN OF THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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This article traces the emergence of the modern national identities of Azerbaijanis and Armenians back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In doing so, it emphasizes the ways national identities were shaped by Azerbaijani and Armenian intellectual elites, reflecting their historical heritage of being parts of Turkish, Persian, and Russian empires. Accordingly, the evolution of mutual perceptions of Azerbaijanis and Armenians vis-à-vis their imperial neighbors–and vice versa–is highlighted. The article focuses on the period of the second half of the nineteenth century until 1920/1921, when following a two-year intermezzo of independent states in the South Caucasus, both Armenia and Azerbaijan were effectively incorporated into the emerging Soviet Union.

The ethnic conflicts that have dominated the political landscape of the South Caucasus–a historical crossroads of many civilizations, empires, cultures, and peoples–since the years following the Soviet Union's collapse have generated strong ethno-nationalisms. They have played a crucial role in determining inter-ethnic, and to a certain degree also inter-state, relations in this post-Soviet area. Given the strategic location of the South Caucasus–with its small populace historically sandwiched between great powers–local ethno-nationalisms have been considerably affected by the perceptions of neighboring states. These states once used to be empires encompassing what are now Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. In fact, modern nationalisms of contemporary Azerbaijanis and Armenians have been significantly shaped in a complex historical context of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century. This reflects the way local elites interpreted the ethno-linguistic, cultural, and political legacy of three major empires–Turkey, Persia (Iran), and Russia, of which Azerbaijan and Armenia had been part for centuries.

Focusing on the historical context, this article seeks to highlight the evolution of perceptions toward Russia and the Russians, Turkey and the Turks, Persia and the Persians. They developed themselves in the milieu of Azerbaijani and Armenian intellectuals, as these perceptions helped shape modern ethnic consciousness of the two South Caucasian nations. The article hence focuses on the period of the second half of the nineteenth century, tracing the developments up until 1920/1921. This was when the two-year intermezzo of Armenian and Azerbaijani independence came to an end following the occupation of these territories by Communist Russia.

AZERBAIJAN

A Historical Perspective of Relations with Persia and Persians or Turks and Turkey

Since the eleventh century, when Oghuz nomads entered the picture, Iran's history can be regarded as a Persian-Turkic symbiosis, taking cultural influences from both of these civilizations. Following a *coup d'état* in 1925, the Pahlaví Dynasty, the first purely Persian dynasty in Persia, was founded. Its power was not limited to the borders of historical Persia. From the eleventh century[1] until that point, tribes and clans of Turkic origin had ruled over Persian lands, Azerbaijan, and the surrounding areas.[2] For nearly ten centuries, Iran represented a peculiar conglomerate of Iranian and Turkic nations; until relatively recently, the actual toponym "Iran" carried much greater semantic weight than it does today.

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Safavid ruler Shah Isma'il I made Shi'i Islam the state religion. The spreading and strengthening of his hold on the region rested on the military elite of the Qizilbash[3] tribal union, which brought together the Turkic tribes of Persia and the southern Caucasus. The majority of Azerbaijanis and Persians adopted Shi'i Islam at that time. This strengthened the devotion of Turkic tribes to the idea of Iranian statehood and particularly intensified the Persianization of the tribal elite. The new religion was a powerful impulse for territorial expansion. Decades of so-called Persian-Turkish or Shi'i-Sunni wars followed. The fortunes of war alternated, favoring one side then the other. From the sixteenth century through the first third of the nineteenth century, the khanates of northern and southern Azerbaijan were either an integral part of Persia or were in a state of war against Tabriz/Isfahan/Teheran. Successful attempts to gain emancipation from its domination were, however, not uncommon.[4]

A definitive change did not arrive until the two Russo-Persian wars, in which St. Petersburg was more successful. According to the peace treaties of Gülistan (1813) and Türkmänay (1828) the territory of the north-Azerbaijani khanates (north of the border on the river Arax) was handed over to the Romanovs. Azerbaijan thus came to be divided into northern and southern parts inhabited by one nationality that spoke one language. From the turn of the nineteenth century onwards, the idea of a divided homeland or *severance* (*ayriliq* in Azerbaijani) was reflected in the ideological and political solidification of Azerbaijani national consciousness. This influenced the beginnings of nationalism.[5]

The formation of the Azerbaijani identity at first played out as a contest between two ideological and political currents. The first current stressed the primacy of culture and religion (*société persane*), while the second emphasized origin derived from language. The creation of a unified Azerbaijani identity was effectively hindered not only by traditional clan/territorial differentiation, but also by the existence of two widespread denominations within Islam. While the preponderance of Azerbaijanis were adherents of Shi'i Islam and were inclined toward the Persians, the strong Sunni minority–inhabiting mainly the west and north of Azerbaijani territory–identified more with their Turkish and Dagestani fellow believers.[6]

As Tadeusz Swietochowski writes, "the depth of the sectarian split was reflected in the nineteenth-century wars waged by Russia, when the Tsardom was able to use Shi'ite volunteers against Turkey in 1828 and 1853-1856 as well as against Shamil's Ghazavat (holy war) in Dagestan. By contrast, the Sunnis tended to support Shamil, sometimes taking up arms, and showed restiveness at times of Russo-Ottoman conflicts."[7] In the 1830s alone, there were three local uprisings in the northern areas of contemporary Azerbaijan bordering on Dagestan, all connected with Shamil's movement.

