

REFLECTIONS OF NATIONALISM AND THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE POLICIES IN  
NATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN POST-SOVIET AZERBAIJAN

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## **ABSTRACT**

### REFLECTIONS OF NATIONALISM AND THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE POLICIES IN NATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN POST-SOVIET AZERBAIJAN

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After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the newly independent Azerbaijan has entered its nation-building process. Azerbaijani political elites aimed to re-form national identity through a set of language policies. In this context, they focused on the alphabet, and on the name of the official language which they consider as markers of their national identity. Turkism versus Azerbaijanism as the two competing ideologies have left their mark on this process. Language has been used as a political tool for promoting Turkish identity first and then Azerbaijani identity. This study will analyze the construction of Azerbaijani national identity in the post-Soviet period scrutinizing language policies in the light of the ethno-symbolist approach where symbols, myths, values, and memories are the decisive elements for the formation of national identity. In this regard, language has assumed a vital role by ascending Azerbaijani national consciousness and by awakening the feeling of unity and uniformity among the Azerbaijanis. I argue that the Azerbaijani presidents relied on language policies to assist the nation-building process in the country, which had a strong influence on the creation of the Azerbaijani national identity together with the influence of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. In this context, I will examine the shifts, continuities, and ruptures in the political discourse of the Azerbaijani elite with regard to the name of the nation and language after Azerbaijan's independence in 1991.

**Keywords:** National Identity, Language Policies, Ethno-symbolist Approach, Turkism, Azerbaijanism

## ÖZ

### SOVYET SONRASI AZERBAJCAN’DA MİLLİ KİMLİK İNŞASINDA DİL POLİTİKALARININ ROLÜ VE MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİN YANSIMALARI

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Sovyetler Birliği’nin dağılmasından sonra, yeni bağımsız Azerbaycan ulus inşası sürecine girmiştir. Azerbaycan siyasi elitleri bir dizi dil politikaları aracılığıyla milli kimliği yeniden oluşturmayı amaçlamıştır. Bu bağlamda, milli kimlik inşası için, milli kimliğin göstereicileri olduğunu düşündükleri alfabe ve resmi dilin adı üzerine odaklanmışlardır. Türkçülük ve Azerbaycancılık, birbiriyle rakabet eden iki ideoloji olarak ulus inşası sürecine damgasını vurmuştur. Dil, önce Türk kimliğini, daha sonra Azerbaycanlı kimliğini geliştirmek için siyasi bir araç olarak kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışma, Sovyet sonrası dönemde Azerbaycanlı milli kimliğinin inşasını dil politikalarını inceleyerek semboller, mitler, değerler ve anıların milli kimlik inşası için belirleyici unsurlar olduğu etno-sembolcü yaklaşımın ışığında tartışacaktır. Bu açıdan, dil Azerbaycanlı milli bilincini arttırarak ve Azerbaycanlılar arasında birlik ve benzerlik hisleri uyandırarak hayati bir önem üstlenmiştir. Milli bilincin güçlenmesinde önemli bir etkisi olan Dağlık-Karabağ savaşının yanı sıra, Azerbaycan cumhurbaşkanları ülkede ulus inşası sürecini desteklemek için Azerbaycanlı milli kimliğinin oluşturulmasında güçlü bir etkiye sahip olan dil politikalarına güvenmişlerdir. Bu bağlamda, bu tez, 1991’de Azerbaycan’ın bağımsızlığından sonra Azerbaycanlı elitlerin ulusun ve dilin adına ilişkin siyasi söylemlerindeki değişimler, süreklilikler ve kırılmaları araştıracaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Milli Kimlik, Dil Politikaları, Etno-sembolcü Yaklaşım, Türkçülük, Azerbaycancılık

*To those who have bonds of love with "the Land of Fire"*



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

DRA	Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
USSR	the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
PFA	Popular Front of Azerbaijan
NAP	New Azerbaijan Party

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Overview

Svante Cornell defines the history of Azerbaijan with only one word: “crossroads”. This geographic feature has shaped the history of Azerbaijan from the earliest times to the present (2011, p. 3). The developments throughout the 19th century in Azerbaijan paved the way for the development of an Azerbaijani intelligentsia. According to Shaffer, early Azerbaijani intelligentsia progressed in consequence of three main phases. These are the creation of a supra-ethnic Islamic identity, dissemination of liberal values, and the emergence of Azerbaijani nationalism by emphasizing their Turkish identity (2002, p. 23). These phases which were important for the formation of Azerbaijani national identity had an influence on the Azerbaijani intelligentsia during the processes of state and nation-building in the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (DRA) between the years of 1918-1920 (Ibid, pp. 32-37). Under the Tsarist rule, Azerbaijanis defined themselves as Muslims based on their religious identity. However, with the rise of nationalism in the 19th century, self-conscious Azerbaijani intelligentsia started to search for a new definition by considering their ethnic roots. They published seminal works about their history, literature, and language. At the very beginning of the 20th century, Azerbaijani intelligentsia advocated the ideology of Turkism. They wrote articles in newspapers related to the Turkic identity of Azerbaijanis, which led to the national awakening by increasing the awareness about the division between religious identity and ethnic identity. All these developments provided an ideological basis for the establishment of the first republic in 1918 (Mahmudlu, 2017, pp. 135-140). DRA played a significant role for the formation of the national identity based on Turkism, Islamism and Modernism, which the tri-colour flag of Azerbaijan reflects (Tokluoğlu, 2012, p. 21). However, DRA survived only for 23 months, and the rising of national consciousness was tried to be suppressed when Azerbaijan became a part of the Soviet Union. In the 1930s, Azerbaijani intellectuals who were proponents of Turkic definition for identity and language were exiled, imprisoned or killed by accusations of being Pan-Turkist and anti-regime

(Yilmaz, 2013, pp. 528). Altstadt argues that many leading intellectuals such as writers, poets, historians as well as former members of the Musavat party became the victims of the “Great Terror” (1992, pp. 132-133). Stalinist regime had imposed Azerbaijanism, and the Turkic definition of identity and language was replaced by the term Azerbaijani (Swietochowski, 1994, p. 283). Hence, the Turkish identity was suppressed for a long time. In 1991, Azerbaijan regained its independence which had a profound effect on the process of both identity formation and the nation-state building.

The dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is one of the most significant turning points for the former republics of the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent republics commenced their nation-building process by bringing policies and legal provisions into effect. Azerbaijan, as a newly independent republic, had to cope with the issues related to the formation of national identity and with Azerbaijani cultural revival in order to fulfill the requirements of nation-building.

Laitin asserts that the modern nation-state building envisages the revitalization of language which constitutes the source for identity politics (1998, p. 25). In this regard, during the nation-building process, the formation of national identity goes hand in hand with the revitalization of vernacular language in all the post-Soviet republics. This was because they needed a common cultural basis for the coalescence of their titular nation. Hence, nation-builders attributed a special meaning to national language as an intensifier of national identity. In this sense, Fierman argues the important role of language policies for the newly independent states which considered language policies as symbolic tools aimed the articulation of the official perspectives for identity construction and consolidation of their regimes (2009, p. 76).

According to Smith, for the consolidation of national identity, shared values, symbols, and traditions are appealed during the process of nation-building. Language as a shared value provides cultural affinity among the members of a distinct nation by enabling them to rediscover their “authentic self” (1991, p. 17). It is through a shared language that the members of a nation develop the feeling of togetherness and collective uniqueness which

paves the way for the internalization of the idea of “us” and “them/others” (Laitin, 1998, p. 23).

Corrigan and Sayer claim that state-formation is a cultural revolution, and it reconstructs social relations among the insiders and outsiders by reshaping identities and loyalties (1985, p. 200). In the Azerbaijani case, following its independence, discussions about the the alphabet and the name of state language can be seen as reflections of a cultural revolution. This was because Soviet administration aimed to create Soviet man (Homo Sovieticus), Russian was promoted as a lingua franca for the formation of Soviet identity (Sovietski-narod) through increasing communication among members of the Soviet Union and disseminating Russian culture (Hasanoğlu, 2015, pp. 315-316). As a consequence of the seventy-year Soviet legacy, the policy of creating Soviet man, and the privileged status of the Russian language as lingua franca, the process of nation-building and the formation of national identity became more complicated for the successor states of the Soviet Union.

Following the independence of Azerbaijan, language issue became a priority for Azerbaijani nation-builders due to the demographic composition of the country. In 1989, Azerbaijanis were constituting the majority in their titular republic by comprising 82.7 per cent of the total population, which accelerated the decision-making process related to language for the nation-builders (Fierman, 2009, pp. 81-85). Azerbaijani political elite aimed to form a national identity through a set of language policies. Thus, they focused on the alphabet and the name of the state language for the sake of national identity formation (Garibova, 2009, pp. 15-17).

Initially, on December 25, 1991, the Latin-based script was adopted in Azerbaijan. This was an important and unusual experience for Azerbaijan since Azerbaijan experienced several alphabet changes in a short span of time. First, the Arabic script was used until 1923. From this date forward, the Latin-based script was accepted. Then, in 1939, it was replaced with the Cyrillic alphabet. After the dissolution of the USSR, the newly independent Azerbaijan reverted the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin script again. These extraordinary experiences had a decisive impact on the formation of Azerbaijani national identity (Grenoble, 2003, p. 111). Every script change symbolizes a different standpoint for political and cultural discourses

in Azerbaijan. For instance, the transition from Arabic to Latin was discussed in extenso among the Azerbaijani intellectuals. The advocates of Arabic script claimed that it would be a significant loss for future generations so that script change would lead to the rupture of relations with the past. On the contrary, many foremost members of the Azerbaijani intellectuals evaluated Arabic script as a symbol of backwardness due to the difficulty in learning and writing of it. Besides, they wanted to move away from the effects of mullahs in Iran, and they wanted to enhance relations with the West, so it was crucial to use Latin script for reaching scientific knowledge in the West. At the end of long-lasting debates, Latin script was officially adopted in 1923. The second script change occurred in 1939. Unlike the first change, the second change was not discussed in detail. Hence, the second script change was regarded as a top-down, arbitrary decision which was taken in the times of political oppression with the aim of promoting Russian language and disseminating Russian culture. Eventually, when Azerbaijan regained its independence in 1991, script change became an important topic to discuss. Azerbaijani intellectuals and policymakers claimed that Cyrillic script reflects the Soviet inheritance and the Soviet culture, so for the continuation of independence, the ties with the Soviet past must be cut down and the Western values should be followed for the social, political and economic development of Azerbaijan. In this regard, every script change in Azerbaijan symbolizes the different cultural and political discourses depending upon the different contexts. (Ergun, 2010a, pp. 33-46). Based on my fieldwork, majority of respondents believed that the adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet was a political project of Russia (Soviet rule) which aimed to isolate Azerbaijan from Turkey since Turkey adopted Latin alphabet, too. On the other hand, Azerbaijanis tried to protect their language and other cultural values to resist the Russification process. The main actors in this process were the intellectuals who always take the leading role in Azerbaijan, as claimed by many respondents. In this respect, Smith's definition of intellectuals as "cultural entrepreneurs" becomes more meaningful in the context of Azerbaijan (2009, p.70). The Azerbaijanis now believe that with the adoption of Latin in 1991, they opened up to the world. In this sense, getting rid of the Russian alphabet meant being part of the outside world. To sum up, it is believed that converting script from Arabic to Latin means modernization, adoption of Cyrillic means Russification and indicates Russian slavery, and adoption of Latin again represents the independence and getting rid of Russian bondage.



Azerbaijan's re-independence has necessitated the need for an ideological ground which would form the basis for uniting the nation once again under a different name. This ideological ground was shaped in line with the perspectives of the ruling elite, and also under the influence of various internal and regional factors. In order to determine a roadmap for the process of nation-building, Turkism and Azerbaijanism emerged as two competing ideologies (Tokluoğlu, 2005, p. 729). In the light of ideology of Turkism, Abulfaz Elchibey tried to revitalize Turkish identity by emphasizing Turkishness and by changing the name of the state language as Turkish language (*Türk dili* in Azerbaijani). Later on, Heydar Aliyev justified the ideology of Azerbaijanism to hold all citizens of Azerbaijan together as to prevent the repetition of the separatist attempts that took place in the past, such as the Sadvalist movement by a group of Lezgins or Colonel Alikram Humbetov's attempt to establish the Talysh-Mughan Autonomous Republic. Hence, Heydar Aliyev aimed to reconstruct Azerbaijani identity by changing the name of the state language as Azerbaijani language. Although the term Azerbaijani as the name of the language and nationality was imposed by the Stalinist regime, the advocates of Azerbaijanism justified the term arguing that emphasis on Turkishness would create internal security concerns among various ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan threatening the unity of Azerbaijani society.

It is important to note that in the Azerbaijani discourse one view is that certain minority groups in Azerbaijan reacted, and still do, to changing the name of the state language as Turkish/Turkic language during the presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey. However, there are others who are in favour of the term Azerbaijani as the name of the nation and its language. According to this second perspective, it is argued that there is no dissatisfaction or protests against the ideology of Azerbaijanism. In general, it is believed that it was not the name of the state language, rather it was Elchibey's strong emphasis on Turkishness that triggered these separatist attempts in the past. Yet, there are others who believe that these separatist attempts were artificially created and supported by external powers, and that members of these ethnic minority groups did not participate or support these events; on the contrary, they upheld the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

In this context it is important to provide the census data regarding the demographic composition of Azerbaijan during this period. According to the census data in 1989, the percentage of Azerbaijanians (Azerbaijani Turks) was 82.7, whereas Lezgins were 2.4 per cent, and Talyshs were 0.3 per cent. Additionally, according to the census in 1999, Azerbaijanians (Azerbaijani Turks) were 90.6 per cent, whereas Lezgins were 2.2 per cent and Talyshs were 1.0 per cent (Statistical Yearbook 2019 on Demographic Indicators of Azerbaijan, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, p. 58). When the percentage of these ethnic minority groups are compared to the percentage of the majority, it is possible to argue that the emphasis on Turkishness was seen more as a threat in the context of assumed external support that can be given to Lezgin and Talysh groups (by Russia and Iran) that would not endanger the unity of Azerbaijan.

Tokluoglu argues that following the immediate post-Soviet period there were two clear-cut, competing discourses in Azerbaijan; while the ideology of Turkism was identified with the opposition, the ideology of Azerbaijanism was identified with the government (2005, p. 725). Although these two ideologies are still currently juxtaposed, it appears as Azerbaijanism is highly welcomed and internalized even by some of those who can be considered as members of the opposition although it is difficult to measure how deeply it is internalized. Azerbaijanism has been the ideology of the state for almost 25 years and criticizing Azerbaijanism or promoting Turkism is equated with being an opponent of the government in today's Azerbaijan. Although it is claimed that Azerbaijanism embraces Turkish identity alongside with other ethnic identities, many others believe that it turns Turkish identity into a sub-identity. Accordingly, the identity of the vast majority levels down to the identities of other ethnic minorities who have low percentages. Conversely, even though Elchibey's ideology of Turkism is criticized with reference to separatist movements among certain non-Turkic groups in Azerbaijan, Turkism is still a powerful source of identity. This can be traced when the name of their mother tongue is asked to Azerbaijanis. During my fieldwork although the respondents defined their language as Turkic language or Azerbaijani Turkish or Azerbaijani, the following sentence mostly was, "well, it's Turkish, a branch of Turkic language, the name of our language is Azerbaijani but we all know it's Turkish". Hence, although the terms Azerbaijanism and Azerbaijani identity were not criticized explicitly by the majority of the respondents, they all felt the

need to add that their language had a Turkic origin. This can be considered as an indirect way of pointing to their Turkic identity.

Even though some regard Azerbaijani identity as an upper-identity which embraces Turkish identity as well, others criticize the term Azerbaijani arguing that it is a geographical name referring to citizenship rather than ethnicity. Thus, it might be problematic for (Azerbaijani) Turks living in Iran and Georgia since they are the citizens of these states and since they cannot legally define themselves as Azerbaijani which might also lead to an identity problem. Additionally, many think that while other ethnic minority groups can freely refer their ethnic identity and language, Azerbaijani Turks are deprived of defining their ethnic identity and language as Turkish although they form the majority. An interesting point is that although the census data provides information about all of the ethnic groups in Azerbaijan, those who define themselves as Azerbaijani Turks are counted as Azerbaijanis, whereas other ethnic groups are counted according to their ethnicity. Accordingly, the size and structure of the population by ethnicity based on the 2009 Population Census data (total population 8,922,400) are as follows: Azerbaijanis 91.6 per cent (8,172,800), Lezgins 2.0 per cent (180,300), Armenians 1.3 per cent (120,300), Russian 1.3 per cent (119,300), Talysh 1.3 per cent (112,000), Avars 0.6 per cent (49,800), Turks 0.4 per cent (38,000), Tatars 0.3 per cent (25,900), Tats 0.3 per cent (25,200), Ukrainians 0.3 per cent (21,500), Sakhurs 0.1 per cent (12,300), Georgians 0.1 per cent (9,900), Jews 0.1 per cent (9,100), Kurds 0.1 per cent (6,100), Kryzs 0.04 per cent (4,400), Udins 0.04 per cent (3,800), Khynalygs 0.02 per cent (2,200), and other nationalities 0.10 per cent (9,500) (Statistical Yearbook 2019 on Demographic Indicators of Azerbaijan, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, p. 58). As mentioned during my fieldwork, although Meshketian Turks or Turks from Turkey were registered as Turks and Azerbaijani Turks as Azerbaijani, some people insisted to be registered as Turks. This is because they define their ethnic identity as Turks and their national identity as Azerbaijani.

Unlike Azerbaijanism, Ilham Aliyev's policy of multiculturalism is commonly criticized since it is regarded as a European-based policy aiming the incorporation of the immigrants into the Western culture. It is argued that the minority groups living in Azerbaijan are indigenous people whose culture is not totally different from the culture of the majority.

This is because they have been living together for centuries developing common cultural traits. However, it was noted that multiculturalism resembles a Soviet tradition, but its name was not multiculturalism, rather it was called “friendship of peoples” (*druzhba narodov*) which aimed to neutralize the differences between different ethnic groups. Thus, it can be inferred that both Azerbaijanism and multiculturalism could be a continuation of policies of Soviet times. Both of them support sub-identities while weakening the identity of the majority.

Azerbaijani identity is a product of the continuous boundary making and re-making in relation to the ties Azerbaijan has with other regional countries. Azerbaijan has strong historical and cultural linkages with Iran and Russia and with Turkey based on ethnic and linguistic similarities. However, Azerbaijan needs to position itself by considering its own state-building process. In respect to boundary-making, Azerbaijan distances itself from Iran in consideration of its secular state structure. For the sake of independence, Azerbaijan also wants to separate itself from Russian culture and Russian language. Although Azerbaijan has established closeness with Turkey with reference to similarity in language and ethnic origins, there is a careful positioning of Turkey by Azerbaijan to avoid a more dominant position of Turkey as the ‘big brother’ in place of Russia. Therefore, we can observe that as a result of such regional positioning of Azerbaijan, a multi-layered and fluid identity emerges, which becomes a subject of continuous contestation due to the tensions regarding the name of the language and the nation, as well as the conflicting lifestyles within the country.