In the end, Turkish language and culture won out. In the early twentieth century, the pro-Turkish or pro-Turkic orientation of Azerbaijani identity was clearly profiled. In the meantime, the role of religion in the emerging secular, pro-Western, modernistic nationalism was limited. The result was the growing

orientation of the local elite toward the Ottoman Empire, which was regarded as the flagship of the (pan-) Turkic movement and at the same time as a leading Muslim country. It was to the Ottoman Empire that the pan-Turanist revivalists from the Crimea to the Altai tied their hopes.

No less intensely felt was the rediscovery of "Turkic brotherhood" in various parts of the Russian Empire–in the Volga-Ural region, northern and southern Caucasus, Central Asia, and Crimea.[8] Thanks to the developments in the first decades of the twentieth century, the political forces that were behind the emergence of the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–1920) could declare: "The Muslims of the Transcaucasus [i.e. Azerbaijanis] together with the Turks constitute one nationality."[9] From the beginning of the twentieth century, bourgeois circles in particular laid claim ever more vocally to their Turkic identity. Still, not at all uncommon among the aristocracy was a historically based orientation toward Iranian statehood. Moreover, the apolitical countryside still identified itself more on the basis of religious criteria as Muslims or in accordance with family, clan, or territorial criteria, the foundations had been laid for the Azerbaijani identity as a lingual and territorial phenomenon.

This noteworthy change of identity was sealed during the last months of World War I, when in the autumn of 1918, after the withdrawal of the Bolshevik army and of Armenian revolutionary forces, the Ottoman troops and the mostly Azerbaijani Army of Islam briefly occupied Baku. The Turks were welcomed in Azerbaijan as rescuers and liberators who, together with Azerbaijani militia units, rid them of the bloody rampaging of Armenian militias, even at the cost of murdering thousands of Armenian civilians in the capital. Until their withdrawal in the fall of 1918, when they were replaced by British occupation forces, Turkish troops were largely responsible for the creation of an independent Azerbaijan. They also provided significant aid in the fight against Armenian rebels in Karabakh.

A Historical Perspective of Relations with Russians and Russia

The relationship with Russians in the Muslim Caucasus has never been unambiguous. By most of the population, Russians were regarded as "infidels" who–as opposed to the Christian Armenians and especially Georgians–exhibited almost no sympathy toward Azerbaijanis, especially during the initial period of colonization. For St. Petersburg, the Muslim Azerbaijanis represented a potentially treacherous element. At the time of the wars against Russia in the nineteenth century in the northern Caucasus, there was a threat several times that the conflict could spill over into territory inhabited by Azerbaijanis. This was potentially a very unpleasant scenario for the empire in view of the local population's strong ties to Persia and Turkey.[10]

According to the *Caucasian Calendar for 1853,* Caucasian Tatars (i.e. Azerbaijanis) are "fiery, impatient, predisposed to brutality, preferring an itinerant way of life; when the government weakens they cross over to a different government or to anarchy; they do not forgive wrongs, but are vengeful, tenacious…"[11] About ten years earlier, a Russian officer reported from Karabakh that with the Tatars, their way of life and their morals were inconsistent: "According to their customs and beliefs, lying, banditry and plundering are worthy of praise," and to abduct a girl, and while doing so to kill "at least a man or even her very own

parents and then to marry her is praiseworthy, youthful heroism." As a consequence, "they cannot be real supporters of the Russian government, and in case of any political upheaval, they will be prepared to rise up against us."[12]

Even sources that attribute to Azerbaijanis mostly positive qualities ("hard-working, manly, full of determination, not inclined toward changes and novelties") do not fail to emphasize that "one cannot at all rely on their peacefulness and loyalty."[13] Still, the number and the extent of anti-colonial uprisings in Azerbaijani lands were small, especially in comparison with other areas of the Muslim (northern) Caucasus. Among other things, this was due to the fact that in its regional policy, St. Petersburg relied on the established Azerbaijani aristocracy, who were granted a certain degree of autonomy. At least at first, this approach provided the appearance of continuity of power and legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary farmers and herdsmen, for whom the arrival of the Russians changed almost nothing. Occasional local disturbances were generally suppressed by the armed forces of the local feudal lords, khans, or beks, and not by mounted Cossacks or the army.