The main argument of this thesis is that following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, language has been used as a symbolic marker for the formation of national identity, since the ruling elite determined the content of identity politics by changing the name of the state language in accordance with two competing ideologies: Turkism and Azerbaijanism. Gradually, Azerbaijanism prevailed over Turkism in the process of national identity formation due to internal and regional dynamics. Even though Azerbaijani language is one of the dialects of Turkic language, the political elites who advocate the ideology of Azerbaijanism have emphasized the uniqueness and distinctness of Azerbaijani language to differentiate themselves from other Turkic states (mainly Turkey) for the sake of the

formation of Azerbaijani national identity rather than Turkish identity. In light of the above claims, the main purpose of this thesis is to discuss and analyse the relationship between nation-building, national identity and language in post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

Based only on speaking a similar language, Azerbaijani and Turkish societies welcomed each other without feeling the need to know each other better. Both sides assumed that they are part of one nation since they have the same ethnic roots and speak a similar language. This perception was the dominant one during the first decade of Azerbaijan's independence and the relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey. On the basis of this close relationship, the role of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus and Nuri Pasha of the Ottoman army in the "Liberation of Baku"<sup>1</sup> on September 15, 1918 has a special place. Additionally, Turkey stood by Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by closing its border with Armenia after the occupation of the city of Kalbajar in 1993 (Gökçe, 2011, p. 1148). The close relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey has advanced to the level of strategic partnership in the fields of military, economy, politics and so on (Aslanlı, 2018, p.16). However, in the 2000s, there were times when the relations between the two countries were restrained. For example, Turkey's attempt to open its border with Armenia in 2009 forced Azerbaijanis to question their thoughts about Turkey as a model country to be followed (Tokluoğlu, 2012, p. 88).

Although Azerbaijan and Turkey are described as "one nation, two states" Azerbaijan has a distinctive character, which is shaped by different historical, political, and geographical factors. The geographic location of Azerbaijan has sealed the fate of Azerbaijan down the ages. It has been the area of interest for regional powers due to its strategically important location. Besides, Azerbaijan as one of the Southern Caucasus countries is located in between Europe and Asia, which provides Azerbaijan with unique characteristics by combining both Western and Eastern values. It has also a rich, sui generis culture which consists of elements from different cultures such as Caucasian, Persian, Turkish and Russian due to historical and political reasons. Additionally, even though Azerbaijani Turks

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed information see, Asker, A. (2015). Azerbaycan'da Ulus İnşasının Onay Aşaması (1918-1920) ve Önemi Üzerine Bazı Tespitler, *Yeni Türkiye*, 75, 536-546.

constitute the majority, there are various ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan for centuries. All of these factors contribute to Azerbaijan's cultural distinctiveness.

Within this framework and as a student of Eurasian Studies, I decided to study Azerbaijan's language policies and alphabet changes with a perspective beyond conventional ways of looking at Azerbaijan. I have been in Azerbaijan for almost a year in 2014 which helped me to learn Azerbaijani language fluently and to know more about its history and politics and to take a deeper look at the cultural features of the Azerbaijani society.

This study aims to discuss two separate but related research questions: 1) How Azerbaijani political elite used language as a symbolic tool for the formation of their national identity following the years after the independence in Azerbaijan? 2) What are the political outcomes of their language policies for the process of nation-building in post-Soviet Azerbaijan?

The ethno-symbolist approach as the basis of this thesis provides a coherent explanation for nationalism and national identity formation. Hence, this study mainly focuses on the ideas of Anthony D. Smith. The reason why I chose the ethno-symbolist approach is based on Smith's analysis. In this regard, Smith presents ethno-symbolism as an approach or a perspective instead of a theory. This is because he does not have a many-sided theory which clearly explains the phenomena of "ethnie", nations and nationalism. On the other hand, according to Smith, this approach can be more useful than other alternatives such as materialist, nationalist or modernist theories. First of all, this approach helps us to understand the growth of nations and nationalism in historical perspective and with reference to their ethnic roots through concepts like historical homeland, collective memory or victimization. Secondly, it can assist us to determine which people initiate a nationalist movement under adequate conditions and to identify the transformation of this movement. Thirdly, this approach enables us to understand the role of memories, values, myths, and symbols in shaping nationalism. Nationalism generally pursues symbolic aims such as education in a certain language, having TV channels in their own language, having schools and courts in their own vernacular language, the protection of their sacred monuments and so on. Alternative theories are not adequate to explain these issues because they underestimate the power of symbols, shared values, and myths. Moreover, they cannot

comprehend the power of collective memories. Lastly, the ethno-symbolist approach explains how nationalism is supported by such a large number of people. How the intelligentsia manages “to invite the people into history” and why the people accept this invitation are questions that need to be answered. The answer cannot be related to material purposes alone. Ethno-symbolist approach enlightens this process by considering the ‘vernacular mobilization of the masses’ (Smith, 1996, pp. 362-363).

The novelty of this thesis is that the related literature about nationalism, nation-building, and national identity formation are re-examined through the ethno-symbolist approach and are squared with the case of post-Soviet Azerbaijan. Asserted claims are corroborated with a fieldwork carried out in Baku in 2018. This thesis contributes to the literature in a significant manner since there are limited number of studies on the issue of national identity and language in Azerbaijan. Although the issue of language in Azerbaijan has been studied to a certain extent, I will focus on its symbolic role in national identity formation in Azerbaijan. The ethno-symbolist approach adopted in this thesis will help to understand the issue better by focusing on the role of shared values, memories, symbols, and traditions in Azerbaijani nationalism. These topics are closely related to the ongoing debates in Azerbaijan about the name of the state language, the language of instruction at schools, ethnic minorities, and regionalism. This thesis opens up a space for further studies in this direction. The extended view on the issue of nationality goes far beyond a one-dimensional perspective such as Turkism versus Azerbaijanism and aims to provide a picture of Azerbaijani national identity by focusing on both the internal and the regional dynamics.

## **1.2. Methodology**

The source of data of this study is the fieldwork carried out in Baku between September 5 and September 25, 2018. A total of 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with academics from various private and public universities, with political analysts and experts from international and intergovernmental organizations such as the Council of Europe, the United Nations, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, public research institutions such as the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and so on. Thirty-four open-ended questions were asked, and each of the interviews lasted more than an hour. In the broadest sense, the

role of language in the formation of Azerbaijani national identity was discussed in detail during the interviews. The questions were about the elements for the persistence of identity, impacts of the alphabet changes and of changing the name of the state language on identity, effects of the laws and decrees related to language, changing political perspectives of ruling elite, and perceptions of interviewees about language and identity regarding internal dynamics and regional actors. The quotations from the interviews were integrated with my arguments and analysis in this thesis. The anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees were ensured by numerating their names in alphabetical order.

All of the interviews were held in Azerbaijani language and recorded with a tape recorder with the permission of the interviewees, and the transcriptions were made by myself. My knowledge of Azerbaijani language very much pleased the interviewees and created a warm atmosphere, so they freely expressed their ideas without a language barrier. Hence, it provided an advantage for this thesis during my fieldwork and also for the literature review in Azerbaijani language.

The interviews were generally conducted at cafes or the offices of the interviewees. All of the interviewees were well disposed to me. They were very hospitable, sincere, and gentle. Their friendly attitude made me feel comfortable. Thus, the interviews were more like a deep conversation. Before the interviews, the informed consent form was read to them, which they voluntarily signed.

The vast majority were young respondents. Sixteen of the total participants were born in the late 1970s and the 1980s, while two of them were older. All of the participants knew both Azerbaijani and Russian languages, whereas fifteen of them knew both Russian and English in addition to Azerbaijani. Thirteen interviewees received their education in the Azerbaijani language, whereas five of them received it in the Russian language. They were graduated from various departments such as international relations, political science, history, and linguistics. Additionally, sixteen interviewees were Azerbaijani Turks, whereas the ethnic origins of two of the interviewees were different. These two interviews were very useful for having a better understanding of some of the controversial arguments of the others who were members of the titular nation in Azerbaijan.



Documentary research was also used in this thesis. Data collected from different sources such as official documents, Articles 21 and 45 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan related to language policies, official statements of Azerbaijani Presidents about nation-building, national identity formation and language were analyzed by using qualitative methods of analysis. Moreover, laws and decrees such as the “Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the renewal of the Azerbaijani alphabet with Latin graphic (December, 25, 1991)”, “Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the state language in the Republic of Azerbaijan (December 22, 1992)”, “Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on improvement of the application of the state language (June 18, 2001)”, “Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on setting up the Day of Azerbaijani language and alphabet (August 9, 2001)” were also examined.

In short, by scrutinizing official documents and the interview data about perceptions and arguments regarding national identity formation and language policies in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, I discuss how language undertakes a symbolic role as an intensifier of national identity in the case of Azerbaijan.

### **1.3. Organizational Structure**

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter One introduces the main argument of the thesis and explicates the methodology and the organizational structure of my study.

Chapter Two introduces the theoretical framework of the study and discusses the main concepts related to nation-building, national identity, ethnicity, and language. It evaluates the different interpretations of nationalism and highlights the ethno-symbolist approach as the theoretical framework of my analysis and arguments. Thus, this chapter discusses the correlation between language and national identity with reference to the ethno-symbolist approach.

Chapter Three consists of three main sections and separate headings under these sections. The first section of this chapter provides a brief history of Azerbaijan with reference to the major historical events and the emergence of national consciousness. Then, it discusses the history of the alphabet changes and its impacts on the identity based on certain extracts from

interviews. Later on, based on the ethno-symbolist approach, it analyzes the elements for the persistence of national identity and evaluates on the backbones of Azerbaijani national identity. It also discusses the effects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the formation of national identity and the rise of national consciousness. The second section of chapter focuses on the role of language policies in the formation of Azerbaijani national identity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. It discusses the importance of Azerbaijanism versus Turkism within the context of two competing political discourses of the builders of the Azerbaijani state after its independence. It examines the official language policies under different political leaders as the basis for analyzing the functions of these policies for the formation of Azerbaijani national identity. The third section of chapter provides an analysis of Azerbaijani national identity based on certain discussion topics on the political agenda of Azerbaijan such as the name of the state language, the increasing demand for Russian medium schools, the perceived importance of receiving education in mother tongue, the influences of the spread of (Anatolian) Turkish on Azerbaijani language, and the impact of issue of regionalism on the formation of national identity. In general, chapter three examines the symbolic role of Azerbaijani language as one of the most prominent markers of identity based on the analysis of language politics and how Azerbaijanis position themselves in relation to the language.

Chapter Four is the final chapter summarizing the major findings of the thesis. It highlights the relationship between the language politics and identity formation. For instance, the effect of the changing alphabets in Azerbaijan within the last century is observed to have influenced the acts of national identity. Overall, it is concluded that the construction of national identity takes place as a complex and a multi-layered process in Azerbaijan which underwent a quest for redefining national identity after re-independence along two competing lines of ideology, i.e., Turkism versus Azerbaijanism. Although Ilham Aliyev added the element of multiculturalism to the ideology of Azerbaijanism, multiculturalism is not a mid-way between the two dominant ideologies. It is rather a component of Azerbaijanism to strengthen it. As a result, there is a variety of perceptions of national identity among the population, and the local experts define the process of naming the nation as an ongoing process, particularly with reference to the continuously changing language politics.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ETHNO-SYMBOLIST APPROACH

#### 2.1. Nationalism and Ethno-symbolism

The main difficulty when studying nations or nationalism is that there is no agreed or complete definition of the concepts of nation and nationalism. There is also no agreement about the age of nations or whether nations have an ethnic origin or not. How nationalism came into being is another topic. Depending on these topics outlined above, there are many mutually exclusive, sometimes complementary theoretical models of nationalism. Grouping these theories is another difficult task. The most known classification of these various approaches is to divide them as a primordialist, modernist, constructivism, and ethno-symbolist approach. Below I will briefly discuss these approaches, relating them to the main arguments in this thesis.

Primordialists basically assert that nations have existed since time immemorial, so they are pre-given, natural and immutable. The common denominator of the primordialists is their opinion about the naturalness and antiquity of nations (Özkırımlı, 1999, p. 64). On the other hand, Anthony D. Smith identifies three kinds of primordialism which are *nationalist*, *sociobiological* and *cultural*. According to this nationalist view, nations are part of nature. The emphasis on the naturalness of nations in a way suggests that belonging to a nation is pre-specified just as belonging to a single family. One cannot have the chance to choose nor decide which nation to belong to, so it is God-given (Smith, 1999, p. 4). Secondly, the sociobiological view identifies nations and *ethnies* as natural. Van Den Berghe is the most popular advocate of the sociobiological view (In Smith, 1999, p. 4). Van den Berghe asserts that human relations are based on three impetuses: “kin selection, reciprocity, and coercion” (1978, p. 402). He sees these impetuses as the sources of human sociality. People, like animals, tend to choose people who have common ancestors or blood ties with them in order to succeed in their reproduction. This means a kin selection. The second impetus, reciprocity, means collaboration of people for gaining mutual advantage whilst coercion

refers to the using force for gaining a one-sided advantage. Hence, Van den Berghe identifies ethnic groups as inbred super families in parallel with his idea that nations and “ethnies” are the extensions of kinship groups due to their nepotistic drives of “inclusive fitness” (1978, pp. 402-404). Lastly, the cultural kind of primordialism brings to mind the works of Edward Shils and Clifford Geertz. According to cultural primordialists, beliefs are important for loyalty to an ethnic community. Cultural attributes like language, religion, custom, common past and territory are thought as “givens of human existence”. This belief attributes sacred power to those cultural elements, which ensures an attachment between the members of an ethnic community (In Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 1999, pp. 4-5).

It can be claimed that the Soviet administration took steps in accordance with the framework which is discussed by the primordialist model since the Soviet administration classified people with reference to the concept of “ethnos”, however only some of them were treated as socialist nations who had their own union republic or autonomous republic. Some of them had a lower administrative status while some of them were totally disregarded (Tishkov, 1997, pp. 1-3). Tishkov argues that in each national census, peoples living in the Soviet geography were divided or united within the context of the Soviet nationality policy. Some ethnic groups were united under the same name whereas others were re-defined by new “ethnonyms”. For instance, Turks were registered as Azerbaijani in Azerbaijan, Kirgiz or Kazakh in Central Asia (1997, p.15). Hence, in the case of Azerbaijan, the name of the nationality of a group of people was not based on their ethnic affiliation, rather they were defined with a territory-based name: Azerbaijani. Arbitrariness in naming groups, such using geographical names as the name of specific groups, was an intentional policy, which suggest that these identities were constructed according to the policy aims of the Soviet administration rather than being long-lasting or durable as suggested by the primordialist. In the following chapter, this issue will be discussed in the context of identity formation in Azerbaijan in extenso.

The common ground of modernists is the idea that nations and nationalism are the products of the modern era. Nations and nationalism emerged as a product of modern processes such as capitalism, industrialism, the establishment of bureaucratic state and so on. Hence, nations have sociologically become a necessity during the era of nationalism. In the light of

these claims, modernists assert that nationalism invents nations, and not the other way around (Özkırımlı, 1999, pp. 85-86). In the seminal work of Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, he states that:

Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.

Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. A nationalist movement is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1983, p. 1).

For Gellner nationalism is a consequence of industrial social organization, “not the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force” (1994, p. 63). Gellner argues that in an industrial society, there is a need for cultural homogeneity due to social and economic reasons, unlike in agrarian society. New kind of division of labor and increased mobility in the emergent modern industrial society needed people to communicate with each other. The integration of modern industrial society into a high culture is ensured by a state-led, standardized education. In this regard, Gellner defines high culture as national since it is through standardized education that a culturally homogeneous society is built, which is the basis of a nation. In the light of these arguments, it would not be wrong to say that cultural homogeneity and mass, standardized education requires a common language and that state’s efforts cannot be ignored in this process of homogenization and standardization (In Spencer and Wollman, 2002, pp. 34-36).

The process of Azerbaijani state and-nation building after the break-up of the Soviet system does not fit into the model described by Gellner due to Azerbaijan’s Soviet heritage. In addition to building of a central state, a single language is required to unite the historically divided peoples of Azerbaijan through which a system of central education can be established. This is accompanied with naming the nation and forming a unifying culture and identity. Based on Gellner’s ideas, it can be said that cultural homogeneity through standardized education has not been ensured in Azerbaijan since there are Russian medium schools, Azerbaijani medium schools, English medium schools, and a Turkish medium school, where there is no restriction on choosing the type of schooling. Moreover, graduates of these various schools not only learn different languages, but they also have a different worldview and a cultural perspective. Hence, this situation becomes an obstacle for

providing cultural homogeneity in Azerbaijani society, as will be discussed in first and last sections of Chapter Three.

Similar to Gellner, Kohn discusses the connection between nationalism and language in two ways. He firstly argues that collective national identity emerged and was nourished through the increasing stress on a common language in some instances. As opposed to other cases where nationalism was led by intellectuals, it was necessary to ascertain, justify or reshape language as a “primordial idiom” (In Safran, 1999, p. 77). Safran, too, argues that while it is possible to change, promote, revitalize and overvalue language according to state’s interests, it is also effective in constructing awareness of ethnic identity and state-building (1992, p. 397).

One of the most important modernist theorists is Eric J. Hobsbawm who defines nations and nationalism as products of “social engineering”, which is conducted by the ruling elites in order to protect the loyalty and obedience of their subjects. Since, in the age of industrialism, religion or dynasty as a source of legitimacy lost its power and validity, so the ruling elite needed a new kind of legitimacy. This could only be achieved by inventing traditions and using history in order to establish a linkage with a suitable past so that they could convince their subjects (1983, pp. 11-13). He asserts that during this social engineering process, continuous and repetitive habits and practices turn into the “invented traditions” which are clarified as;

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 1).

For Hobsbawm, national consciousness is one of the most concrete examples of invented traditions. Although those traditions are invented in modern times, they increase the unity and solidarity among the members of a social group by supplying a continuity with the past. When social changes occur rapidly, the invention of traditions is needed more than ever in order to overcome the disintegration within society. Hence, as a result of a rapid social change with industrialization, ruling elites tried to control the masses by means of inventing new traditions deliberately (1983, pp. 263-265). Hobsbawm propounds three main

innovations apropos of the invention of tradition: “development of primary education, the invention of public ceremonies, and mass production of public monuments” (1983, pp. 271).

Anderson evaluates nations and nationalism as a “cultural artefact”. For him, in order to understand the nature of those cultural artefacts, emergence and transformation of nations and nationalism and their sources of legacy should be scrutinized (Anderson, 1991, p. 4). Anderson defines a nation as an “imagined political community” and claims that the nation “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Ibid, p. 6). To sum up, all of the members of a nation do not meet each other, but in their minds, they feel a sense of affinity and fraternity towards each other, which is the reason for being able to sacrifice even their lives for the sake of their nation (Ibid, p. 7).