Existence within the framework of the Russian state provided the inhabitants of the southern Caucasus with decades of stable socioeconomic growth. However, it was primarily Russian, Armenian, and foreign capital that profited from the oil wealth of Baku. Also playing a considerable role was the long-term influence of Russian culture and learning, especially for the formation of the local intellectual elite, for whom the Russian language and culture served as a bridge to Western culture and modernizing tendencies that (Western) Europe was undergoing. This is another reason the Azerbaijani revivalists of the nineteenth century, with their anticlerical tendencies, had generally positive relations with Russia and Russian domination.

Although the Azerbaijanis, as a Muslim nationality, were relieved of the duty of serving in the Russian army, some of the old feudal elite regarded military service as an honorable privilege. Still, there was noticeably less participation by Azerbaijani nobility in the officer corps of the Russian army than by the nobility of Georgia and Armenia, also corresponding to the degree of involvement of those ethnic groups in the societal life of tsarist Russia.[14] Relatively weak anti-Russian attitudes characterized the period after the Russian revolutions of 1917. This can at least partially be explained by the fact that the disappearance of the power of St. Petersburg from the region left behind a power vacuum that both the Armenians and Azerbaijanis tried to fill, striving for control over several areas that they jointly populated. Armenians and not Russians were perceived as the chief threat accompanying the brief existence of the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–1920). Even after the South Caucasian republic had been occupied in April 1920 by divisions of the eleventh Red Army, anti-Russian attitudes did not strengthen. The armed resistance to the occupation in certain areas of the country was not, however, definitively suppressed until 1924.

The period of Soviet domination was characterized by escalating autonomy for Azerbaijan–especially after World War II, the newly established local elite played an ever greater role–and by generally calm Russian-Azerbaijani coexistence. Yet the ultimate outcome was tragic. On January 20, 1990, Soviet Army units invaded Baku. Their official goal was to prevent the mass murder of Armenian civilians, being instigated by fanatical crowds, mainly refugees from Armenia. The Soviet troops deployed in the capital city and its environs had been following the events passively for more than a week. The Azerbaijanis, however, clearly interpreted this brutal attack, which led to the deaths of dozens of civilians and injury of hundreds more, as punishment from Moscow for the increasingly emphatic demands for independence

heard at ongoing demonstrations by many tens of thousands followers of the nationalist opposition in Baku. Their original mission had been to prevent the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh under the administration of Yerevan.

ARMENIA

A Historical Perspective of Relations with Turks and Turkey

From the ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451),[15] Armenia began to view the West and Persia to the south) as a source of constant threat. Since then, the geostrategic interests of Constantinople, which strove to gain this important territory in its struggles with the Persians and later the Arabs, combined with a religious effort to bring the Armenian "heretics" to Orthodox Christianity. Although the Armenians gave Byzantium a number of important statesmen and military commanders, Greek-Armenian antagonism was so strong at that time, that many Byzantine Armenians viewed the victorious breakthrough of Seljuq Turks into Anatolia a thousand years ago as salutary. This antagonism continued, and even seemed to have strengthened during the Ottoman era.[16]

At first, the strengthening of the Turkish element in Asia Minor actually brought Armenian communities in Anatolia more religious freedom. The Muslim rulers granted this to the vassals of other faiths in exchange for loyalty. This benevolence included the possibility of maintaining their own faith and identity. The Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, like other "People of the Book" (Christians and Jews), enjoyed the status of *dhimmis* or wards of the Muslim community or state. They were regarded as an independent *millet*, i.e., political-religious community. While that formally determined their lower social status,[17] they still had the guaranteed possibility of stable development within the framework of communities under autonomous administration.[18]

During the Balkan uprisings in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Armenian community, unlike the other Christian subjects, did not question the sultan's authority. As a result of their loyalty, Armenians received the distinction of being called *millet-i sadika* or a faithful nation. In the nineteenth century Turkey, the standing of the Armenian urban community–generally the bourgeoisie and intellectual elite–grew enormously. It reached its apex in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Armenians were at the heart of the economic, cultural, and–in a certain sense–political life of that empire of multiple nationalities.

During this period, however, the Armenians of eastern Anatolia became targets of ever more intensive attacks by the Ottoman army and Muslim militias. From 1894 to 1896, there were massacres of the Armenian population. According to various estimates between 80,000 and 300,000 Armenians were killed.[19] This sharp turnaround in Ottoman relations with Armenians was caused by a whole series of factors.

Foremost among them was the new tax system introduced in Turkey in the second half of the nineteenth century. Yet the higher taxes had to be paid without the abolition of the old taxation system, which existed

in areas of Anatolia in parallel to the new one and accommodated the traditionally high demands of feudal lords–landowners, the Kurds generally and Armenians as well. This also left room for ubiquitous corruption, cronyism, and anarchy. The situation further deteriorated after thousands of so-called Muhajirs [20] or Balkan Muslims were settled in the none too fertile regions inhabited by Armenians. This was usually done to the detriment of the Armenian and Syriac Christians.

As if that were not enough, at the same time Istanbul gave approval for ever larger numbers of nomadic Kurdish tribes to migrate farther to the north and northeast, i.e., into territory that had traditionally been populated by the Armenian element. “The Kurds, nomads and semi-nomads, would winter in the regions of Mush, Van, and around Ararat, occupying upkeep and tribute from the Armenian peasants, forcing them to purchase their protection (*hafir*), pillaging with impunity, and carrying off women and flocks. The usual reactions of the Armenian peasant and artisans were flight and emigration toward Constantinople, Smyrna, and Transcaucasia.”[21]

In response to these developments, in the mid-nineteenth century in some areas of Anatolian Armenia, armed divisions began to appear spontaneously. Their main goal was to resist Kurdish raiders. The first Armenian rebellions (in 1862 in Zeitun and in 1863 in Van and Erzurum) were anti-Kurdish in character. As with the earlier Balkan uprisings, Christian farmers initially asked for the sultan’s protection. Yet “[l]ocal Turkish officials ran the towns with little regard to central authority, and Kurdish beys held much of the countryside under their sway. Often the only way Istanbul could make its will felt was by sending in the army.”[22]

These events, which took place in the Anatolian countryside, coincided with an emancipation movement that was gaining strength among Armenian intellectual circles in Russia and Europe as well as in the major Ottoman cities. Once the “Armenian question” had entered the stage of grand European diplomacy at the Congress of Berlin (1878), it was politicized once and for all. The initial efforts of a handful of Armenian revivalists to improve the situation of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire were soon taken up by St. Petersburg as part of its foreign policy agenda. This was an excellent tool for meddling in the internal affairs of the “sick man of the Bosporus.” The publicly declared goal of protecting Ottoman Christians was a convenient excuse for expansion into the interior of Anatolia.

The disconsolate state of Armenian farming in Anatolia became the center of attention for several Armenian revivalist organizations. This included the three oldest and largest Armenian socialist revolutionary parties, whose members did not hesitate to use terrorist or diversionary-terrorist means of armed resistance during certain periods. These were the revolutionary group Protectors of the Homeland, founded in 1882, and the three aforementioned socialist revolutionary parties–Armenakan (meaning “Armenian” in the Armenian language), founded in 1885; Hnchak (Armenian for “bell”), founded two years later; and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Haykakan heghaphokhakan dashnaktsutiun), also known by the shorter name Dashnaktsutiun, founded in 1890.

In various stages of their existence, these parties aspired for the founding of an independent Armenian state or the incorporation of eastern areas of Anatolia, regarded as an integral part of western Armenia, [23] into the empire of the Romanovs. Before long, it came to clashes with Kurds in several east-Turkish areas. Attacks were also launched against Ottoman military units and police. Sometimes the targets of the attacks were even Muslim civilians. It was generally believed that St. Petersburg was supporting these activities. The revivalist organizations thus helped to mobilize originally apolitical Armenian villagers, leading to the formation of an armed resistance movement.

In a relatively short time, Ottoman Muslims began to view the Armenians as a homogenous ethnic-religious community, a "fifth column," trying to undermine the state's integrity with the support of foreign powers. In any case, after a series of uprisings and wars–which cost the humiliated Ottoman sultanate extensive territory in the Black Sea region and the Balkans while also causing the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees to an economically devastated country–the seeds of distrust of the Ottomans toward their Christian fellow citizens had now been sown.

The High Porte was entirely deaf to the desires of its Anatolian vassals. Wherever possible, it resolved attempts at separatism in the standard manner–through military intervention. This was also confirmed by the suppression of several local rebellions of Kurdish tribes in Anatolia before the 1860s by army units. Sultan Abdul Hamid II (in power from 1876 to 1909), nicknamed "the Butcher" (not only among Ottoman Christians), ruled during a period of Ottoman fears of the destructive activity of European powers trying to break up the empire. The efforts toward emancipation of the Armenian community were thus *a priori* interpreted in the light of this global Christian conspiracy against the caliphate.

At the same time, Istanbul was becoming more and more concerned with the increasing cooperation between certain Kurdish tribal chiefs with ideas of autonomy and the Russians. These fears were confirmed during the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878). Turkey was defeated in 1891. Soon after, on the basis of an analogy with mobile Cossack regiments, whose deployment in the previous war had proven extraordinarily successful, Abdul Hamid II authorized the formation of the Kurdish militia divisions (*hamidiye*), to which he lent his name. Besides, "it was important to stiffen the resolve of Kurds as part of the empire."[24] The Kurdish tribes from which members of the hamidiye were recruited were exempt from paying taxes. Their only duty was military service to the sultan, for which they received regular pay. Nonetheless, "when the government could not afford to pay hamidiye officers, it offered them tax-collecting rights on local Armenian villages, causing further hardship for the latter."[25]