As claimed by Anderson, it was print capitalism that triggered nationalism by ensuring the spread of certain folk languages which, in turn, created an affiliation among people who have never met (1991, pp. 42-44). Similar to Anderson, Laitin asserts that in the modern era, the process of nation-building includes the revitalization of a folk language for the formation of a nation and national identity. In this regard, language acts as a tool to form both modern nations and their national identity (Laitin, 1998, pp. 24-25). Hence, the process of nation-building and national identity formation comprises cultural and linguistic revival to a certain extent.

With reference to the modernist arguments above, the theory of modernism misbecomes for clarifying the fall of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the new states in the post-Soviet geography since these processes cannot be explained through capitalism or industrialisation. In this context, Hobsbawm’s class based definition is also not suitable to understand the process of state building in Azerbaijan. Regarding Anderson’s claims, the efforts of Azerbaijani intellectuals for awakening national consciousness and preserving identity and culture by writing articles, poems in their own language since the mid-19th century provides a good example. Azerbaijanis pay special attention to their literary works in their fight against Russian hegemony during the Soviet period. Similarly, protecting their language against the dissemination of Russian language is of central importance for them.

The term ethno-symbolist has been used for theorists who advocate the idea that pre-existing ethnic ties and sentiments serve a function in the formation of modern nations (Özkırımlı, 1999, pp. 167-168). Ethno-symbolists like Smith, Armstrong, and Hutchinson denied the assertions of primordialists and also criticized modernists for their defective claims about the pre-modern era. Hence, ethno-symbolists attempted to find a middle way between primordialism and modernism (Ibid., pp. 168-169).

Like modernists, ethno-symbolists acknowledge that nations are a recent phenomenon in terms of their territorial consolidation, self-determination, and mass public culture, but the main concern of ethno-symbolists is identity and history rather than modernity. Thus, ethno-symbolists identify a nation as a historical community which maintains its existence through myths, symbols, memories, and culture. What is meant by culture is not only symbols, traditions, and rituals but also actions, motivations, and orientations of nations. Therefore, the main difference between ethno-symbolists and modernists is about the question of the formation of nations and the role of political elites, intellectuals and state institutions in the nation-formation process (Hutchinson, 2001, pp.76-77).

According to Smith, in order to answer the question of who the nation is, the ethnic roots of a nation should be scrutinized since most of the current nations are the continuation of a specific “ethnie”. Smith uses the term “ethnie” instead of an ethnic community. He defines “ethnie” as “a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories and one or more common elements of culture, including an association with a homeland, and some degree of solidarity, at least among elites” (Smith, 1999, p. 13).

The theoretical framework in Smith’s works is based on the critique of modernism. Unlike modernists, Smith indicates that modern nations and nationalism can only be understood by considering prior ethnic communities and loyalties. Hence, the origins and the formations of nations must be traced back over long time-spans. Rather than accepting the emergence of nations in the wake of modernization, or searching its formation only in a particular period, the process of being a nation should be investigated within a “longue durée”. This is because Smith identifies nations as “historical phenomena” and argues that their



collective pasts and collective cultural identities have shaped their national past, present, and future (1999, p. 10).

In order to explain the relationship between the national past, present, and future, Smith indicates three themes: “recurrence, continuity, and reappropriation”. According to him, although many of the nations and nationalisms became apparent as a result of the French and American Revolutions, some ethnic communities have maintained their existence long before the modernization process through the recurring ethnic components such as the myth of ethnic origin, shared past, collective memory and so on. Continuity with the past is ensured with the durability of a nation’s cultural components such as language, traditions, symbols, and rituals. These components should pass down from generation to generation. Hence, cultural continuities of *ethnies* form a basis for modern nations. Reappropriation refers to searching out ethnic past for obtaining *ethos* in order to reshape nation. It means a quest for authentication of a nation by reconstructing the unique characteristics of past *ethnie*. Therefore, Smith called the nationalist intelligentsia as “political archaeologists” (Ibid., pp. 11-12). In this regard, these intellectuals aim to evoke their glorious past, heroes, shared memories, myths of ethnic origin, unique cultural elements, and distinctive traditions in order to ensure the continuity between their ethnic past, national present, and future. As Smith claims, the sense of ethnic distinctiveness as a sine qua non of a nation has been reminded by using cultural components during the formation of national identity (1991, p.70).

Supporting Smith’s arguments, Isaac and Polese in a similar way argue that there are two kinds of nation-building tools, namely “traditional tools” and “new tools”. Language, religion, historical events, and memories are used as traditional tools whilst cinema, elections, public events and public constructions are used as new tools as a result of the changing and varying of ways of national identity construction (2016, pp. 2-3).

Another related topic is the periodization of nationalism. According to Kolsto, there are “three waves” of nation-building. The first wave started after 1648 when Westphalian order enabled the emergence of nation-states possible. The second wave started at the end of the Second World War. Through the decolonization process, new nation-states emerged in Asia and Africa. The third wave began with the collapse of communism and the disintegration of

USSR in the 1990s (as cited in Isaac & Polese, 2016, p. 5). Hence, independent successor states emerged building their own nations in order to meet the requirements of forming a nation-state and to consolidate their regimes. Nation-building, as described by Isaacs and Polese, is “the process through which a state, through its institutions and political elites, over a period of time, proposes a series of identity markers and, at the same time, convinces the people living on its territory to adopt the same identity markers interpreting them in the manner the state wants” (2016, p. 11). Therefore, it is an ongoing process and it is intertwined with identity construction, state formation, and regime-building. It is also multi-dimensional, so it affects and is affected by political, social and everyday life (Ibid., p. 2). Besides, it is important to mention the actors of nation-building. Along with the state as a primary actor, political elites, international actors, civil society and non-state actors and people themselves are involved in this process (Ibid., pp. 10-12). As it is argued above, Azerbaijani intellectuals always play a large part in this process.

The ethno-symbolist approach is the most suitable model in order to understand the post-Soviet geography. Smith’s approach explains how the idea of homeland came into being in Azerbaijan more clearly as distinct from the Western type. Smith analyzes the formation of the nation and national identity regarding concepts of myths, shared values, language, common memory and symbols. Hence, this theoretical framework is well suited to comprehend the process of nation formation in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. As argued by both Gellner and Smith, the role of elites/intellectuals is very important in Azerbaijan since they have played the leading role for the awakening of national consciousness and the preservation of national values in Azerbaijan.

## **2.2. Ethnicity**

In this section, I will discuss the relationship between culture and identity within the framework of the constructivist perspective and with reference to Barth’s analysis of boundary making. It is important to scrutinize both culture and identity since culture and identity are the backbones of ethnicity. Besides, through long ages ethnicity had been examined by looking into the cultural features of an ethnic group. In other words, the ambiguous state of ethnicity can be comprehended by interpreting the relationship between culture and identity since sharing a common culture and having a common language are

essential in terms of state's policies during the process of national identity formation which is one of the main themes of this thesis.

According to constructivists, who are in sharp contrast with the primordialists, ethnic identities are not primordial, but constructed. In that sense they are not rigid, but flexible and always subject to change (Bayar, 2009, p.1639). Below I will discuss the views of Barth, who is known as the father of constructivism. The main focus will be on 'making boundaries' which fits well to Azerbaijani efforts to minimize regional influences and maximize national integration through emphasizing the uniqueness of their language and identity. Thus, separating themselves from 'outsiders', while integrating their diversified society.

Ethnicity was mostly studied with reference to the cultural sphere. It was assumed that ethnicity can be understood by looking into the cultural features of an ethnic group. However, Barth scrutinized ethnicity by making a distinction between ethnic boundaries and the cultural components within those boundaries. He claims that it is the "ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth, 1969, p. 15). Hence, Barth makes a distinction between culture and identity when discussing the concept of ethnicity. He argues that culture is not a static entity or a condition; it is dynamic, and it evolves in response to new developments. In this respect, it is not possible to understand the issue of identity by looking into culture only. Instead, (ethnic) boundaries and boundary-making processes are important for understanding the dynamics of ethnicity and identity. In this regard, the continuity of ethnic identity is associated with the preservation of boundaries, not with the preservation of culture. In Barth's words, "...If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion" (Ibid., p. 15). For Barth, having the same culture is not the primary characteristic of being an ethnic group. Therefore, sharing a common culture of an ethnic group should be evaluated as an implication or a result rather than reason. Rather than culture, it is social boundaries that determine whether a person belongs to an ethnic group or not. In this sense, he rejects the traditional assumption that race equals culture and language (Barth, 1969, p. 11). Through the works of Frederik Barth, the focus for studying ethnicity shifted from culture to boundaries.

Barth defines an ethnic group as “a form of social organization”, meaning that there needs to be a dynamic interaction between different ethnic groups. Thus, the defining criterion for ethnicity is self-ascription and ascription by others. Members of an ethnic group move their ethnic identity to the forefront to distinguish themselves from others by taking their cultural differences and similarities into account (Barth, 1969, pp. 13-14). Barth also argues that members of the same ethnic group may not have common characteristics in different ecologic conditions due to the interaction with others. Hence, ethnicity does not equal culture and the durability of identity cannot be ensured by the preservation of cultural features. What matters for the persistence of identity is the protection of social boundaries (Ibid., pp. 19-20).

Azerbaijanis position themselves by considering the dynamics in the region. They try to break their linkage with the Russian culture. They desire to get closer with Turkey, but they also do not want Turkey to be their ‘new’ big brother. They try distance themselves from Iran for the sake of protecting their secular structure. They also want to be able to act in accordance with their Caucasian mentality. Based on these, they differentiate themselves to a certain extent from these regional powers by way of their alphabet and language. Azerbaijanis have continuous social interaction with these states in the region because of their historical links and because of the geographical proximity between these states. Hence, Azerbaijani identity is both multi-layered and fragile. On the other hand, they also emphasize their proximity with Iran and Russia regarding their common history and their close connection with Turkey regarding speaking a similar language and having the same ethnic roots. Therefore, they sometimes emphasize similarity and close ties with these states, and sometimes emphasize their differences to protect the boundaries. As will be discussed in the following pages, the name of the language, name of the nation and conflicting lifestyles in Azerbaijan appear as persistent sources of tension which leads to continuous boundary-making and re-making in Azerbaijan.

Beyond boundary-making in the regional scale, there is also constant boundary-making within the society. This is because there are many ethnic groups in the country such as Talysh, Lezgins, Tats, Udi, Avars, Kurds, Khinalugs and so on. Supporting Barth’s argument, Brubaker in a similar way emphasizes the importance of boundary-making in societies. He defines these successor states of the Soviet Union as “nationalizing states” by

highlighting their nationalist projects as uncompleted and continuous in their nationalizing process (2011, p. 1786). Brubaker asserts that these successor states were national in appearance, but the reality was totally different since their substances had a reverse situation. Therefore, nation-builders had to promote a core nation. In this sense, Brubaker lists five main themes which were commonly used in the nationalist discourses of these states in order to legitimize their nationalizing policies. Firstly, the state's core nation should be privileged ethno-culturally vis-à-vis the other subjects of the state. Secondly, the state stands for the core nation, so the core nation has a primacy. Thirdly, the state's core nation is in an insufficient condition. Fourthly, the state must take firm action in order to enhance the core nation through revitalizing language and culture, and also other domains such as economic, political, social and cultural have to be promoted. Lastly, past experiences of the core nation like discrimination, coercion or assimilation have to be overcome through taking firm action with utmost urgency (Ibid.).

As Barth, Nagel also mentions the importance of boundaries for (ethnic) group formation since ethnic boundaries mark off the members and nonmembers of an ethnic group (1994, p. 154). He evaluates official ethnic categories as mostly political due to the fact that the state is the most prevailing institution in society. Hence, the state's policies related to ethnicity form ethnic boundaries substantially. He discusses the politically constructed nature of ethnicity through the effects of political policies by generating new definitions and meanings to ethnic boundaries, cultures, and identities (Ibid., pp. 156-157). Nagel evaluates ethnicity as "socially constructed" and claims that ethnicity is always reconstructed and redefined (Ibid., p. 153). Hence, Nagel identifies identity and culture as the two-main building-blocks of ethnicity since identity is related with the "construction of boundaries" and culture associated with the "production of meaning" (Ibid.). According to Nagel, in order to understand the content and meaning of ethnicity, the construction of culture should be scrutinized (Ibid., p. 161). In this sense, culture and history are appealed for the construction of ethnic meaning. An authentic ethnicity is formed by defining cultural contents such as language, religion, customs, a way of dressing, lifestyle, art, music and so on. In this sense, cultural identity is shaped by internal dynamics whereas external factors become important for the shaping of ethnic boundaries, namely ethnic identity (Ibid.). The construction of culture is ensured by choosing items from past and present through cultural revival and restoration of historical cultural elements or by producing new cultural values

and practices (Ibid., p. 162). Nagel says that “The construction of culture supplies the contents for ethnic and national symbolic repositories” (Ibid., p. 163). From this perspective, both ethnic identity and national identity are mobilized by using components of cultural identity. In order to reveal the national identity, cultural revival is needed. Cultural revival includes revitalization of language and emphasis on national heroes, national days, important political figures or other cultural contents like customs, celebrations and so on. In this regard, cultural revival serves to a political project and cultural revival and linguistic revival are intertwined (Ibid., pp. 163-165).

### **2.3. National Identity**

Smith introduces nationalism as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining identity, unity, and autonomy of a social group some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential nation” (1991, p. 73). However, he strongly insists that nationalism also must be analyzed as a form of culture and identity since nationalism comes into prominence as a part of the zeitgeist also includes the pre-modern motifs, visions, and ideals of an “ethnie”. In this regard, it is impossible to deny the impact of nationalism on the formation of national identity. Therefore, nationalism must initially be addressed as a form of culture and identity (Ibid., p. 70). In the following chapter, the issue of culture will be discussed in the context of receiving education in the mother tongue or a foreign language. The identity issue will be discussed regarding the naming of Azerbaijanis with a geographic-based term for the sake of national unity.

Based on Smith’s definition of nationalism as an ideological movement, the main goals of an ideological movement are to ensure national identity, national unity, and national autonomy. For him, the nationalist’s perception is based on the idea that a nation must have a distinctive character or a particular identity, and a nation must be free. Hence, nationalists seek for identity, unity, and autonomy through nationalist movements (Smith, 1999, pp. 102-103). Language is symbolically very important for Azerbaijanis since they evaluate their language as the source of their identity. When they look at their neighbors, Georgia and Armenia, they explain the persistence of Georgian or Armenian identity in a way that these states always had their own alphabets, languages and churches. On the other hand, Azerbaijan experienced script changes three times in a century, and religion was restricted

during the Soviet period. In this sense, they perceive language as the only source to maintain their existence. Hence, language has a symbolic importance for them. Besides, language is a source of national unity in Azerbaijan since there too many ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan and they communicate with each other through the Azerbaijani language. In other words, language provides a strong common ground for them. Language is also used as the basis of forming a national identity in Azerbaijan since the name of the state language characterizes the national identity of its citizens. Naming language as Azerbaijani language, the ruling elites aimed to ensure unity in order not to estrange other ethnic groups.

As Smith argues in his seminal work entitled, *National Identity*, “Chameleon-like, nationalism takes its colour from its context” (1991, p. 79). Based on the fact that instead of simply being an ideology or a movement, nations and nationalism should be conceptualized as cultural phenomena. In other words, nationalism must be associated with national identity. Besides, it can be argued that a specific language, sentiments, and symbolism must be considered while scrutinizing nationalism (Ibid., p. vii). Hence, the reflections of nationalism in post-Soviet Azerbaijan can be understood by considering language, sentiments, and symbolism as well as national identity. Regarding symbolism, it is important to mention the flag and the national anthem of Azerbaijan. When Azerbaijan regained its independence in 1991, the flag of the first republic (1918-20) was adopted again as the flag of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This can be evaluated as putting an end to the rupture in their history. Additionally, colors on the flag of Azerbaijan symbolizes the ideologies of “Turkification, Islamization, and Modernization” (Süleymanlı, 2006, p. 281). Although some Azerbaijanis object to Turkism, it is still represented on their flag. Besides, the military cadence in the time of first republic was adopted as the national anthem of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Ibid.).

Nationalism which is associated with language and symbolism is a phenomenon where intellectuals play a predominant role by means of slogans, ideas, symbols, and ceremonies. Thus, they connect nationalist ideology with the sentiments of the masses by spreading a sense of authenticity via nationalist language and symbolism. In this sense, nationalism fundamentally is a political doctrine that also contains a cultural doctrine within it. This cultural doctrine is based on the activation of new concepts, symbols, and languages (Smith, 1991, p. 74). In this context, the role of intellectuals in Azerbaijan is quite important

since the beginning of the 19th century. The intellectuals played a dominant role in the emergence of national consciousness by raising questions about their history, ethnic roots, and identity. Thanks to the intellectuals, Azerbaijanis have preserved their language and identity over the last two-hundred years while they were living under the bondage of the Tsarist Russia and later the Soviet administration. Regarding the role of the intellectuals, the discussions on the shifting the alphabet in Azerbaijan will be also be discussed in detail. This is especially important since converting the alphabet from Arabic to Latin was primarily supported by the intellectuals. However, the adoption of Cyrillic was seen as an arbitrary decision since the Soviet administration did not get the Azerbaijani intellectuals' opinion on this issue, which will be discussed further in the first section of Chapter Three.

Smith points out that the concept of identity is understood in a way that is similar to the meaning of "sameness". Members of a particular nation tend to see themselves as different from non-members since they have certain attributes like dressing, eating habits or speaking in the same language which non-members do not have. Hence, members of a particular nation distinguish themselves from the outsiders by considering both similarities and differences. As Smith puts it, what matters for national identity is the pattern of similarities and differences (1991, p. 75). In this context, Talysh and Lezgins as the two biggest minority groups living in Azerbaijan are very important.

Smith defines national identity as "the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identifications of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements" (2001, p. 18). In the case of Azerbaijan, the most important pattern is memories. These memories are all related to their sufferings such as living under the bondage of Russia for two hundred years, annihilation of Azerbaijani intellectuals by the Soviet regime, the massacre of Azerbaijanis during the Black January events, and Russian support to Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh war. These are the sources of their negative feelings towards Russia. Besides, memories related to the occupation of their lands and loss of many lives during the still unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and especially the Khojaly massacre are extremely important in the context of the formation of Azerbaijani national identity. This issue will be discussed further in the first section of Chapter Three.



As Smith argues, inclusion and mobilization are required for turning “ethnies” into nations, somyths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritage are appealed by the nationalist intelligentsia. With the reinterpretation of these elements, national identity is reconstructed continuously. These elements can also be the sources of conflict as well as solidarity. Due to competing claims over a territory, cultural legacy or property rights, clash of interests gives way to conflicts over ancestral homelands like it did between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians (Smith,1999, p. 9).The impact of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on national identity, unity, solidarity, national awakening, and the emergence of the idea of a homeland will also be analyzed in the first section of Chapter Three.

Smith defines a nation as “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (1991, p. 14). According to him, this definition of the nation displays the complicated and intangible nature of national identity. Therefore, national identity is multi-dimensional (Ibid.). In order to understand the multi-dimensional nature of national identity, Smith suggests scrutinizing the functions of national identity. Those functions can be classified as external and internal. External functions are territorial, economic and political. Territorial function serves the nation by defining a historical territory where the members of a nation maintain their lives. Economically, the nation has control over territorial resources, and resource allocation and division of labor are made by considering the members of a nation (Ibid., pp. 15-16). Politically, the most significant function of national identity is “its legitimation of common legal rights and the duties of legal institutions, which define the particular values and character of the nation and reflect the ancient customs and traditions of the people” (Ibid., p. 16). On the other hand, when the internal functions are considered, the most important of them is the socialization of individuals as citizens and nationals by means of standardized, public mass education which inculcates a homogeneous culture into the members of a nation. Besides, another function is about establishing a social bond among members of a nation thanks to shared values and symbolic tools such as flags, anthems, monuments, ceremonies, uniforms and so on. Through these symbols, cultural affinity and common heritage of members of a nation are evoked and so their sense of belonging is strengthened. Lastly, a sense of national identity helps members of a nation for defining and positioning themselves in the world by

rediscovering their shared, unique culture. This enables them to perceive their authenticity (Ibid., pp. 16-17). Based on these arguments, it is important to mention the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional feature of Azerbaijani national identity since it cannot be comprehended without considering the Iranian, Russian, Turkish, and the Caucasian effects on Azerbaijani identity stemming from the historical linkages and shared cultural values between these countries who are all influential regional powers. Besides, Azerbaijanis living in Southern Azerbaijan (Northern Iran) should also be considered since this is a very important source of potential conflicts in the future, adding to the already existing tensions in the region and challenging the efforts of keeping the country in unity. I now analyze my findings within the framework presented in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### A REVIEW ON AZERBAIJAN

Discussions on language in Azerbaijan include discussions on alphabet changes and the name of the state language, as well as regional distinctions and possible objections from various ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan. The basis of these discussions lies in the concern that Azerbaijan, which has lost 20 percent of its territory to Armenia due to the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, has taken on separatist ideas following the influence of various ethnic groups and local powers, which may result in further possible loss of land. This fear triggers other long-lasting concerns of the Azerbaijani society. One of these is to be able to keep Azerbaijan's full independence not only from Russia but also from Turkey and Iran. In this context, the Latin alphabet and the name of Azerbaijan's language appear as the two most important topics for the unity and strength of the country against regional powers who have ever-ending interests in the Caucasus. As Azerbaijan regained its independence, the discussions on the changing of the alphabet and the name of the language took shape under the influence of various competing ideologies and in accordance with the regional dynamics. In general, the discussions about these issues are multi-layered and prone to frustration, disappointment or anger among Azerbaijanis. The origins of the terms Azerbaijani and (Azerbaijani) Turkish have historical roots, and their meaning and political connotations are in continuous flux depending on the geopolitical power shifts in the region.

The identity issue in Azerbaijan is quite complicated and multifaceted. Defining who they are is harder than defining who they are not. When asked how they define their national identity and culture, the respondents provided conflicting accounts from time to time, mostly when discussing the name of their language or in which language they prefer to receive education or when relating themselves to the Turks in Turkey or the Russians in the context of the regional political issues of the Caucasus. Hence, it can be claimed that both language and alphabet are tools used in the process of forming a nation, as well as in shaping Azerbaijan's relations with Russia, Turkey and Iran. In the context of forming the Azerbaijani nation, types of schools, language of instruction in these schools, language

rights of ethnic minorities, and language preferences in a multi-linguistic society appear as pillars of identity. In that sense, language has great symbolic power. In addition to language issues as outlined above, naming a nation and/or self-naming also constitute an important part of the work of the building a nation. Azerbaijanis were called by different names such as Muslims or Tatars by Tsarist Russia, but never as Turks. In today's Azerbaijan, the ideologies of Turkism and Azerbaijanism are still alive and are juxtaposed. The emergent ideology of multiculturalism adds another dimension to the already existing, age-old divisions in Azerbaijani society. Through the ideology of Azerbaijanism, the consensus on the name of the nation (Azerbaijani) appears to be ensured to a certain extent at least on a short-term basis.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia tries to keep its interests in the post-Soviet region by different means. In this sense, Russia follows a soft power strategy for the dissemination of Russian language in order to preserve its bonds with those states. The Russian language maintains its importance in this region. Although English and Turkish (Anatolian) can be seen as alternatives to Russian, Azerbaijanis still need to learn Russian language to find a better job or to have a qualified education. Additionally, there are around two million Azerbaijanis working in Russia who recommend their relatives to learn Russian to be able to work in Russia. The schools which give education in foreign languages are seen as the best option to learn a foreign language and to receive a qualified education. As Turkish (Anatolian) is not seen as a foreign language and as English medium schools are very expensive for middle income families, Azerbaijani parents tend to send their children to Russian medium schools. On the other hand, these schools lead to cultural discrepancy within the society since they restrain the standardized education which is important for the emergence of a culturally homogenous society as claimed by Gellner. Therefore, it can be argued that lack of standardized education is an obstacle for the formation of strong Azerbaijani national identity. Azerbaijan is country that allows different languages to be spoken due to the existence of various ethnic groups. . This can be seen as a heritage of the Soviet system. Although there are many obstacles for the formation of national identity in Azerbaijan, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a powerful unifying factor for Azerbaijanis.

In this chapter, I will discuss three main topics under separate headings. In the first section I will provide a brief history of Azerbaijan with reference to the major historical events

which awakens national consciousness. Additionally, script changes, elements for the persistence of national identity and the effects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be also discussed within the context of national identity. In the second section I will focus on the efforts for the formation of national identity after the re-independence of Azerbaijan in 1991 by analyzing the different perspectives of ruling elites based on the ideologies of Turkism and Azerbaijanism. Lastly, I will provide an analysis of Azerbaijani national identity by highlighting the controversial topics related to language and identity. These issues are indirectly related to one another, but also complement each other.

### **3.1. A Glance on Blurred Ties: On the Qui Vive**

The geographic location of Azerbaijan has sealed the fate of Azerbaijan down the ages. It has been the area of interest of regional powers due to its strategically important location. Although its size is small, its importance is great enough thanks to its rich oil reserves, location and sui generis culture. Azerbaijan as one of the Southern Caucasus countries is located in between Europe and Asia, which provides Azerbaijan with unique characteristics by combining both Western and Eastern values. On the other hand, it also contains the elements of Caucasian culture like traditions, dance, a way of life, dressing style and so on. Hence, the Azerbaijani identity cannot be explained without considering the regional context where Iranian, Russian, Turkish and Caucasian influence has an important impact on Azerbaijan (Priego, 2005, pp. 1-2).

First of all, the majority of Azerbaijan is Shia Muslim which is an effect of being a part of Iranian civilization until the Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828) Treaties were signed. In terms of the formation of national identity in Azerbaijan, it is important to mention these treaties since they have special importance in the history of Azerbaijan. The war between Russia and Iran ended with the defeat of Iran. In 1813, Iran was forced to sign the Gulistan Treaty, which confirmed the supremacy of Russia in the region, and Iran lost control of most of the Caucasian territory to Russia. The second Russo-Iranian war occurred between 1825 and 1828 and Iran was defeated again. At the end of the war, Russia and Iran signed the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828 and Iran lost all of its territories in the Caucasia. With these treaties, the river of Araz became the division line; Azerbaijan was divided into two parts. Hence, the Treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay symbolize the separation of Azerbaijanis

between the Russian and Iranian rules. From that time to the present, Azerbaijanis have been living separately and have experienced different destinies under different rules (Shaffer, 2002, 22).

When nationalism started to rise all over the world, Azerbaijan as a colonial territory of Tsarist Russia was also affected. At that time, the Azerbaijani Muslim population was called as “Tatars”, “Caucasian Tatars”, “Azerbaijani Tatars” in the official documents of Tsarist Russia, although they rather called themselves as Muslim, which shows the religious emphasis on their identity. This was because the concepts of national identity or ethnic identity were not common in the region at that time (Mahmudlu, 2017, pp. 135-139). During the field research, one of the interviewees mentioned a poem of Mirza Alekber Sabir. In this poem, the poet says, “I get scared when I see a Muslim”. The interviewee said that in this poem the term Muslim refers to the Azerbaijani Muslim population because at that time the Azerbaijanis were called as Muslim rather than Azerbaijani, Turk and so forth.<sup>2</sup>

The initial steps toward the formation of the Azerbaijani nation and its identity were taken by the first self-conscious intelligentsia during the 19th century. These intellectuals contributed to the formation of the Azerbaijan nation by publishing works about their history, literature and language. In this regard, Azerbaijani historians Abbasgulu Aga Bakikhanov’s and Mirza Kazim’s works have special importance as primary sources on the history of Azerbaijan. Bakikhanov analyzed the history of Azerbaijan and Dagestan in his work entitled, *Gulistani Irem*. Mirza Kazim’s work, *Derbentname*, is an important history book about the history of the Caucasus. His other work, *Turkish Tatarian Grammar*, is one of the first and pioneering books about Turkish grammar that makes a systematic examination of Turkic language (Mahmudlu, 2017, p. 136). An interviewee claimed that this grammar book is devoted to Azerbaijani language, but he called it Turkish Tatarian in order to distinguish Azerbaijani language from other Turkic languages.<sup>3</sup>

Mirza Fatali Akhundov is another important figure of this period who wrote his dramas in Azerbaijani Turkish language. He advocated the adoption of a new alphabet based upon

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with a political analyst (13)

<sup>3</sup> Interview with an academician who is a historian (10)

Latin script due to the high level of illiteracy. Besides, he was in favor of mother tongue-based teaching and education (Mahmudlu, 2017, pp.136-137). Nesibli argues that Akhundov's period was the starting point for the development of national consciousness and it provided the basis for cultural awakening among Azerbaijanis (2001, p. 141).

Hasan Bey Zerdabi is also an important character because his periodical *Ekinchi* (1875-77) was the first newspaper published in Turkic language. It was also evaluated as a turning point with respect to national awakening since the issue of Turkic identity was thematized through the discussions about the Turkic identity of Azerbaijanis in this newspaper (Mahmudlu, 2017, p. 137). Similarly, Turan asserts that the emergence of the national press in Azerbaijan played significant role in the development of national identity. Hence, *Ekinchi* newspaper as the beginning of national press in Azerbaijan had major importance for the national awakening of Azerbaijani Turks (2018, p. 434).

The issue of identity gained popularity in the wake of the Armenian-Muslim clashes in years of 1905-1906 in Baku, the Russian Revolution in 1905, and the Young Turk Revolution in the Ottoman Empire in 1908. In this sense, the intelligentsia started to think about how to define the identity of Azerbaijanis (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 514). The questions like who are we and where do we come from were mooted in the press paving the way for the development of the first phase of Azerbaijani nationalist movement. However, Nesibli asserts that this first phase of Azerbaijani awakening had the characteristics of a cultural current. After 1905, the period of national revival began when the nationalist movement was transformed from a cultural current to a political one following the establishment of the short-lived DRA (1918-1920) (2001, pp. 141-143).

In the very beginning of the 20th century, Azerbaijani intelligentsia advocated the ideology of Turkism. Hence, the distinctness between religious and ethnic identity started to be seen more explicitly. Self-awareness of ethnic identity paved the way for the improvement of national consciousness and later on, of national identity. This nationalist movement based on the ideology of Turkism emphasized (ethnic) Turkish identity. The rise of the ideology of Turkism manifested itself in the writings of Huseynzade Ali Bey in 1907 with his famous slogan, "Turkification, Modernization, Islamization" which ensured the ideological basis of both of the democratic republics of Azerbaijan (first in 1918, second in 1991). Later on,

Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, founder of the DRA, became the leader of the Musavat Party in 1913 and directed party politics from Pan-Islamism to Turkism (Tokluoğlu, 2012, pp. 19-20). On this ideological basis, Turkification means the preservation of national values, Islamization means the preservation of religious values, and modernization means to follow the developments in the West in terms of technology, democracy and secularism (Tokluoğlu, 2002, p. 44). During the first congress of the Musavat Party in 1917, an important decision was taken in terms of identity. It was declared that religious association could not be sufficient for the formation of a nation; rather, nations emerge in the axis of common values such as language, traditions and literature, so by looking at these common values, it can be claimed that all of the Turks in the world form a nation (Nesibli, 2001, p.142). Thus, when the DRA was established, the fundamentals of state policies were attributed to the ideology of Turkism which has been reflected on the Azerbaijani flag with the blue horizontal top stripe since 1918 (Ibid, p. 143).

The most crucial development with regard to nation building was the establishment of the DRA in 1918. This development reflects the strengthening of national consciousness and, in my opinion, this was the first step in the formation of national identity in Azerbaijan. DRA was the first democratic republic in the East at that time and it conveyed most of the features of a modern state such as founding of a national university, forming a national army, opening diplomatic missions, formation of a national assembly, and so on (Mahmudlu, 2017, p. 141). Although DRA survived only for 23 months, it has left a legacy to today's Azerbaijan thereby creating a modern democratic society and forming a national identity based on Turkism, Islamism and Modernism. In this regard, it effectuated a basis for the identity of Azerbaijan after its independence in 1991 (Ismayilov, 2008, pp. 8-9)

Another important turning point in the history of Azerbaijan was the entry of the Red Army into Baku in April 1920, herewith the establishment of Soviet rule put an end to the independence of the DRA. According to Dragadze, the Sovietization process repelled Azerbaijan both economically and culturally. Soviet Azerbaijan, a country rich in oil, had to serve according to the economic interests of the Soviet Union. Conversely, the alphabet was changed from Arabic to Latin and then, from Latin to Cyrillic only in two decades. These changes have influenced Azerbaijan culturally. Furthermore, under the rule of Stalin, the border between Azerbaijan and Iran was closed and the Azerbaijanis who had Iranian



passports were deported from Azerbaijan in 1938. All these attempts led to the isolation of Soviet Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani intellectuals and political activists who resisted Soviet rule were sent to prison camps, executed, or killed. Religion was restricted, and religious places were demolished (1996, pp. 272-273).

Azerbaijan was a part of the Russian Empire for two hundred years and later on, it was a part of the Soviet Union for seventy years. This contributed to the modernization of Azerbaijan in line with Western values, which is acknowledged by Azerbaijanis. Although more than twenty different ethnic groups live in Azerbaijan, the ethnic identity of the majority is Turkish, so the ideology of Turkism has shown itself occasionally. Lastly, Azerbaijan's location enables one to see the Caucasian elements in their identity. Besides, Azerbaijanis are both ethnically and religiously different than the countries in the Southern Caucasia such as Georgia and Armenia. Although the majority of Azerbaijanis belong to the Oghuz branch of Turks and believe in Shia Islam, Georgians and Armenians are Christians. All these features have contributed to the emergence of a sui generis Azerbaijani culture and identity. Taking into account these characteristics, the complex nature of Azerbaijani identity can be grasped to a certain extent. In this regard, one interviewee stated that:

In my opinion, Azerbaijani identity is Turkic. There is an Islamic element in Azerbaijani identity, there is a Caucasian element in Azerbaijani identity ... there is Caucasianness in us for example, you can't see this in Turkey. And we have Iranian elements, Persian elements are also strong, as well as a strong Russian element. It has affected us over the last two hundred years. I don't evaluate this as a bad situation. Indeed, we have seen harm from Russians, but we also benefitted from them to a certain extent. I mean, we benefitted from their universities. ... I don't separate Persians from us because Azerbaijanis are the builders of Iranian identity. ... As Turkey has benefitted from the Mediterranean, from Greece and the Balkans, we benefitted from Caucasia, Russians, Armenians, Georgians because Azerbaijan is a small country. There are Caucasian, Russian and also Persian elements here. In my opinion, we borrowed very interesting things from them. Our mugham (a specialized style of music attributed to the Azerbaijani people) is more different in this sense. The intonations in our language are different, Persian words in our language is a little bit different. Our sense of Islam is different due to the effects of Russians, Caucasia and so on. ... However, Azerbaijan managed to create sui generis, an independent and autonomous identity. It has been affected by these cultures, but it was never under the impact of them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with an academician (5)

Considering all these matters, the impacts of Iran, Russia and Turkey on the identity of Azerbaijanis have been continuing in various ways from the past to the present. Almost all of the interviewees pointed out these impacts. In line with the scope of my thesis, their impacts have become visible with respect to the issues of the alphabet and the name of the state language since both the alphabet and the language are seen as a way of both rapprochement and the estrangement. In the following heading, script changes will be discussed in this context.

### **3.1.1. Script Changes in Azerbaijan in the Formation of Azerbaijani National Identity**

Script changes in Azerbaijan symbolize three different civilizations that affected the Azerbaijani national identity throughout the ages. As described by almost all of the respondents, Arabic script symbolizes the Islamic civilization (precisely the Iranian effect), Cyrillic script symbolizes the Soviet cultural inheritance and Russian civilization, whereas the Latin script symbolizes Western and Turkish values and civilizations. Each of these alphabet changes served certain purposes of different civilizations. In this regard, the interviewees made the following comments:

Cyrillic means being under the bondage of Russia, Russification. Let's say, Latin (alphabet) represents Turkification. Cyrillic alphabet, on the other hand, represents Russification, Sovietization. Arabic alphabet represents Persianization. ... during history, Persians have tried to Persianate us, whereas Russians have tried to Russify us, but we chose Latin because we, ourselves, wanted to Turkify.<sup>5</sup>

Arabic alphabet symbolizes our medieval relations and our connections with Islam. Latin alphabet symbolizes our modernity. Cyrillic meant to be a part of Russia. Latin alphabet means commonality with the Turkic world, common alphabet. ... Latin alphabet doesn't only mean rejection of the Soviet heritage, but also rejection of Russian imperialism. Not just for today, but also for the future. ... we're independent now and we aren't a part of that civilization anymore. Adoption of the Latin alphabet signifies modernism and Turkishness.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with an expert (15)

<sup>6</sup> Interview with an expert (8)

The transition from Arabic to Latin script meant innovation and modernization ... Turkey also experienced the same process. The transition from Latin to Cyrillic alphabet meant Sovietization. Adopting Latin letters again meant independence.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1920s, Azerbaijani intellectual elites comprehended the transition to Latin alphabet as a precondition of modernization and development. The first script change occurred in 1923 as a result of long-lasting debates among the Azerbaijani intellectuals. Some of the intellectuals asserted that the transition from Arabic to Latin script would cause the disappearance of their ties with the past. This would also be destructive for the future generations since they would not be able to read sources about Azerbaijani history, culture and literature written in Arabic. Hence, they evaluated the script change as disengagement from their past (Ergun, 2010a, p. 35). As worded by an interviewee:

Alphabet change uprooted people from their pasts. Today, people can't read the press published in the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, *Ekinchi* is the first newspaper in Azerbaijani press, but even 2 per cent of the population in Azerbaijan can't read it. ... When you change your alphabet, you not only distance yourself from the Arabic alphabet, but you also alienate your millennial culture and history.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to these arguments, many leading intellectuals claim that the number of sources published in Arabic was very insignificant, so it would not be a crucial loss. Besides, due to the difficulty of the Arabic alphabet, the literacy rate among Azerbaijanis was low. They came up with the idea that if they adopt the Latin script, the literacy rate would increase considerably, and that Azerbaijanis would not be affected by the ideas of Iranian mullahs. They would also follow Western democratic and secular values and scientific knowledge thereby learn and use the Latin script instead of Arabic since these intellectuals considered Arabic as a symbol of backwardness and abortiveness (Ergun, 2010b, pp. 140-141). An interviewee explained this situation as follows:

From the mid-19th century to the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, Turkishness and Islam started to drift apart from each other. However, these were not opposites. Rather they were evaluated separately. In time, Turkishness predominated Islam. Accordingly, the transition from Arabic to Latin script connoted modernization because there were different Muslim ethnic groups such as Persians, Arabs, Kurds, and they all wanted to be ruled by different regimes such as by a Sheik, Shah, Sultan. Our intellectuals wanted to

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with an expert (17)

<sup>8</sup> Interview with a political analyst (3)

differentiate themselves from these Muslims because they were Republicans. One of the political tools of this differentiation was the transition from Arabic to Latin alphabet. In the 19th century, our intellectuals such as Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Mirza Alakbar Sabir, Mirza Jalil Mammadguluzadeh wrote about this issue. ... There were no Russians, Soviets, Communists at that time. I'm talking about the 19th century. These intellectuals read the books of Montesquieu, Rousseau and were affected by their ideas. Of course, there was the influence of Russian civilization, but there was no policy of the Tsarist government about this issue. The Tsarist government was simply expecting our loyalty, that there was no revolting. Our intellectuals emerged and wrote about secularism, republicanism, Rousseau's ideas like social contract or about the adoption of the Latin alphabet. The adoption of the Latin alphabet was an idea that emerged in Azerbaijan. It was seen as a political tool that meant modernization and rupture from the backward Islamic world.<sup>9</sup>

The second script change occurred in 1939. Unlike the first script change, the second one was not discussed or debated in detail. In order to create the Soviet-man (homo-Sovieticus), Russian language was promoted as the lingua franca for the formation of Soviet identity (Sovietski-narod). This was done through increasing the level of communication among members of the Soviet Union and through disseminating Russian culture. In this regard, the second script change was a top-down, arbitrary decision which was taken in times of political oppression. Cyrillic alphabet was seen as a symbol of Russian domination which was imposed by Stalin in order to Russify Azerbaijan. As a result, Azerbaijan's relations with the rest of the world were restrained; whilst, the USSR became more dominant in the region (Swietochowski, 1995, p. 212).