Before long, the armed Kurdish tribes, given broad authority for protection of the border with Russia in the eastern provinces, began engaging in battles over the region's limited resources. This occurred both among individual hamidiye divisions and between those divisions and the local population, whether Kurdish, Turkish or Christian. "Local commanders did not differentiate between enemies of their tribe qua tribe, and enemies of the hamidiye cavalry."[26] Eastern Anatolia thus became an arena of regular armed conflicts of a local character, in which the Christian population suffered the most.[27]

The Armenians' calls on Istanbul to intervene in the name of protecting its Christian vassals and in order to stabilize the remote East-Anatolian vilayets were in vain. At the end of the nineteenth century, Istanbul generally avoided armed intervention in the area, partly in order not to incur the wrath of the populous and powerful Kurdish tribes, and partly because the Kurdish-Armenian antagonism seemed to have suited Istanbul. Given this situation, the aforementioned massacres of 1894–1896 took place with the participation of local police forces and especially of hamidiye units and ordinary local Muslims.[28]

The tragic climax of the deepening crisis was the so-called Armenian Genocide[29] (1915). The circumstances of this event have not been satisfactorily brought to light to this day. The Young Turk regime appears to have decided in part for the liquidation of the Armenian population and in part for its expulsion, in order to prevent the feared penetration into the interior of Anatolia.[30] The result was the murder of hundreds of thousands of people, the greater part of the Armenian population of Anatolia, by Ottoman divisions and hamidiye units; others were subjected to fatal conditions during deportation.[31]

The remaining Armenian survivors were then Kurdified of Turkified, and tens of thousands of others managed to escape to the disintegrating Russian Empire, the West (to France or the United States), Syria, Lebanon, or other Arab areas of the sultanate (which before long came under the mandate of France or the United Kingdom).

Massacres also recurred during the assault of the Turkish army across the entire newly-created Armenian Democratic Republic in 1918 as well as during the brief Turkish-Armenian War (1920). In response, there were extensive ethnic cleansing and murders of thousands of people belonging to the Turkish and Azerbaijani population, who constituted approximately one third of the population of independent Armenia. Used as an excuse for this was the fact that Turkish farmers and herdsmen had largely taken the side of the Turks.

It was during the period of the tragic events at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries that the view of Turks as a "nation of murderers and ruffians" became definitively sealed in the Armenian national consciousness. This was further strengthened by conflicts with the Azerbaijanis of the southern Caucasus.[32] The interpretation of the catastrophic year 1915 fit in thematically with the religiously imbued self-image of Armenians as a nation of martyrs. This seems to be the source of the ease with which the events became an integral part of the Armenian national myth. Even before 1915, literary and musical works had spoken of the suffering of Armenian women and children, the courage of Armenian partisans, and the boundless brutality of the Turks.[33]

A Historical Perspective of Relations with Russians and Russia

Russia's penetration of the Caucasus was welcomed by the Armenian intellectual and especially clerical elite, as well as by ordinary people. Their common religion played no small role in this. Divisions of Armenian volunteers had existed beginning with the two Russo-Persian Wars (1804–1813, 1826–1828), during which the territory of eastern Armenia became part of the empire of the Romanovs, and in nearly all of St Petersburg's Turkish campaigns in the Caucasus and eastern Anatolia (1806–1812, 1828–1829, 1877–1878, 1914–1917).

The Russians were perceived by the Armenian revivalists, whose ideas had a significant cultural/religious component, as liberators from the thousand-year yoke of the "heathen." In the first half of the nineteenth century, some Armenians even believed St. Petersburg would allow the restoration of a sort of Armenian tsardom, as an autonomous entity under the protectorate of the Romanovs' empire. Although for various reasons such optimistic hopes were never fulfilled, Armenian migration to the Caucasus from the Ottoman Empire and Persia was supported by Russian authorities in every possible way. Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees founded numerous prospering communities all over the Caucasus as well as in the southern parts of Russia itself.[34]

As far as the Russian view of Armenians is concerned, these attitudes underwent certain changes during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Until 1917, hatred toward the "Jews of the Caucasus," as Armenians were often called for their business talent, was not uncommon among "Greater Russian" chauvinists. Unlike the Azerbaijanis, who were generally distrusted by the Russian authorities and who

were sometimes seen as having the character of noble savages,[35] Armenians were regarded more as a religiously and politically kindred element. According to the Russian opinion of the day, Armenians "without any doubt take first place among the inhabitants of the Transcaucasus for their ability, industriousness and effort to educate themselves" and "have always been regarded as the most industrious workers of the East."[36] Russian authorities accounted them as "peaceable, gentle, cautious, calculating, diligent, tied to their families, industrious, delicate, quiet, obedient, trying to act [in compliance with] the law…"[37] Besides their talent at business, many documents underscored the unquestionable loyalty of the Armenians, who were viewed as "devoted to the Russian government and could not betray us."[38]

From the early 1900s, with elements in the Armenian elite becoming revolutionary, the Russian attitude began to regard Armenians as a potentially dangerous "nation of revolutionaries and conspirators." According to the daily *Russkoe slovo*, "any Armenian in the Caucasus is regarded as a revolutionary just for being Armenian."[39] The Armenians were the most politically conscious inhabitants of the Transcaucasus at the time and offered the stiffest resistance to the Russification campaign that St. Petersburg had begun in the 1880s. Russian relations to the Christian Armenians during this period could be best characterized as condescending accommodation.