Using the alphabet change as a political tool is also remarkable and in concurrence with the naming of the state language, as I comprehended this topic during the interviews. An interviewee stated that:

Russians kept the Latin alphabet until 1939. Then with Stalin's decision, they changed our alphabet to Cyrillic. This was a painful process because they forced our hands. In time, the new generation got used to writing in Cyrillic. However, I remember feeling inside deeply that we should get rid of the Cyrillic alphabet when I was in high school. Nobody taught us this idea, but it was kind of in our memories like a genetic code. Eventually, when we got our independence, this conversation restarted. The decision was made, and it was easily switched from Cyrillic to Latin. We saw this not as a cultural but as a political tool.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with a politician (6)

<sup>10</sup> Interview with a politician (6)

Late in the 1980s, discussions about changing the script started. It was claimed that the Cyrillic alphabet was stranger to Azerbaijani culture and history, and that the aim was to remove Azerbaijanis from their cultural and ethnic roots. In other words, it was evaluated as a tool of oppression by the Soviet rule. Hence, in order to put an end to the Soviet legacy, Cyrillic must be replaced with the Latin alphabet, which was voluntarily accepted by Azerbaijani intellectuals in 1923, who argued that it was more appropriate for the Azerbaijani language (Ergun, 2010b, p. 153).

Eventually, when Azerbaijan regained its independence in 1991, script change became an important topic of discussion again. Azerbaijani intellectuals and policymakers claimed that the Cyrillic script has been reflecting their Soviet inheritance and the Soviet culture. They believed that for the continuation of independence, ties with their Soviet past must be cut down. Parallel to this, Western values should be followed for the social, political and economic development of Azerbaijan. In this regard, every script change in Azerbaijan symbolizes different cultural and political discourses depending upon different contexts. It is also associated with the issue of identity. As worded by an interviewee:

In my opinion, it was the issue of identity. The idea of changing the alphabet during Elchibey's presidency and the Azerbaijani national movement was an extension of the rampancy of identity. I mean, "I am a Turk and an Azerbaijani, Russia is an enemy of us, I don't want the alphabet which Russia has imposed on us". This was a kind of protest. I mean, there was the idea of being anti-Russian and anti-regressivism. This meant Russia no longer was a progressive country. During history, Russia was an enemy of us, but she was also progressive. That's why we couldn't decide. But Russia was both an enemy and a regressive country in the 1990s. So, that's why we didn't want the one that was both hostile and regressive. We wanted someone amicable and progressive. And, for me, it was a reflection of an identity preference.<sup>11</sup>

In general, the adoption of the Latin script in independent Azerbaijan was a deliberate political decision, which had a symbolic meaning for the re-definition of national identity. This decision reflected the rejection of the Soviet heritage since Cyrillic belonged to Russians and referred to the alienation of Azerbaijanis from their cultural and ethnic roots by means of oppression. Therefore, script change was also seen as an indicator of both independence and sovereignty for Azerbaijanis. In this regard, after independence, the

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with an academician (5)

transition from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet has been considered as a progressive step which represented the increasing tendency toward the West and Turkey. As worded by different interviewees:

It was related to political decisions. We used the Arabic alphabet because we were part of the Islamic civilization. There was one civilization and one alphabet in this geography. Later, we adopted the Latin alphabet because they wanted to break our ties with our Eastern past. This was for modernization. ... Thereafter, the Soviet administration changed our alphabet from Latin to Cyrillic to insert us into Russian civilization. In the 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed we tended towards Western civilization by detaching ourselves from the Russian civilization. That's why we adopted the Latin alphabet because we regard ourselves as belonging to Western civilization. I think it was the right move. Turkey also followed the same path. It switched its alphabet from Arabic to Latin due to same valid reasons. We felt as belonging to Western civilization, contemporary civilization rather than Eastern civilization. (Alphabet change) was an indicator of this fact.<sup>12</sup>

In my opinion, firstly it (the transition from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet) was a kind of protest against Russia. This means I don't want your alphabet, you're an enemy. Secondly, I want to have the alphabet of more progressive nations. Thirdly or maybe the foremost and most important, Turkey uses that alphabet. So, let's use the same alphabet.<sup>13</sup>

The majority of the interviewees explained the adoption of the Latin alphabet after independence in relation to the close ties with Turkey. According to many of them, using the Latin alphabet in Turkey prompted the idea of adopting Latin letters in Azerbaijan, too, since Turkey was perceived as a model. However, this step was not taken simply because Turkey's alphabet is Latin. As stated by an interviewee:

About the adoption of Latin, rapprochement with Turkey wasn't the main driving force. Although there was a desire for closeness between Turkey and Azerbaijan, the main driving force was that people personally wanted to take this step because of their memory in the past about Latin. ... there was an idea about rapprochement with Turkey, becoming distant from Russia, and returning back to the past.<sup>14</sup>

By considering all these claims above, it can be concluded that not only language but also alphabet has a symbolic meaning in Azerbaijan which may represent being a part of different civilizations. Additionally, there is a consensus on the issue of adoption of Latin

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with an expert (16)

<sup>13</sup> Interview with an academician (5)

<sup>14</sup> Interview with a politician (6)

alphabet since Azerbaijanis do not want another change, and they widely internalized the Latin alphabet compared to the name of the state language. On the other hand, it can also be asserted that the alphabet has not played a significant role for the persistence of Azerbaijani national identity in comparison with its neighbours such as Georgia and Armenia who had their own alphabets for centuries as argued by an interviewee.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, it is important to analyze the main elements for the persistence of Azerbaijani national identity in the following heading.

### **3.1.2. Elements for the Persistence of Azerbaijani National Identity**

Smith defines national identity as “the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identifications of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements.” (2001, p. 18). Hence, Smith pays special attention to the role of myths, memories, shared values, traditions and symbols as “reminders of the unique culture” (2003, p.191). Based on Smith’s claims, all of the elements that ensure the persistence of their national identity were discussed in detail with the respondents.

When the participants were asked about the elements ensuring the continuity of their identity, a large majority said that language is the most important element. In addition to the language, other elements such as traditions, culture, music, and literature were also listed. However, it is very obvious that language plays a vital role in the continuity and persistence of identity since culture is perceived as a building block of identity and language as the carrier of culture. Hence, Azerbaijani political elites attribute special symbolic meaning to language in the process of national identity formation.

Based on my fieldwork, Azerbaijanis pay special attention to language since many interviewees directly associated language with national identity. They evaluated Azerbaijani language as the primary indicator of their national identity and claimed that they cannot maintain their identity without preserving their language. As opposed to these arguments,

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with an academician (14)

one interviewee mentioned the importance of the sense of belonging rather than language for the continuity of identity. As worded below:

I know that many people might say that for the continuation of identity, language is the essential (factor) ... But I can tell you that the feeling of belonging to a certain culture is more important. Because there can be some people (Azerbaijani) who speaks Russian but doesn't know any Azerbaijani ... I have personally met such people and these people define themselves as Azerbaijani, as an Azerbaijani Turk. I know Azerbaijanis living in Derbent. They are very patriotic, loving Azerbaijan, its culture, food, music, everything about Azerbaijan. But they lost their language. Language is a very important element, but identifying yourself with a culture, country or a nation is very important.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, it was also claimed that if the language of instruction is different than the mother tongue, children will feel belonging to a different culture and civilization. This leads to weakening of the ties between members of a society. Thus, they evaluate language and culture as parts of an inseparable whole. In this regard, five of the interviewees emphasized the importance of mother tongue in education for the persistence of identity and claimed that education in the Russian language alienates Azerbaijani children from their own cultural values. This was emphasized as follows:

In my opinion, education is the main factor (for the maintenance of identity). That is why education in Azerbaijani language must be improved ... enhancing the quality of education ensures the sustainability of language ... this can maintain Azerbaijani identity.<sup>17</sup>

It's language (the first factor for the maintenance of identity). Language, education, education in that language, and the quality of that education. Because when education in that language (mother tongue) is of low quality, people start going to other schools. For example, English schools, Russian schools. For instance, I met with an ambassador who graduated from a English-medium school. He said that... because Turkish schools were of poor quality, he went to an English school that was founded by some American missionaries. He was 65 years old. I could still sense a different culture in him because he went to that school. So, language and qualified education are very important in my view.<sup>18</sup>

Personally, it's education, history, and language. ... The roots of all of the big problems in Azerbaijan is Azerbaijani schools. This is related to the quality of education. Simply according to the language factor, people are trying to give education to their children in another language. ... The second one is history. ... Azerbaijanis are forming their national

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with an academician (10)

<sup>17</sup> Interview with an expert (15)

<sup>18</sup> Interview with an expert (12)



identity according to their relations with Armenia. This is linked with the conflict with Armenia.<sup>19</sup>

An interesting point is that none of the interviewees were against learning Russian, regardless of their age. All of the participants knew Russian language whereas fifteen of them knew both Russian and English. Thirteen interviewees received their education in Azerbaijani language whereas five of them received their education in Russian language. The children of six participants were receiving their education in Azerbaijani language, two elder participants' children also received their education in Azerbaijani language, and two participants who did not have a child stated that if they had a child, they would send them to Azerbaijani medium school. Three participants' children were receiving education in Russian language and two participants' children were receiving education in English. One participant stated that if he had a child, he would send him or her to Russian or English medium school, whilst one participant said that the language of instruction was not important, and that he would pick the school which offers qualified education regardless the language of instruction. One participant emphasized the increasing importance of English as an international language and said that if he had a child he would consider English medium schools. When I asked the participants which foreign languages they wanted their children to learn, they mostly said Russian language together with English. This is because they still see Russian language as necessary in terms of the dynamics in the region. English language was also considered as important since it was an international language. The participants commonly did not evaluate (Anatolian) Turkish as a foreign language and mentioned that learning Turkish takes only two or three months for an Azerbaijani due to the similarities between the two languages.

Some participants underlined the significance of the will of people and the role of intellectuals to preserve their identity, language, and cultural values. One participant mentioned the role of the state for the formation and continuation of identity by stating that "...the state creates nationalism, nation, and language."<sup>20</sup> The interviewees also mentioned other factors for the persistence of identity such as the oral and written literature, traditions,

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with an expert (17)

<sup>20</sup> Interview with an expert (13)

cuisine, music (specifically mugham), the Newroz festival, historical consciousness, and religion. Additionally, one interviewee expressed that:

Demography (in terms of the persistence of identity) is important, neighbouring is important, the existence of Turkey and Southern Azerbaijan is important. The development of language is crucial. Language needs to be sufficiently formed. And related to that, literature needs to be at the same level. We already have this type of literature. ... We have Bakhtiyar Vahabzade, his poems can be shown to everyone without any hesitation, even after five hundred years, his poems will still be read. ... Firdevsi wrote Shahname. People say that Firdevsi revived Persian language, he created the Persian nation. I think our's will transcend it. We also have such kinds of literary works which we are proud of. For instance, our music pieces. You can show them anywhere in the world without hesitation. And everyone would say it's very interesting, very beautiful. ... these people have created a ... sophisticated culture that everyone agrees with, and this ensures the durability of our civilization (culture).<sup>21</sup>

In addition to all these elements, one of the interviewee introduced regionalism as another element as described below:

All the elements that make up ethnicity that Anthony Smith talks about are important factors for our worldview or for the continuity of our national identity. But ranking them according to their level of importance can vary from person to person ... For me, unfortunately, regionalism is much more important than others. People reveal their sense of belonging, unfortunately, through regional ties.<sup>22</sup>

Different from these ideas, one interviewee emphasized the role of Heydar Aliyev as a protector of Azerbaijani identity by authoritative means. According to the interviewee, ethnic identity has been gaining importance for both the titular nation and the minority groups. However, Azerbaijani identity has been undertaking a unifying role in the society. As worded below:

The only thing which ensures continuity (of Azerbaijani identity) was the adoption of the (new) constitution in 1995 by Heydar Aliyev, and adding it to formal documents. Were there people then who were protecting and saving this identity? Yes. Who are these people? Very marginal people from the Soviet times, ones who harbor the tradition of being Azerbaijani. ... These people are the ones who believe that nothing good can come from Turkey or Russia. ... The formation of Azerbaijani identity is based on the period of Stalin in the 1930s. Then in 1995, Heydar Aliyev again changed the name of the language from Turkish to Azerbaijani when he adopted the new constitution by authoritarian means. I'm repeating, the continuation of Azerbaijani identity is ensured by marginal peoples who continue to keep the Soviet

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with an academician (5)

<sup>22</sup> Interview with an academician (11)

inheritance of being Azerbaijani. I'm guessing that both the titular nation and other ethnic minorities are ready to refuse Azerbaijani identity in a serious manner ... but in my opinion, Azerbaijani identity is a very important thing in these lands.<sup>23</sup>

Based on the data obtained from my fieldwork, it can be claimed that language has a special place in the context of national identity since Azerbaijanis regard language as an indispensable part of their culture. They highlight the importance of mother tongue in education since they fear that there is no other way to preserve their language and consequently their culture. It is believed that receiving education in a foreign language leads to cultural discrepancy in Azerbaijani society by generating individuals who have a different mentality and a worldview. They are very attached to their culture and language since they believe that they maintain their identity by preserving their language for last two hundred years while they were living under the bondage of Tsarist Russia and then under the Soviet rule. In this regard, they attribute very special symbolic meaning to the language.

In the following heading, I will discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the context of national awakening, identity, and the idea of homeland.

### **3.1.3. The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Resurgence of Identity**

The Nagorno-Karabakh issue is indisputably important to comprehend the national identity of Azerbaijanis since a state of awareness has emerged in the community leading to the restoration of Azerbaijani nationalism. In other words, it has enabled national integrity through a national awakening among the Azerbaijanis. More than twenty-five thousand Azerbaijanis lost their lives mostly between 1990 and 1994 (Tokluoğlu, p. 27). The twenty per cent of Azerbaijani territories is under the occupation of Armenia, and more than one million Azerbaijanis had to flee from the occupied lands to Azerbaijan (Cornell, 1998, p. 51). In this regard, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue has affected both the foreign policy understanding and the domestic policy choices of Azerbaijan. The Popular Front gained popularity with the rising of Azerbaijani nationalism in the face of Armenian aggression (Demirtepe and Laçiner, 2004, p. 206). The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is also important in terms of the issue of identity since the sense of belonging to a certain group is crucial for

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with an expert (16)

group formation in order to distinguish themselves from others, which brings about a differentiation between groups. As worded below:

For the formation of identity, otherness is one of the most important things. In order to identify ourselves, we need the other. In this sense, the Karabakh issue enables us to know the other. I mean, Armenia and those who help Armenia are the other for us.<sup>24</sup>

The Nagorno-Karabakh war also created hatred and mistrust among Azerbaijanis against Russia because they believe that Russia took side with Armenia in this war by establishing a special administration in Nagorno-Karabakh with the order of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union rather than enhancing the authority of Azerbaijan SSR in the region (Abilov and Isayev, 2017, p. 109). Moreover, due to increasing public protests, Russian troops entered into Baku on January 20, 1990 without informing people about the state of emergency. One hundred and twenty-nine civilian Azerbaijanis lost their lives, and many were wounded. This event is known as Black January (*Qara Yanvar* in Azerbaijani) (Mahmudlu, 2017, p.146). In the case of Azerbaijan, among other patterns that Smith classifies, memories are the most crucial pattern through which national identity is reproduced and reinterpreted. Memories have accordingly been shaped by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and Azerbaijanis regarded Armenia and those who supports Armenia as the “other”. In the words of an interviewee:

As you know, there is a sociologist Charles Tilly, whose opinion I agree with, who says war makes nations because shared suffering is very important for the nation. If someone kills you because you are Azerbaijani, then there is unification around Azerbaijani identity. ... Secondly, it also helped us to identify who is our ally and who is our enemy. Today, most of the Russian-speaking Azerbaijanis know that Russia is our enemy. Because everybody knows that Russia occupied Karabakh, not Armenia indeed. If not for Russia, we would take Karabakh back in maybe a month or two. Everybody knows this. ... The Karabakh war helped for the consolidation of local Azerbaijani identity, and also formed the idea that Turkey is our close ally, Russia and Iran are not.<sup>25</sup>

When I asked the impact of the Nagorno-Karabakh war on Azerbaijani identity, seventeen of the eighteen interviewees stated that the Nagorno-Karabakh war has strengthened Azerbaijani national identity by consolidating and unifying all Azerbaijanis. However, two

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with an academician (2)

<sup>25</sup> Interview with an academician (5)

of the participants added that some of the discourses of the Turkish-nationalist people during the war period bothered the non-Turkic minority groups who were fighting for Karabakh at that time. They criticized these discourses as impairing ideas for the national unity of Azerbaijanis. As stated by an interviewee:

While our soldiers were fighting against Armenia in the 1990s, the nationalist Grey Wolves who came from Turkey to fight together, they frequently shouted move forward Turkish soldiers, move forward for Karabakh or the Turk has no friend but the Turk. Lezgins, Talysh, Avars, even Jews participated in that war said that these kinds of slogans were very wrong. We all fought for Azerbaijan. When you say move forward Turkish soldiers, what am I doing here? I'm Avar, I'm Lezgi, I'm Talysh. You should instead say, move forward Azerbaijani soldiers, move forward for Azerbaijan. If you make exclusions, you will hurt me, my honor, you will pressure me.<sup>26</sup>

The Nagorno-Karabakh war also triggered the nationalist sentiments in Azerbaijan. When the quest for identity started, people gravitated to their ethnic roots and consequently, Turkism as an ideology gained popularity. The state of war with Armenia caused the national awakening of Azerbaijanis. As argued by Barth, self-ascription and ascription by others are defining criterion for ethnicity since boundaries are important for membership and exclusion (1969, pp. 13-14). In this sense, when Azerbaijanis were ascribed as Turks by Armenians, their ethnic definition was further reified, and the boundaries became clearer as described below:

Armenians have always perceived us as Turks. In fact, at that time we knew that we were Turks, but we weren't thinking about it. ... We were caught unprepared for the Karabakh war because we were living together with Armenians, and we were also living good. Armenians, I don't refer to the Armenians in Baku because they were Russified. But the Armenians outside of Baku were a non-Turkic group that fitted well into our language and traditions. They also learnt our language. When the (Karabakh) war started, most couldn't believe it, it was impossible because we didn't know the 1915 events in Turkey. The Soviet administration prohibited talking about this issue. However, Armenians knew it because they were talking about it in their families. Actually, in 1918 Armenians massacred Azerbaijanis, but it was forgotten after our older generation died. The Soviet administration prohibited talking about this, too. Also, our people don't remember such kinds of malignity and evilness for a long time because they are generally liberal, secular, and humanist. And we saw that Armenians saw us as an enemy by calling us Turks. They saw us as enemy and the massacre in Khojaly was a major trauma for us. After that, we said if we are Turks, then we will show you our Turkishness. Such understanding emerged. ... Until these events, Turkishness was a folkloric thing. Now, it turned into a more political issue, but only in times of danger.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with an academician (4)

<sup>27</sup> Interview with a politician (6)

Just the emergence of the Armenian problem is an issue of identity. In the 1990s, even Russian speaking Azerbaijanis started to learn Azerbaijani language. The ideas related to Turkism emerged exclusively due to the Armenian question. I mean, historically, Armenia-Azerbaijan problems were going this way. There was a religious factor, there emerged an Armenian-Muslim problem (in 1905). But in this period of war (Nagorno- Karabakh), the support of Russia to Armenia and because of the growing hatred against Russia, we started to emphasize Azerbaijanism. We are Azerbaijanis, Azerbaijani Turks. ... The need for identity emerged. Because until then Azerbaijanis didn't think about their identity. Soviets created a fitting environment for this so that Azerbaijani identity wouldn't surface. But after the Armenian problem, after independence, it strengthened, and Azerbaijanis started to define themselves Azerbaijani, Azerbaijani Turk to show foreigners that they were different than Armenians.<sup>28</sup>

Almost all of the participants emphasized the consolidative role of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for Azerbaijanis. Despite all the negativity and destructiveness of the war, the participants emphasized its importance as a catalyser, which unified peoples living in Azerbaijan as a single community. As stated below:

Karabakh has an affect because Karabakh is a unifying thing. Even the most liberal Azerbaijani, cosmopolitan Azerbaijani, urbanized, Russian-speaking etc. don't want to relinquish Karabakh to Armenians. For example, think about two Azerbaijani families. One of them is a Russian-speaking glamorous family who lives in Baku, and the other one is an internally displaced family who fled from Agdam. The idea unifying them is Karabakh. There can be nothing in common for them, except Karabakh. ... They might never see or talk to each other, but there is an enormous imagined community around the Karabakh issue, as Benedict Anderson claimed. It doesn't matter where you live, if you are an Azerbaijani, you will be sensitive about the Karabakh issue. There are millions of people who never met but can unify around this idea. This is a very strong feeling which the state tries to preserve.<sup>29</sup>

The Karabakh conflict unified all of the ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan ... under the name of Azerbaijani. Actually, this term belongs to all who live here. I mean, Azerbaijani refers to national identity, not to ethnic identity. ... The members of various ethnic groups preserve their own identity, speak their own language, and Azerbaijani Turkish as well. When they go abroad, they describe their belonging to the motherland by saying I'm Azerbaijani.<sup>30</sup>

As claimed by Smith, wars can have different affects according to their time-span. For example, while in the short term the differences between ethnic groups within the state are overlooked in unifying against a common enemy, in the long-term wars can reinforce the communal sensitiveness and further the sense of ethnic individuality (Smith, 1981, p. 391).

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with an expert (15)

<sup>29</sup> Interview with an expert (13)

<sup>30</sup> Interview with an academician (10)

That is what we see in the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict where solidarity and unification against the Armenian threat was effective upon the ethnic groups in Azerbaijan during the first years of the war. On the other hand, as time passed, ethnic groups such as Talysh and Lezgins have emerged with a stronger sense of ethnic individuality due to the conflict becoming more framed as Turkish versus Armenian. As worded by an interviewee who is not ethnically Turk:

When the Karabakh war started even Talysh were fighting at the front row in the battlefield from the end of the 1980s till 1992. But after a while, some people thought that this war is an Armenian versus Turkish war. I mean, when they saw this war as a continuation of old hostilities between Armenia and Turks, the minorities living in these lands started to question what they were doing in this war. That was a very silly thing which ethnic nationalism brought. ...When the USSR was on the brink of collapse, I realized that this was a national liberation movement, Azerbaijani liberation movement, because it was our liberty movement. In the beginning of the 1990s, when Turkish nationalism arose through the national liberation movement, I realized that aha! We're not the same with those (Azerbaijani Turks). I mean, we have a different ethnic identity. I heard this for the first time in my life. At that moment I was 14-15 years old.<sup>31</sup>

Any issue related to Azerbaijan cannot realistically be evaluated without taking into account the unsolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which plays a unifying role for Azerbaijani society, has a significant impact on the development of Azerbaijani national consciousness, as emphasized by the majority of the respondents. Thus, the consciousness of being “us” against “them” has constituted the framework of national identity by creating a sense of belonging and solidarity among Azerbaijanis. Although this conflict has devastating effects on Azerbaijan, it also has a consolidative power by increasing their sense of attachment to the homeland. As stated below:

Karabakh increased the sense of patriotism in people and particularly in the 1990s it played a crucial role in the issue of national identity and gaining independence. The Soviet Union was a conglomerate state. There was one Soviet country, so people were identifying themselves as a Soviet citizen. But in those years the sense of patriotism arose among the people, and they started to think about the territory where they live as their motherland, just like during the period of the first republic. For example, the values being represented in the flag of Azerbaijan, Turkism, modernization, Islamization, made sense for the new generation.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with an expert (16)

<sup>32</sup> Interview with a political analyst (3)

After the Karabakh conflict, people firstly tried to learn their own history. It played a unifying role. For the first time, people as members of a nation, started to realize the sense of territorial concession. The best example of this is between 1918 and 1920 when people didn't have such kind of a sense of belonging to the territory. Now, together with Karabakh, people developed a sense of belonging. ... In 1918, Zengezur was given to Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh was given the status of autonomous oblast, and Armenians were given autonomy, but none of these were given to Azerbaijan, and this was never questioned. With Karabakh, this started to be questioned, national identity was formed, and the sense of belonging to the territory emerged and it still continues. ... National awakening started in the Soviet geography through *perestroika*. In Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh characterized our national awakening.<sup>33</sup>

In the following section, I will discuss the issue of naming of identity and nation with reference to certain historical developments and to the ideologies of Turkism and Azerbaijanism.

### **3.2. Reframing Identity: Cui Bono, Cui Malo?**

The naming of identity is one of the most problematic issues in Azerbaijan due to its internal and external affairs. During history Azerbaijan's population has been called by different names. For example, under the Czarist rule, they were called Muslims or more specifically Tatars referring to Turkic-speaking Muslims. From initial years of Soviet rule to 1937, they were defined as Turks in their passports or other official documents. There was a moderate environment regarding ethnicity. For example, the first Turkology Congress was held in Baku in 1926 with the participation of 131 leading Turkologists from different countries to discuss the problems of Turkic languages regarding a common alphabet, literary language, and terminology (Balim-Harding, 2009, pp. 69-70). However, this moderate policy of Soviet administration towards Turkic identity and their language totally changed in 1937. Many intellectuals including historians, writers and poets were assassinated, sent to prison or exiled due to the allegation of being anti-regime or pan-Turkist. The citizens were called as Azerbaijanis and their language was also called as Azerbaijani rather than Turkic language by means of oppression in the time of "Great Terror" (Yilmaz, 2013, pp. 511-512). According to an interviewee:

Do Russians like Turks? No, they never liked Turks. Although they didn't like them, in 1926, there was the Turkology Congress which was held in Baku. This was the biggest Turkology Congress in history. ... (The Soviet administration) saw that Turks had a desire for a common language, common literature, and a common literary language. 131 people attended to the

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with an expert (17)



Baku Turkology Congress in 1926. According to my research, 128 out of 131 delegates in the Turkology Congress didn't die a natural death. They were killed, sent to exile, shot and so on. They even killed the Russian intellectuals, like Samoylovich, who was a Russian and wrote about Turkic language. They killed this Russian man (Alexander Samoylovich) because he served for Turkology. ... From the 1940s to the 1970s, Turkology experienced a chaos because they cut a generation of Turkologists off. In the 1980s, Turkology started to revive again. But there were no works in the field of Turkology between the 40s and the 70s... I mean, this indicated Russia's hatred for Turks, which ruined Turkology.<sup>34</sup>

Mehdiyeva claims that Azerbaijani national identity was mainly built in the Soviet period. Since then, Soviet administration determined a two-stage strategy for the process of "Azerbaijanisation". This strategy was projected by homogenizing the nation and institutionalizing Azerbaijani nationhood. The institutionalization of the term of Azerbaijani as a nationality, the Azerbaijani nation was superficially envisaged. According to her, ethnic minorities conceded to define themselves as Azerbaijani, which eased the assimilation process. The distinctness of Azerbaijanis from Turks and Iranians was claimed by envisioning the name of the language on the basis of geography. Hence, Azerbaijani nationality was designated and enhanced by the Soviet administration (2003, pp. 276-278).

Following re-independence, these identifications were criticized for the sake of building a nation-state. When the Turkish-nationalist minded intelligentsia gained power with the turmoil of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, the act of identifying and language issue re-emerged. It was argued that Azerbaijani nation and Azerbaijani language were just a fabrication in the times of pressure which Stalin wanted to alienate Azerbaijani Turks from their ethnic roots since Azerbaijani refers to the name of a territory, not of people. In other words, it has a geographic and civic meaning rather than ethnic (Süleymanlı, 2006, pp. 299-300). A number of interviewees indicated that naming the Azerbaijani Turkic population as Azerbaijani was a political manoeuvre by Stalin, and it was an injustice for Azerbaijani Turks. As worded by a historian interviewee:

After 1939, the name of the Azerbaijani Turks was changed as Azerbaijani and it was a great injustice to the people. Azerbaijani included all of the ethnic groups in Azerbaijan. I mean, it referred to the territory. Kurds, Tats living here can territorially define themselves as Azerbaijani. None of these ethnic groups' names were changed. Talysh, Tats, Kurds, Khinalugs, Kumyks, Udins, but the name of the Turks who defined themselves as Azerbaijani Turks was changed. I should note that Azerbaijani Turks started to define themselves as Turks before the 20th century because of the discourse of the intellectuals. Prior to this, people used

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with an academician (4)

to define themselves as Muslims. ... I mean, their religious identity was quite important for them, but when the name of their language was asked, they were calling it Turkic.<sup>35</sup>

After re-independence, the search for identity in Azerbaijan was shaped by the ideology of Turkism, and later by Azerbaijanism. When defining national identity in Azerbaijan these two main ideologies contradict with each other. According to the advocates of Azerbaijanism, the name of the nation in Azerbaijan should be defined as Azerbaijani, while the supporters of Turkism are in favour of defining the nation as Turk. Some advocates of Azerbaijanism claim that the term Azerbaijani is envisaged as an upper identity, so it essentially embraces all ethnic groups in Azerbaijan. However, advocates of Turkism criticize these ideas by claiming that the vast majority of the citizens are Turk, and that they were called as Turk in all of the official documents until 1937. After 1937, the term of Azerbaijani was fabricated by Stalin to uproot Turks from their ethnic roots as a result of the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union. Thus, they demand that this historical injustice towards Turks should be repaired by bringing the term Turk back rather than Azerbaijani since the term Azerbaijani cannot be the definition of their ethnic identity. The term Azerbaijani is rather the answer to the question where you are from. In other words, this term refers to geography, not ethnicity. They also criticize the idea that although non-Turkic ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan can ethnically define their identity and language, Turks as the titular nation cannot define themselves by their ethnicity fearing that it may cause resentment among other ethnic minorities. On the other hand, the advocates of the ideology of Azerbaijanism argue that defining the nation as Turks may lead to confusion for foreigners since defining yourself as a Turk makes them think of Turkey, not of Azerbaijan. Additionally, Azerbaijanis have their own distinctive features which originate from their history and geography. The distinctiveness and authenticity of Azerbaijanis should be preserved for the survival of independent Azerbaijan. As a middle way, some people suggest the use of the term Azerbaijani Turk for the sake of emphasizing the distinctiveness of Azerbaijani Turks from Turks in Turkey. However, by considering the present-day conditions and the requirements for state-building, the ruling elite has decided to follow the ideology of Azerbaijanism for the sake of national unity and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan (Süleymanlı, 2006, pp. 308-319).

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with an academician (10)

There are various ideas on the development and essence of the ideologies of Turkism and Azerbaijanism. Some of the intellectuals claim that the basis of the ideology of Azerbaijanism was effectuated in the period of Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (1918-1920). According to Taghiyeva, Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, the founder of the DRA, envisaged the idea of Azerbaijanism as the concept of unification of Southern Azerbaijan (Northern Iran) and Northern Azerbaijan (present-day Azerbaijan) (1998, p. 33). Rustamov also claims that the roots of the ideology of Azerbaijanism are based on the period of the DRA and that Azerbaijanism became more visible and effective through the presidency of Heydar Aliyev (2008, p. 91).

Although some researchers claim that Azerbaijanism derives from the ADR, Ramiz Mehdiyev, who is the Head of the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Azerbaijan, claimed that Azerbaijanism is the first example of a national ideology that has recently been used in the Azerbaijani national-political discourse. He defines Azerbaijanism as verbalization of the idea of unification of all of the ethnic groups living in the country on the basis of the common interests of the Republic of Azerbaijan. It emerged to struggle against widespread chauvinist and separatist movements in Azerbaijan in 1992 and 1993 and received enough support from the public in a short time (Mehdiyev, 2007). Rzayev (2017) also asserts that Heydar Aliyev was the founder of the ideology of Azerbaijanism by transforming Azerbaijanism into a national ideology which unites all Azerbaijanis in the world and provides a basis for independent Azerbaijan. According to Rzayev, Heydar Aliyev applied Azerbaijanism to statehood, created a national state based on this ideology, and formed a sense of statehood in the people.

Some intellectuals, on the other hand, define Turkism and Azerbaijanism as complementary ideologies rather than being contradictory. Nesibzadeh claims that the formation of national consciousness in Azerbaijan dates back a long time. In this process, the ideologies of Turkism and Azerbaijanism emerged in response to policies of Russification and Persianization. Thanks to the intellectuals such as Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Hasan Bey Zerdabi, Huseyinzade Ali Bey, and Ahmed Bey Agaoghlu, Azerbaijani national consciousness was stimulated, and the ideology of Turkism responded to the search for identity. It was followed by the members of the Musavat Party, and later on by the Popular Front of Azerbaijan, more precisely by Abulfaz Elchibey. The ideology of Turkism aimed

to scrutinize their ethno-cultural roots and history, raising national consciousness, development of national culture, nationalization of the education system, formalization of the naming of Turkic language and the Turkish nation, raising the level of national language to state language, establishment of close relations with Turkic states, and adoption of a common alphabet and a common literary language for all Turkic states. Azerbaijanism as complementing the ideology of Turkism grounds on the ideas of national statehood, national integrity, and the protection of the rights of ethnic-national minorities living in Azerbaijan. In this regard, Nesibzadeh objects to the claims that Turkism may lead to the disintegration of Azerbaijan which is contrary to democratic principles. He asserts that the titular nation requires the ideology of Turkism for raising Azerbaijani national consciousness, and Azerbaijanism is needed for the protection of national minorities. (Nəsibzadə, 1998, pp. 5-6).

The national leader of Azerbaijan designated the ideology of Azerbaijanism as a state policy which aims to bond all Azerbaijanis living both inside and outside of Azerbaijan. The nationality perception of this ideology includes an understanding of territorial-based nationhood, patriotism, and the preservation of cultural values. When the speech of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, at the First Congress of the World Azerbaijanis on November 10, 2001 is taken into account, it can be seen that he defines the ideology of Azerbaijanism clearly:

Azerbaijanity, the idea of azerbaijanity unites all of us. After Azerbaijan gained its independence, the Azerbaijanity, as a leading idea, has become the primary idea for the Azerbaijanis living both in Azerbaijan and abroad. We should unite around this idea. The Azerbaijanity means maintenance of national belonging, maintenance of the national-spiritual values, and at the same time, their enrichment with synthesis, integration into common to all mankind values, as well as provision of development of each personality (Speech of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev at the I Congress of the World Azerbaijanis, 2001).

According to Ibrahimli, there are fifty million Azerbaijanis living around the world. Therefore, the term Azerbaijani has a unifying power as a common name. He suggests that all Azerbaijanis and their language must be defined with this term. Unifying components like Azerbaijanism, language, common alphabet, common names, and surnames should be considered in order to form a national identity. Besides, the history of Azerbaijan should be scrutinized with respect to Turkish history, as well as to the history of both Northern and

Southern Azerbaijan which should be seen as forming a whole (2016, p. 8). He strongly argues that using the term Azeri can lead to a fallacy for people who do not know the Azerbaijanis and their history very well (Ibid, p. 5).

As discussed above, there is no consensus on both the development and content of these two competing ideologies. Although the traces of these ideologies could be seen in the past and different classifications can be made, the most accurate classification is according to the three successive periods each with a different president: the period of Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) under the presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey (1992-1993), the period of New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) under the presidency of Heydar Aliyev (1993-2003), and lastly the period of Ilham Aliyev (NAP) as his father Heydar Aliyev's successor (2003- ). In the following section, these periods regarding the issues of language and identity will be examined in detail under different headings.

### **3.2.1. The Ideology of Turkism: Period of the Presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey (PFA Government)**

Just after the adoption of Latin scripts in 1991, the identity issue became a popular topic among the intellectuals and political elites since they were struggling to break away from their Soviet heritage and to define who they really are. The Nagorno-Karabakh War and Khojaly massacre led to the rising of nationalist ideas, herewith predominantly nationalist-minded intelligentsia of the PFA came to power in 1992, and the ideology of Turkism surpassed with the overemphasis on Turkishness by President Abulfaz Elchibey.