In spite of occasional disappointment with the policies of St. Petersburg in the affairs of eastern Anatolia or the none too pro-Armenian approach of the colonial authorities regarding the so-called Armenian-Tatar War of 1905,[40] the Armenians were always sympathetic toward Russians. This was the result of the Armenians' increasing concerns for their own safety. They saw themselves as "an island of Christendom in a hostile (i.e., Turkic-Muslim) environment." In direct proportion to the deterioration of Armenian relations with their immediate neighbors (the Turks and Azerbaijanis) over time, the orientation of Armenia's elite toward Russia strengthened. Russia was seen as the only power willing and able to provide sparsely populated Armenia with a guarantee of existence in a situation of geopolitical stalemate.[41]

In spite of the country's occupation by the Eleventh Red Army (1920)[42] and the end of Armenian independence, during the following decades this consciousness served for the consolidation of the nationality both in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and among nationalistically oriented Armenians in the diaspora. The 70 years of existence within the USSR further strengthened Armenia's orientation toward Russia. Also contributing to this was the significant social role played by Armenia in the Soviet state. These factors also help explain why in Armenia–unlike in neighboring countries–the breakup of the Soviet Union was accompanied by almost no anti-Russian sentiment.

CONCLUSION

During the Soviet and post-Soviet period, a modern national self-awareness for Azerbaijanis and Armenians arose. This reflected the process of self-identification that afflicted small peoples of the borderland areas at the crossroads of empires. In case of Azerbaijanis and Armenians, that process involved Russia, Turkey, and Persia.

The Azerbaijani intellectual elites in the nineteenth century considered “Persianness” and “Turkishness” as two identity options for themselves. The first principle mentioned reflected the existence of a highly Persianized culture and common Shi’i religion of the predominant part of the Azerbaijani populace that had been part of Persia for centuries. The second phenomenon emphasized the primacy of language and thus ethnic origin, which was thought to cement Turkophone Azerbaijanis with Anatolian (or Ottoman) Turks. The primacy of language eventually prevailed as Azerbaijanis overwhelmingly began to identify themselves with neighboring Turkey–and their Turkic roots.

Over time, their nationalism obtained strongly Turkic intonations. This was amplified as early as 1918, when Azerbaijanis found themselves in a bloody armed conflict with neighboring Armenians. It was the aid provided by the Turkish forces in the Caucasus that helped Azerbaijanis eliminate the Armenian threat and lay the foundations of independent Azerbaijani statehood. In the meantime, a once close relationship to Persia gradually diminished. This was conditioned by the strongly secular character of Azerbaijani nationalism and the overall decline of religiosity during the Soviet period. The Russians and Armenians were also considered as adversarial cultures.

While the perceptions of Persia played a rather marginal role in the development of Armenian self-consciousness of the last centuries, the dramatic events of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century that took place in eastern Anatolia and the South Caucasus laid the ground for modern Armenian nationalism. Since then, anti-Turkic sentiments have been the core of that ethno-nationalism as they established themselves during the last decade of the existence of the Ottoman Empire. This period was marked by a series of massive Armenian pogroms and massacres culminating in the 1915-1916 events in which hundreds of thousands of Armenians were murdered.

The negative perceptions of Turkey and the Turks were further magnified during what came to be known as the Armenian-Tatar War of 1905, as well as during the 1918-1920 wars waged by independent Armenia with neighboring Azerbaijan and Turkey. Importantly, Azerbaijanis began to become increasingly identified with Anatolian Turks, which helped refocus anti-Turkic sentiments toward Turkophone Azerbaijanis as well. In the meanwhile, the image of Russia was sealed as the only ally–a Christian nation that was able and willing to provide Armenians with the necessary assistance for the latter to secure their physical survival in the unfriendly environment of Turkic (Muslim) neighbors.

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[1] Something of an exception was the period of the domination of the Mongolian dynasty of the Jalairids (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries), which followed the occupation of Iran by Mongolian troops in the mid-13 th century and the annexation of its territory to Pax Mongolica.

[2] These were Seljuqids, Timurids, Qara Qoyunlu, Aq Qoyunlu, Safavi, Afshars, and Qajars. All of these dynasties or ruling tribes with the exception of the Timurids, who were related to the Uzbeks, were

descendents of Oghuz Turks.

[3] In Azerbaijani, *Qizilbash* (Qzlba) means “golden-haired” (*qizil* – “gold”, *bash* – “head”).

[4] In contemporary Azerbaijani historiography, there is a tendency to regard state entities established by Turkic dynasties not as Persian or Iranian, but as Azerbaijani, a typical tendency of post-colonial nations.

[5] For more on the history of the Iranian Azerbaijanis, see, in particular, Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 1–77.

[6] Referring to contemporary Russian sources, Tadeusz Swietochowski states that at the moment of the Russian occupation of the Azerbaijani khanates, the number of adherents to Sunni Islam was roughly equal to the number of Shi’a. The number of rebellious and more politically active Sunnis gradually declined because of their migration to the Ottoman Empire. Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 8.

[7] Tadeusz Swietochowski, “National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Azerbaijan, 1905–1920,” in Ronald G. Suny (ed.), *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change. Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1996), pp. 211–12.

[8] These were mainly Transcaucasian Azerbaijanis and Kazan and Crimean Tatars (the most politically active Muslims in the empire of the Romanovs) who were behind the emergence of Pan-Turkism and who promoted it the most. Only afterwards did it spread to the west, to the Ottoman Empire, where after the collapse of the Pan-Islamic and Pan-Ottoman project, it soon became a constructive ideology. From there, during World War I, it also began to be promoted back in the direction of the “Russian Turks.”

[9] *Azärbaycan*, September 25, 1918.

[10] In the end, the Caucasian wars did not spread to Azerbaijani areas, with the exception of the northernmost, mountainous parts of Azerbaijan. This was particularly thanks to the fact that the resistance north of the Caucasian Mountains was fought under the banner of Sunni Islam, strongly influenced by Islamic mysticism (Sufism). Occasionally, the north-Caucasian highlanders were supported by Azerbaijani Sunnis inhabiting the mountainous areas bordering on Dagestan, which, together with Chechnya and the Cherks lands of the northwestern Caucasus, was a hotbed of anti-colonial resistance.

[11] *Kavkazskiy kalendar na 1854 god* (Tiflis: 1853), pp. 352–53.

[12] Attributed to Capt. Pruzhanovsky, representing the Russian colonial administration in Shusha, Karabakh, 1845, in *Kolonialnaja politika Rossijskogo carizma v Azerbajdžane v 20–60ie gody XIX v.* (Moscow: 1936), Vol. 2, p. 21.

[14] Ordinary Azerbaijanis have fought on the side of the Russians, for example in World War I. At that time, the ranks of the legendary Caucasian Homeland Cavalry Division (formed in 1914 and known to its contemporaries as the Savage Division because of its tenacity and the exotic appearance of the horsemen (Caucasian Muslims)) also consisted of a Tatar (Azerbaijani) regiment. The regiment was deployed in fighting against German and Austrian divisions in the western areas of the Russian Empire. In this connection, it is interesting that Azerbaijani volunteers from the ranks of the Shi’a joined the Russian

army during the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878), while some of their Sunni countrymen allied with the Turks, even going to battle.

[15] As a consequence of this council, the Armenian Apostolic Church or Gregorian Church (though not the Monophysites) split away from Byzantine Orthodoxy.

[16] In this regard, the most telling historical document is the account of the twelfth-century Armenian chronicler Matevos Urhayetsi (Matthew of Edessa/Urha). The seventeenth-century historian Simon Lehatsi has interesting things to say about the now nearly forgotten Armenian-Greek antagonism.

[17] This concerned the ban on carrying weapons, riding a horse, owning land, holding a position in the state administration, etc. Over time, however, the restrictions eased. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was relatively commonplace to encounter Armenians at the highest levels of state administration–especially in Ottoman cities.

[18] In an effort to limit the influence of the more numerous Greeks, especially in the towns of Asia Minor and in Constantinople/Istanbul, the Ottoman sultans did not hesitate to support Armenians (as well as Jews), who before long began to push the Greeks out of activities that had traditionally been regarded as the Greeks' domain–trade and finance.

[19] For more details, see Arman Kirakosian (ed.), *The Armenian Massacres, 1894–1896: U.S. Media Testimony* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004).

[20] These were immigrants from the ranks of the rebellious Cherkes (Circassians or Adyghes), Abkhazians, and Abazins who had been forced by St. Petersburg to emigrate from the northern Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire.

[21] Anahide Ter Minassian, "Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1887–1912)," in Ronald G. Suny (ed.), *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1996), p. 146.

[22] Ronald G. Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 104.

[23] Until 1915, western Turkish or Anatolian Armenia was the home of the vast majority of the Armenian population. According to a census of the Ottoman Empire in 1914, it had 1,295,000 inhabitants of Armenian nationality. See Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi* (Istanbul: Belge Yayinlari, 1988), p. 142. According to a count made by the Armenian Patriarchate in 1913, the number of Armenian inhabitants in the empire was 1,914,000. See Raymond H. Kevorkian and Paul B. Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire Ottoman à la vielle du génocide* (Paris: ARHIS, 1992), p. 22. This difference of more than half a million in the data on the size of the Armenian population of Turkey on the eve of World War I makes it more difficult to determine the precise number of Armenian victims.