The PFA government tried to remove the Russian impact both on Azerbaijani identity and language through a set of language policies in the light of the ideology of Turkism. During the presidency of Elchibey, the ruling elite tried to redefine Azerbaijani national identity by attributing meaningful significance to Turkism. In this context, Elchibey aimed to realize a cultural revival by using language which he saw as the most effective tool. Hence, the main logic behind the consolidation of cultural identity was to construct a national identity based on Turkishness. In this sense, language played a symbolic role for reshaping of the national identity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. In line with this objective, the Law on the State Language

in the Republic of Azerbaijan was enacted on December 22, 1992 by the government of the PFA (Garibova, 2009, pp. 16-17). This law stated that:

The state language of the Republic of Azerbaijan is the Turkic language. All of the work in governmental bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan is carried out in Turkic Language. The Turkic language as the state language of the Republic of Azerbaijan is used in political, economic, public, scientific and cultural life, and it assumes the role of the communication language for all the nationalities living in Azerbaijan. The learning of the Turkic language by the people of other nationalities is appreciated and supported. (No 413, Article 1).<sup>36</sup>

This law was criticized so that the name of the state language would lead to inappreciativeness among the non-Turkic ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan (Süleymanlı, 2006, p. 300). However, it envisaged the right to choose the language for education and theoretically enabled them to get an education in their mother tongue as indicated below:

Citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan are provided with the freedom to choose a language for education. People and ethnic groups living in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan are given the right to organize separate classes and groups in their native language through the state bodies of the Republic in preschool institutions, secondary schools or different types of educational institutions. As a compulsory subject, the Turkic language, the state language of the Republic of Azerbaijan, is provided in the educational institutions where education is conducted in another language. (Law on the State Language in the Republic of Azerbaijan, No 413, Article 3).<sup>37</sup>

The opponents of Elchibey argued that Turkic language as the name of the official language could overshadow the image of independent Azerbaijan by increasing ties with Turkey and by generating a false perception as if Turkey is the (new) big brother of Azerbaijan. Quite the contrary, the main purpose for Azerbaijan was to demonstrate its independence both to Russia and the West. In this regard, the opponents offered the name of Azerbaijani in place of Turkic language as the official definition of the state language (Garibova, 2009, p. 16).

The PFA government remained in power for a short period of time (1992-93) due to external and internal pressures together with the lack of experience of the new ruling elite. This was because Elchibey's pro-Turkish, anti-Russian and anti-Iranian foreign policy did not fit into the political realities of the time. Elchibey's discourse on the unification with Southern Azerbaijan (*Bütöv Azərbaycan* in Azerbaijani) discomfited Iran regarding its territorial

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<sup>36</sup> Translated by the author

<sup>37</sup> Translated by the author

integrity. This issue is called as the question of Southern Azerbaijan which is defined by Cornell as “the uncertain status of the huge cohort of Azerbaijanis living in Iran” (2011, p. 319). Right after independence, Iran was seen as a natural ally of the Republic of Azerbaijan thanks to having Shia Islamic belief, sharing certain common cultural values, being a part of a common civilization in the past, and the condemnation of Ayatollah Khomeini to the Red Army for the events on January 20, 1990. However, when President Elchibey followed an irredentist policy by endorsing the idea of unification of the Azerbaijani populations both in Azerbaijan and Iran and accused Iran of violating the rights of the Azerbaijanis living in Iran, the relations between Iran and Azerbaijan deteriorated (Valiyev, 2012, p. 2). Besides, formally leaving the Commonwealth of Independent States bothered Russia regarding its economic interests in the region. Hence, Russia and Iran as the two major regional powers protect their interests in the region by manipulating ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan and by developing bilateral relations with Armenia. Consequently, the pro-Turkish tendencies of Abulfaz Elchibey and his strong emphasis on Turkishness triggered the emergence of separatist-minded forces among Lezgin and Talysh minorities. For instance, the emergence of a nationalist movement among Lezgins called as Sadval and an attempt to establish the Talysh-Mugan Republic by colonel Alikram Humbetov undermined the authority of the PFA government and namely President Abulfaz Elchibey (Cornell, pp. 70-75).<sup>38</sup> In the fieldwork, a few respondents emphasized that the reactions of ethnic minority groups were not against the name of the language, rather it was triggered by the Elchibey’s strong emphasis on Turkishness since they felt excluded. Hence, political elites comprehended the necessity for a unifying policy for language and national identity which ensures a sense of togetherness among Azerbaijanis. In this regard, one interviewee expressed his ideas on this issue as follows:

The naming of language as Turkish or Azerbaijani Turkish by that government or later naming it officially as Azerbaijani language with the 1995 Constitution should be evaluated within the context of that period. According to me, there are two criteria here. The first one is the parameter of realpolitik which was related to the political situation Azerbaijan was going through in the 1990s. There was the Karabakh war ... Paralell to this, there were many domestic events ... Lezgins and Talysh uprisings. When ethnic problems emerge ... you have to take some measures. ... During that period, during the Özal period, Turkey’s policy of pan-Turkism, the Turkic World, was on the rise ... The Soviet dissolution went hand in hand with ethnic energy. But the realpolitik showed that the situation was totally different. Russia’s interests, the neighbor’s interests ... Therefore, Azerbaijan had to make a revision, had to

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<sup>38</sup> For further information regarding minority issue see (Mehdiyeva, 2003; Tokluoğlu, 2005)

develop a national ideology according to the realpolitik... They abandoned the pan-Turkist tendency which was difficult (to impose), which had problems. ... During the Soviet times, something as being Azerbaijani was developed ... it was easier to impose something already there.<sup>39</sup>

Considering the internal and external dynamics in Azerbaijan, the need for a pragmatic and balanced foreign policy was realized. During my field research, a number of interviewees claimed that these separatist forces were manipulated and supported by regional powers. In order to prevent external interventions, Azerbaijan had to follow a balanced policy in its external affairs. In terms of domestic affairs, it had to pursue a unifying and inclusive ideology due to the state of war with Armenia and the numerous ethnic minority groups living in Azerbaijan. However, Elchibey's inexperience in state administration and overemphasis on Turkishness caused sensitivities in the society. He was not able to comprehend these sensitivities and the possible outcomes of external interventions around these issues. Besides, his pro-Turkish stance was considered as romantic rather than pragmatic since Turkey hesitated to directly support Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh War due to world-wide debates about the events that took place in the Ottoman Empire in 1915. Moreover, Turkey also did not want to antagonize Russia by interfering Russia's sphere of influence due to the uncertainties in the new world order following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Cornell, pp. 370-371). Hence, the fall of the PFA government proved that Azerbaijan should consider both the regional and internal dynamics when formulating its policies. In this sense, internal and external damages such as violence, political instability, and ethnic conflict were tried to be healed by Heydar Aliyev through the ideology of Azerbaijanism based on a balanced foreign policy.

### **3.2.2. The Ideology of Azerbaijanism: Period of the Presidency of Heydar Aliyev**

Azerbaijanism is a pluralistic understanding of identity which aims to unite a wide variety of groups living in Azerbaijan under the same umbrella (Tokluoğlu, 2012, p. 52). In this regard, Azerbaijanism as a unifying ideology aims to unite all Azerbaijanis on the basis of a civic-based nationality rather than ethnicity during the presidency of Heydar Aliyev, and his successor Ilham Aliyev. This ideology has been internalized to restrain ethnic-based resentments and to hold all citizens of Azerbaijan together. During the presidency of

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with an academician (11)



Elchibey, the ideology of Turkism and the strong emphasis on Turkishness undermined the existing social bonds in Azerbaijanis and caused uprisings among Lezgin and Talysh populations who are the two biggest ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan (Mahmudlu, 2017, pp.146-147). In terms of national identity, Heydar Aliyev pursued a different path than Elchibey. The term Azerbaijani has been started to be used to refer all of the inhabitants of Azerbaijan (Shaffer, 2002, p. 166).

Heydar Aliyev evaluated language as “one of the main factors in building a nation” (Blair, 2001, p. 15). Hence, he attributed a symbolic meaning to language. Heydar Aliyev’s idea of Azerbaijanism was based on the enhancement of national values such as language, traditions, and culture as indicated in the quote below:

... Nationality of each person is a source of his pride. I have been always proud and I am proud today of being an Azerbaijani. The supreme idea of independent Azerbaijan is the Azerbaijanity. Each Azerbaijani should be proud of his nationality. We must develop the Azerbaijanity - language, culture, national and spiritual values, the traditions of Azerbaijan. The decision adopted by us on the development of the Azerbaijani language pursues just this goal. We have passed a decision on transition to the Latin alphabet. Today, all the people in Azerbaijan, all the state bodies use only the Latin alphabet. This is an extremely important factor proving our national originality, the Azerbaijanity. We will henceforth continue our efforts for the development of the Azerbaijani language (Speech of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev at the I Congress of the World Azerbaijanis, 2001).

Within this direction, he defined both the language and national identity of Azerbaijan on the basis of territory rather than ethnicity. During my field research, all of the interviewees mentioned that the term Azerbaijani derives from the name of the territory; it does not refer to ethnic belonging. In other words, it only indicates territorial belonging. Azerbaijani as a term for the language of the state was institutionalized with the adoption of a new constitution in 1995. Article 21 of the Constitution of the Republic Azerbaijan reads as:

- I. The official language of the Republic of Azerbaijan is Azerbaijani Language. The Republic of Azerbaijan guarantees the development of Azerbaijani Language.
- II. The Republic of Azerbaijan guarantees free use and development of other languages spoken by the population.

Although the state language has been determined as Azerbaijani, numerous ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan has also been considered. Article 45 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan guarantees that:

I. 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.

II. Nobody may be deprived of right to use his/her mother tongue.

The naming of the nation and its language with the term of Azerbaijani has been much disputed by the opposition by arguing that this term was first used in the late 1930s and it was envisaged to alienate Azerbaijani Turks from their ethnic roots. Many intellectuals who were opposed to this decision were killed, jailed or sent into exile. In short, they claimed that the term Azerbaijani was inherited from the time of the “Great Terror”. Azerbaijan as an independent republic should put an end to this unfairness and delusion (Süleymanlı, 2006, pp. 308-311). Additionally, in my interviews, some respondents emphasized that Azerbaijanis were not expecting the outbreak of the Nagorno-Karabakh war because they were not aware of their ethnic identity. However, Armenians call them as Turks, nurturing enmity towards them. Therefore, the term Azerbaijani may prevent the development of ethnic consciousness or awareness of membership in a nation among Azerbaijani Turks. On the other hand, the majority of respondents supported the term of Azerbaijani for both the language and the identity for the sake of national unity. Majority of the respondents including non-Turkic Azerbaijani respondents regarded Azerbaijani identity as an upper identity. As worded by an interviewee:

National identity has been formed and there is a language of this national identity which is Azerbaijani language. I regard Azerbaijani language and Azerbaijanism as an upper identity.<sup>40</sup>

An interviewee explained the political attitude of Heydar Aliyev towards language and identity as follows:

This is similar to the attempts made by Ataturk during the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. In what sense? There was a pan-Turkist vein coming from the Young Turks in the late period of the Ottoman Empire. However, Ataturk predicated the national identity in the Anatolian geography rather than the *Turan* geography. He didn't call the name of the language as Anatolian language, it was called Turkish. The envisagement of homeland was restricted to Anatolia. We followed a similar path which is based on the geography of Azerbaijan. The name of the geography is envisaged as both the name of the language and national identity.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with an expert (17)

<sup>41</sup> Interview with an academician (11)

Regarding foreign policy choices, Heydar Aliyev followed a more pragmatic and balanced foreign policy. He tried to restore the deteriorated relations with Iran and Russia by declaring his support for the territorial integrity of Iran and by joining the Commonwealth of Independent States (Cornell, p. 314). Although Heydar Aliyev occasionally mentioned the similarity between Turkish and Azerbaijani languages, which belong to the same language family, he claimed that Azerbaijani language has its own characteristics by referring to the particular letters (Q, X, Ə) in the Azerbaijani alphabet (Marquardt, 2011, p.186). This can be conceived as putting a certain distance between the Azerbaijani and Turkish languages. This also reflects the symbolic meaning attributed to language in the process of national identity formation. In my field research, the distinctness of Azerbaijani language regarding the three different letters was asked to the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees stated that these different letters do not indicate the uniqueness of Azerbaijani language but partially differentiate Azerbaijani from Turkish. Interviewees also emphasized that these differences should be perceived as cultural richness. However, some participants claimed that only three letters do not differentiate languages since the essence of the Azerbaijani language is Turkic. On the other hand, some participants also mentioned that regarding the literary or academic language, Azerbaijani and Turkish are totally different whilst spoken language seems similar.

Heydar Aliyev also ensured the implementation of the Latinization process. The switch from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet continued for ten years. The transition period was completed by a decree of Heydar Aliyev on “Improving the Implementation of the State Language” which was about the completion of the transition from Cyrillic to Latin-based alphabet until August 1, 2001. Then, he declared the 1st of August as “the Day of the Azerbaijani language and the Azerbaijani alphabet” on August 9, 2001. This day which is perceived as a symbol of Azerbaijanism is annually celebrated (Ömərrov, 2012). In this regard, Heydar Aliyev became the protectorate of the Azerbaijani language through the successful implementation of Latinization (Marquardt, 2011, p. 185). Heydar Aliyev said that “the survival, strengthening and development of the Azerbaijani language as a state language is one of our greatest achievements, this is not only a matter of language, but also of Azerbaijanism” (In Əliyeva, 2010, p.7). The Azerbaijani language and alphabet are treated as symbols of the ideology of Azerbaijanism, these developments are interpreted as the achievements of this ideology, and Heydar Aliyev has been presented as the protector of the country’s language and alphabet.

After Heydar Aliyev, Ilham Aliyev has not pursued an interventionist policy by following his father's foot steps with regards to the language. As an exceptional case, an order issued by Ilham Aliyev in 2006 mandated that all foreign broadcastings must be translated into Azerbaijani language in order to protect the Azerbaijani language from the influence of other languages (Marquardt, 2011, p. 182). As this obligation also includes broadcasting in Turkish language, it has been criticized by the certain parts of the society (Ibid, p.186). The opinions of participants on this issue were also asked. Some participants stated that both languages are the dialects of Turkic language, so there is no need for translation between two. Some participants said that the official language of Azerbaijan is Azerbaijani and that this was a state policy applied for certain reasons. Thus, this move can be understood as a part of the process of state-building regarding the standardization of language by restricting external influences on the language. The six out of eighteen interviewees argued that the main target of this obligation was Russian broadcastings, and in virtue of the balanced foreign policy, Turkish broadcastings have not been exempted. However, this order could not be effective as it was expected since Azerbaijanis mostly watch foreign broadcastings through cablecasting. As worded by the interviewees below:

I evaluate it as a natural regulation, and I think this regulation isn't associated with Turkey. I mean, the main target wasn't Turkey, it was rather Russia, in my opinion. However, they didn't give a certain state name and they said that we were doing this to protect our mother tongue, but I think it was against Russia.<sup>42</sup>

Actually, it was done to forbid broadcasting in the Russian language. This should be seen in this context. Because our government has hesitations about Russia. To say to Russia that we're banning broadcasting in your language is a biased behaviour. That's why it's politics to prevent partiality. It means this isn't just for you, we are applying it against Turkey also. This was just a compromise, but it was actually against Russia.<sup>43</sup>

In the Presidency of Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijani multiculturalism has been introduced as a new state policy due to ethnic diversity and the level of tolerance in Azerbaijani society. The official discourse about this issue is multi-layered. According to this discourse, the ancient history of statehood in Azerbaijan constitute a basis for the development of

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with an academician (2)

<sup>43</sup> Interview with a politician (6)

multiculturalism, tolerance and religious tolerance with respect to state policy. Along with being a state policy, multiculturalism manifests itself as an invariable lifestyle in the modern Azerbaijani society. Ilham Aliyev evaluated multiculturalism as their “way of life” in his speeches. With the orders of Ilham Aliyev, Baku International Multiculturalism Center was opened in 2014 and the year of 2016 was announced as the year of multiculturalism in Azerbaijan (“Azerbaijani Multiculturalism”, n.d.). Additionally, the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue is annually organized in Baku to enhance tolerance and integration in diverse communities (Mahmudlu, 2017, p. 149).

Although multiculturalism has been introduced as a part of ideology of Azerbaijanism, an interviewee argued that the policy of multiculturalism actually contradicts with the ideology of Azerbaijanism. According to the interviewee, the ideology of Azerbaijanism aims to unite all Azerbaijanis under a civic based identity in order to prevent the disintegration of the country instead of emphasizing their ethnic identities. However, the policy of multiculturalism reveals the ethnic identities of various ethnic groups in Azerbaijan. Hence, it is harmful to the development of Azerbaijani identity since it deepens the ethnic differences within the society.<sup>44</sup>

In my field research, the opinions of the interviewees regarding multiculturalism and language were also asked. All of the interviewees claimed that there must be a sole state language for the persistence of the state although people can speak or learn any language they want. As stated by an interviewee:

Why is Azerbaijan multicultural? It's first multi-linguistic. Maybe you don't realize this in Baku. Because there are people who live, for example, let's say in Khinalug, in a village 3.000 metres high above. Someone who comes down here from there speaks in Azerbaijani language. That's why you can't feel that. Let's say that man is a Tat who comes from Khizi, he speaks in Azerbaijani language here, and you can't feel that he has his own mother tongue ... Azerbaijan was a multi-coloured, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic society, but of course the majority, the great majority is the Turks, Azerbaijani Turks. And they have chosen Turkish as a common language for communicating with each other. And they can easily communicate.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with an academician (14)

<sup>45</sup> Interview with an academician (10)

Some of them also claimed that this policy does not fit for Azerbaijan. Although various ethnic groups live in Azerbaijan, they are not outsiders and they do not have totally different cultures since they all are indigenous people who lived together with the titular nation for centuries. Contrary to this model, multiculturalism in Europe was proposed with the arrival of non-Europeans to Europe as immigrants. In this context, many interviewees argued that the idea of multiculturalism is misunderstood in Azerbaijan. As worded by different interviewees:

I don't believe in multiculturalism. I don't exactly understand the reason why it became a state policy in Azerbaijan. It seems to me that multiculturalism is understood as the expression of our tolerance and respect towards various ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan, but multiculturalism is a failed idea. It involves the coexistence of different cultures. However, in the process of state-building, multiculturalism actually means non-being of the national state. ... In the current situation, it's against the building of the national state, and against the formation of a common identity. I don't like it. Talysh can preserve their Talyshness, Lezgins can preserve their Lezginness, but they should know that we all have a civic identity. ... Without a common language, you won't have a common culture and without a common culture, you can't establish a well-functioning state.<sup>46</sup>

When the policy of multiculturalism ended in Europe, ours here took it and said we have multiculturalism here. Here we call this homogenous society, not multiculturalism. What is multiculturalism? I mean, you go from a region to another region, and you can't understand their language, traditions, religion. They also don't understand you. There is no such thing in Azerbaijan. When you go wherever you want in Azerbaijan, you can't meet a different civilization (culture) which you can't totally understand. As I said, maybe you don't know their language, but they will know your language and speak with you in this language. These are long-established people who have intermingled with each other for centuries. There is a common culture, but no one lost their identity. Anyone other than Turks can name themselves as they wish. I mean, ours misunderstood multiculturalism. Just because we have various ethnic groups, different religions and different languages, they started to apply multiculturalism policy. I'm against this and always will be. You're playing with fire. You're taking a bankrupt idea from Europe, and you want to apply it in an environment where there is no place for it. Yes, there are various ethnic groups, languages, religions here, but this isn't multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is something else.<sup>47</sup>

Considering all these arguments, it can be claimed that the Azerbaijani society with its many different ethnic groups and languages is not comparable to European societies since these various ethnic groups in Azerbaijan with their own languages are not immigrants or 'strangers'. Rather, they have a long-shared history and deep-rooted common cultural traits

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with an academician (5)

<sup>47</sup> Interview with a politician (6)

in various aspects. Hence, the policy of multiculturalism is actually unfamiliar for Azerbaijanis.