[24] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: IB Tauris, 2007), p. 58.

[27] The conflict between Armenians and Kurds at the end of the 1890s turned into an ethnic conflict. Also playing a role was the fear among Kurdish tribal chiefs of the desire for autonomy or irredentist aspirations of Armenians who, with the declared support of Russia and Western countries, were striving for control

over territories that the Kurds themselves claimed.

[28] Attempts at conciliation between Christians and Muslims ended definitively after the fiasco of the Young Turk Revolution (1908). While it originally promoted giving the country's Muslim and Christian communities equal rights, before long–after the failure of the Pan-Ottoman project–it led to the strengthening of Pan-Turkism (and partially Pan-Islamism as well) as a state ideology.

[29] This study does not aim to deal with the question of whether the tragic events of 1915-1916 were or were not a genocide in terms of international law. Terms such as "genocide" and "massacres" are used interchangeably and without any prior hidden agenda.

[30] After the debacle of Enver Pasha's Third Army on the Caucasian front, the tsar's troops reached well into the Anatolian interior. In early April 1915, on the route of the Russian army in the province of Van (inhabited by many Armenians), there was a massive uprising. Thousands of Muslim civilians were murdered. What disturbed Istanbul even more, however, was the threat that the Van rebellion could spread to the vast territory of eastern Anatolia, making it relatively easy for the Russian army to advance farther into the west.

[31] Armenian sources usually cite figures of up to 1.5 million people. See Vahakn Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995).

[32] It is not without interest that Armenians regarded Azerbaijanis as "Turks" (in light of the ethnic-lingual affinity with Anatolian Turks) long before Azerbaijanis had largely assumed an ethnic-lingual identity and began to regard themselves as "Turks" or "Azerbaijani Turks."

[33] Works by chroniclers who do not fit in with this image are virtually unknown in Armenia. Only selected episodes of Turkish-Armenian coexistence have been accepted. Likewise, there is no talk of the large role of Kurdish tribes in the massacres and genocide.

[34] The Russo-Turkish Wars in particular were an impulse for powerful waves of Armenians migrating to Russia. While in 1873, the Armenian population of the Caucasus was 333,242, in 1886, it stood at 690,615, and by 1916, it had reached 1,211,145. See *Svod materialov dlya issledovaniya ekonomicheskogo byta gosudarstvennykh krestyan Zakavkazskogo kraya* (Tbilisi: 1886), Vol. 2, pp. 234–36.

[35] This Russian view of the inhabitants of the Caucasus is largely based on a very stereotyped image of the North Caucasian highlander.

[37] *Kavkazskiy kalendar na 1854 god* (Tiblisi: 1853), p. 360.

[38] In 1845, Captain Pruzhanovsky, a representative of the Russian colonial administration in the Karabakh city Shusha, quoted from *Kolonialnaya politika Rossijskogo tsarizma v Azerbayjane v 20–60ie gody XIX v.* (Moscow: 1936), Vol. 2, pp. 21–23.

[39] *Russkoe slovo*, February 1905.

[40] The so-called Armenian-Tatar (Back in Tsarist times, modern-day Azerbaijanis were called Tatars)

War broke out in 1905 as communal fighting involving Azerbaijanis and Armenians. It hit oil-rich Baku first and then spread across many regions of the South Caucasus with mixed Azerbaijani and Armenian populace. According to the dominant version of these events, the masses of poor Azerbaijanis–provoked by Russian governors pursuing a classical divide-and-rule policy–attacked their neighbours, prosperous Armenian craftsmen and traders, whom they perceived to be unscrupulous exploiters. The first hostilities between the two ethnic groups claimed nearly 10,000 victims.

[41] In addition to class considerations, this played a decisive role for Armenian Communists as well as for Armenian nationalists. After Armenia's defeat in the Turkish-Armenia War (1920), the Armenians were aware of the structural imbalance of Turkish and Armenian forces and the inability to avoid a repeat of the Armenian massacres. Thus, in late 1920, they caused an uprising in Armenia in order to annex the country to the Soviet state. The Russians were then regarded as the "lesser of evils." There was also a strong feeling, forcefully supported during Soviet rule, of having been betrayed by the Western powers, who had promised Armenia significant territorial gains in eastern Anatolia at the expense of the defeated Ottoman Empire under the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), but who never came to the defense of Armenian interests.

[42] In reality, the entire territory of Armenia was not occupied until 1921, after the Russian and Armenian Bolsheviks managed to crush the nationalist uprising in the Zangezur Mountains in the south of the country, with the cooperation of units of the local Azerbaijani home defense.