As a concluding remark, the efforts of both the President Elchibey and the President H. Aliyev can be evaluated in the context that Smith defines nationalism as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining identity, unity, and autonomy of a social group some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential nation” (1991, p. 73). Based on this definition, it can be claimed that although they had common aims such as ensuring national unity, identity, and autonomy for the sake of nation-building and state formation, attributing language a symbolic meaning, and using language as a political tool for the formation of national identity, their ways differed from each other since they grounded their arguments on different ideologies as a roadmap in this process.

In the following section, I will elaborate the current debates in Azerbaijan regarding the perceptions of the interviewees related to the naming of the state language and identity, the increasing demand for Russian medium schools, the dissemination of Russian and Turkish (Anatolian) languages in Azerbaijan, and regionalism in relation to the abovementioned topics.

### **3.3. Identity and the Name of the State Language**

The issue of naming the state language in Azerbaijan is a highly controversial topic since Azerbaijanis attribute a symbolic meaning to the language as an indicator of their identity. Hence, naming of the state language has been a part of the ideological clashes in Azerbaijan. In this regard, when the name of their mother tongue was asked to the interviewees, eleven of the total participants answered as Azerbaijani language, whereas six participants said Azerbaijani Turkish, and one Talysh language. On the other hand, when their opinions about the name of the state language were asked, three of the interviewees disapproved the name Azerbaijani language as in the constitution. They claimed that the name of the state language should be Turkish or Azerbaijani Turkish, whereas seven of them said that they were pleased with the name Azerbaijani language. Four participants commented that the term Azerbaijani language and Azerbaijani Turkish are interchangeable, and everyone knows that Azerbaijani language is a branch of Turkic language; thus, they were not against this

naming. One participant stated that it was scientifically wrong, but politically correct. Two participants were neutral and said that it did not matter. Hence, it would not be wrong to conclude that there are three different camps about the name of the state language in Azerbaijan. These are Turkish, Azerbaijani Turkish and Azerbaijani language. This division stems mostly from the ideological preferences of the politicians which divides the Azerbaijani society not only on the name of the language but also about other sensitive issues. In general, there is no consensus on this issue among the interviewees as the following quotes suggest:

I don't agree. It's Turkic language because it was named as the Turkic language in the past. Naming it Azerbaijani happened later. When Heydar Aliyev came to power, he changed it.<sup>48</sup>

According to me, it should be Azerbaijani Turkish. ... As a Turkologist, I object to this. In the formal documents and identity cards it was written as Turkish in the 1930s. For example, everybody knows that there are Azerbaijanis in Iran and also in Georgia. How should they define themselves? Do they define themselves as Azerbaijani? Azerbaijan is the name of a territory. Georgia isn't a part of Azerbaijan's territory. It isn't legally correct for them to say I'm Azerbaijani. So, it's not legally correct for someone living in Iran to say I'm Azerbaijani because that person is an Iranian citizen. That person should say I'm an Iranian Turk or a Georgian Turk. Also, we're Azerbaijani Turks. I mean, we're Turks after all.<sup>49</sup>

It doesn't offend me as long as the essence of the language and our identity is Turkish. I mean, Azerbaijani refers to Turks after all. What is the other reason? Turkey monopolized the term Turk. Thanks to the wise behaviour of Atatürk, the concept of Turkish nation refers to the geography of Turkey. Today, when people define themselves as Turks, they are worried that they will be thought of as being from Turkey. I mean, if an Azerbaijani defines himself as a Turk, other people say but you live here (in Azerbaijan). Saying I'm a Turk, refers to the people who live in Turkey. The overlapping between the ethnic term Turkish nation and the identity of the state (in Turkey) creates a second problem when Azerbaijanis want to define themselves as Turks.<sup>50</sup>

I agree because it's a political issue. I'm a Turk, I'm an Azerbaijani Turk. But there are various ethnic groups in Azerbaijan. For example, when Popular Front, Elchibey came to power, he said we are Turks. If we say we're Turks to ten million people, there are Talysh and Lezgins here. It means you're not one of us, for Udins, Avars and so forth. And Armenians in Karabakh as well. If we say we're a Turkish nation, it means that we exclude them. But if we say we're Azerbaijani, it becomes an umbrella for everyone. Okay, we're Azerbaijani, I mean it's a geography-based identity. When it comes to our ethnic identity I'm Azerbaijani Turk, you're Azerbaijani Talysh, you're Azerbaijani Armenian, Azerbaijani Lezgin and so forth. I mean, this is like a kind of Ottoman identity. At that time, if there was Turkish identity instead

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with a political analyst (3)

<sup>49</sup> Interview with an academician (9)

<sup>50</sup> Interview with an academician (5)



of Ottoman identity, Arabs wouldn't want to be there or the people in the Balkans as well. Ottoman identity became an umbrella for everyone. Now, the Azerbaijani identity is the same. I mean, it's a political decision. If I call this language as Turkish, Talysh don't speak in this language. But if I call it Azerbaijani language, Talysh will speak this language, also Lezgins learn and speak this language and so forth. Turk is an ethnic identity, but there are other ethnic groups apart from the Turks. Talysh will feel scared that we want to Turkify them, but if I say Azerbaijani, they won't have this fear. This is our common identity. Our national identity is Azerbaijani, and our national language is Azerbaijani language, but my ethnic identity is Azerbaijani Turk. I prefer this. So, I believe that saying Azerbaijani language and Azerbaijani is a more correct decision.<sup>51</sup>

I agree. Alright, there are some opinions. Some people say that it should be Turkish (*Türk dili*), but for me it's a thing that would lead to discrimination. Anyway, everybody knows that Azerbaijani language is a branch of Turkic language without any doubt. For me, naming of this language as Turkish or Azerbaijani language doesn't matter so much. But when you define it only as the Turkish language, it won't be able to perform this unifying role. Rather, it will disintegrate peoples. I don't say this because nationalists want it. Let's say for me the biggest problem in Azerbaijan is that there is no difference between nationalist, patriotic, and ultra-nationalist. People don't know these concepts properly, they can't understand it. ... If nationalist refers to being patriotic, everyone supports this, but still, I stand up for Azerbaijani language rather than Azerbaijani Turkish or Turkish.<sup>52</sup>

When I asked why they think that the name Azerbaijani Turkish would be disintegrative, and if this is due to different ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan or because of Azerbaijan's external relations, one interviewee answered as below:

This process isn't only due to various ethnic groups in Azerbaijan. It's mainly our unifying function. It's one of the main supportive elements for the existence of us as a nation. I don't think that there would be a negative or positive impact of the naming of the language as Azerbaijani or Turkish on our external relations. There can be some impact to a certain extent, but in my point of view, naming the state language as Azerbaijani is more appropriate for the state to define itself.<sup>53</sup>

It is important to note that some of the interviewees claimed that the naming of Azerbaijani language may not linguistically be a true classification since there is no such thing; the language spoken in Azerbaijan belongs to the Oghuz branch of the Turkic language. However, politically it was the correct move to ensure national integrity and to prevent separatist movements under the pretext of discrimination since the term Azerbaijani refers to a geography rather than ethnicity. However, the naming of the state language as Turkish

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with an expert (12)

<sup>52</sup> Interview with an expert (17)

<sup>53</sup> Interview with an expert (17)

refers to the ethnic identity of the majority, which endangers the harmony between Azerbaijani Turks and the other national minorities in Azerbaijan. On the other hand, a number of interviewees claimed that all of the national minorities such as Talysh, Lezgin, Udin, Tat, Kurd, Khinalig and so on could define their mother tongue without any oppression, whereas when Azerbaijani Turks call their language as Turkish or Turkic language, the national minorities do not hold with this naming. In this sense, some of the interviewees showed their resentments as below:

Different ethnic minorities maintain to define themselves by their own name. For example, Lezgins say Lezgin language, Talysh say Talysh language, Kurds say Kurdish language, but if Turks say Turkish language, they don't like it. If the name is Azerbaijani language, then there shouldn't be Turkish language, Lezgin language, Talysh language or Kurdish language. There must be a common Azerbaijani language for everyone. I mean, this is how they behave, if you define yourself as Turk, I don't like it, but if you define your language as Azerbaijani, I like it. You can't use the name of your language, but I can. No way!<sup>54</sup>

During the Soviet period, Lezgins, Talysh and Turks were all called as Azerbaijani as a unifying name. After independence, there were discussions on this issue. Alright, a decision was taken, but the discussions about it still continue. ... Talysh and Lezgins are allowed to define their own identities easily. In this country, only the Turks aren't permitted to define their own ethnic identity easily. Talysh can define themselves as Talysh, Lezgins can also define themselves as Lezgin, but if we define ourselves as Turk...<sup>55</sup>

The majority of the interviewees emphasized that there is a harmony between Azerbaijani Turks and the national minorities. This harmony derives from the peaceful coexistence of these various groups since time immemorial. Their traditions, cultural values, cuisine, way of life and so on are intertwined. However, the external enemies of Azerbaijan have tried to provoke the national minorities in order to damage the national integrity of the country. In this regard, some respondents accused Armenia, Russia, and Iran for provoking the national minorities in Azerbaijani society against Azerbaijan. When the reactions of ethnic minorities regarding the laws on language were asked, the majority of the interviewees claimed that there was no reaction from them. One participant especially mentioned that it was an artificial problem which was incited and manipulated by external powers. According

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with a political analyst (3)

<sup>55</sup> Interview with an expert (8)

to the interviewee, although the problem was artificial, the sources stirring up hostility were very powerful.<sup>56</sup> As worded by another interviewee:

I didn't see any reactions, they live here in peace. There are some external powers who want to provoke them. The Talysh-Mughan Republic was a project of Russia. Talysh and Azerbaijanis have been living together regardless of their naming, and there was never a problem between them. There are many commonalities between them. I mean, they were closer than two coats of paint. I mean, the cities and villages in this Southern region of Azerbaijan are intertwined so much that you can't draw a border and say this part belongs to Turks, and this to Talysh. ... If there was no intervention from the outside, if there was no poisoning, if there were no Russians, Armenians and others, there would be no problems at all. They lived in peace, and still do. All problems are triggered by outside influences. ... It wasn't internal. If it was, the Mughan Republic ... wouldn't dissolve easily. The local community didn't support them. They supported the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.<sup>57</sup>

There was another reason for being against the name of Azerbaijani Turkish. On this basis they claimed that the term Azerbaijani as the name of both the language and identity is very important for the national integrity of Azerbaijan. According to a respondent, the term Azerbaijani derives from the Stalin period. There were political reasons for this naming; the aim was to separate the Azerbaijani Turks from the Turks in Turkey. However, the respondent claimed that this naming actually eased the process of Turkification; assimilation was achieved easily. In other words, the non-Turkic groups were easily assimilated into the Azerbaijani society at that time. In the respondent's own words:

The assimilation process was painless because most weren't aware of it. For example, I wasn't aware that the language I spoke wasn't my mother tongue until I was 15 years old. I thought Azerbaijani language was my own language. ... After the 1990s, we realized that it wasn't our mother tongue. I mean, ethnic nationalism created seditions, and the reciprocal relations changed. ... When the Karabakh war started, even Talysh fought in the forefront until 1992. After a while, some people started to perceive this war as a war between Armenians and Turks. ... Then the minorities living in these territories started to question why they were fighting in this war. This was a stupid and contradictory idea, a consequence of ethnic nationalism. ... By the way, Armenians have successfully been benefitting from this damage which ethnic nationalism caused. In which sense? Armenians establish faculties in their universities, and the instruction language is Talysh language. They opened radios and TV channels in Talysh language. I mean, Armenians try to deepen the devastations which Turkish nationalism caused. This is very appropriate for the interests of their state. ... We have people living in the Northern part of Azerbaijan who define themselves as Lezgin and who are hand in and glove with Lezgins living in Dagestan/Russia. ... This is why I say that the term Azerbaijani is more beneficial because nationalism didn't rise here. All of us are Azerbaijani.

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with an academician (2)

<sup>57</sup> Interview with an expert (8)

... Anyway, Turkish identity lies at the root of the term of Azerbaijani. Do you have to define this as Turkish identity and exclude others? <sup>58</sup>

Although some participants stated that there is no language as Azerbaijani language and that this language is one of the dialects of the Turkic language, two of the interviewees claimed that if the name of the state language was Turkish rather than Azerbaijani, it would lead to confusion among foreigners in respect of translations from Turkish spoken in Turkey to Turkish spoken in Azerbaijan. Therefore, they claimed that there should be a differentiation between the two languages in order to avoid this ‘absurdity’.<sup>59</sup>

The interviewees were asked which language is the most known and spoken language in Azerbaijan. All of the participants answered this question as Azerbaijani language. Although the lingua franca was Russian during the Soviet period, the interviewees claimed that the superiority of the Russian language over Azerbaijani was limited to main centres such as the capital city, Baku. In the periphery of the country, the Azerbaijani language was much more superior than Russian. As worded by some of the interviewees:

If I say that there was much pressure on the Azerbaijani language in the Soviet era, it would be a lie. ... In the Soviet era, Azerbaijani people could learn our leading poets such as Nizami Ganjavi, Fuzuli so on. I don't know the period of Stalin administration, but in the 70s, 80s there were symbolic values representing nationalism in Azerbaijan. ... Of course, Russia was an imperialist state. With Gellner's own words, Russian culture was the high culture. ... The main purpose was to create a Soviet man, and the language of Soviet man was the Russian language. The Soviet Republics had their own sub-cultures. If we compare Azerbaijan with other Turkic Republics in Central Asia, Russian was more common in those republics. However, in Azerbaijan, the prevalence of Russian language was restricted with Baku.<sup>60</sup>

In the Soviet period, half of the population in Baku was speaking in Russian, but in rural areas, people were speaking in Azerbaijani Turkish. An article related to the Azerbaijani language as the state language was added to the Constitution of Azerbaijan on the 20th of August, 1956, in Baku. After that, the importance of the Azerbaijani language increased more and more. Until this date, the name of the state language was Russian. On the 5th of December, 1936, when the constitutions of the Soviet Socialist Republics were approved, only Georgia and Armenia were allowed to write the name of their languages into the constitution. Azerbaijan realized it in 1956 and abolished the discrepancy with its neighbours. With the addition of this article, Azerbaijanis felt themselves as the owner of the country... This happened thanks to the intellectuals. At that time, one of the Azerbaijani writers, Mirza Ibrahimov, was the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet in Azerbaijan since 1954. After Stalin was denounced in the

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with an expert (16)

<sup>59</sup> Interview with an academician (4); an academician (10)

<sup>60</sup> Interview with an academician (11)

20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, some sort of freedom could be felt in Union Republics. For the first time, the parliament of Azerbaijan SSR made this addition without getting permission from Moscow. In fact, both the First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party (Imam Mustafayev) and the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet in Azerbaijan (Mirza Ibrahimov) were unseated in the aftermath of this decision, but this amendment remained in force. Many people thought that Heydar Aliyev did this, but it isn't true. I mean, the Union Constitution was accepted in 1977, and the constitutions of the Soviet Socialist Republics was approved in the spring of 1978. These three republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia SSR) preserved the amendment related to their own language along with Russian. Other Soviet Republics weren't allowed to do this. I mean, it wasn't an issue associated with Heydar Aliyev, rather it was a great job of Imam Mustafayev and Mirza Ibrahimov, who served in the 1950s.<sup>61</sup>

When all of the interviews are taken into account, the majority of the participants mentioned the division between Baku and the rural areas with reference to spoken language. One of the interviewees explained the reason for this division as such:

According to some statistics, Baku was a cosmopolitan city, since the 19th century. This cosmopolitan structure of Baku affected the level of spoken language. People living in Baku were generally speaking Russian, whereas people in rural areas were speaking Azerbaijani due to the homogeneity of inhabitants. During the Soviet period, in rural areas, there were many Azerbaijanis who didn't know Russian. Men generally could learn Russian when they performed their military service in the Soviet army, but generally they didn't need to learn Russian in their daily lives. ... Having a place in the state apparatus necessitated having a good command of Russian. People who wanted to get a job in the state apparatus had to learn Russian. Additionally, people who dealt with commerce had to know Russian.<sup>62</sup>

The interviewees claimed that the superiority of the Russian language over vernacular language derived from the realities of the Soviet period since Russian was the lingua franca, and the elite class was speaking in this language. Thus, Russian had a considerable reputation as becoming the language of the elite class, and knowing Russian was a way to get involved in an elite class. Additionally, it was frequently argued that having a good job in the state apparatus or bureaucracy required a good command of Russian in the Soviet period since all correspondences were held in Russian. Consequently, parents tended to send their children to Russian medium schools. Although they got an education in their mother tongue, children were encouraged to learn Russian by their parents, so they are well-educated and can have a good job in the future. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, this tendency started to decrease in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis started to perceive Russian as an

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with a political analyst (3)

<sup>62</sup> Interview with an academician (11)

indicator of Russian hegemony. Moreover, with the enthusiasm of independence, national sentiments grew very powerful, especially following the events on Black January. However, Azerbaijani parents still had some doubts regarding the quality of education in Azerbaijani medium schools in time. Parents considered the quality of education for their children rather than the language of instruction. All of the interviewees emphasized the importance of the Russian language in the region by considering the internal and external circumstances. According to one interviewee whose ideas are shared by the majority:

Knowing Russian was an indicator of having a status in the past, but now it's just a necessity due to our everlasting neighbourhood relations with Russia. Also, many Azerbaijani men work in Russia to earn a living for their families in Azerbaijan.<sup>63</sup>

Interviewees were asked in which language they were educated, which foreign languages they knew, and why they felt the need to learn these languages. The participants were academicians who studied linguistics, history, international relations, and political science. Due to their professions, there was a participatory proportion with two or three languages in addition to their mother tongue. When I asked why they learned these languages, they said that learning Russian was generally the result of their families' decision. This was because their parents believed that their children could not progress in their careers without knowing the Russian language during the Soviet era since Azerbaijan was under the Soviet domination at that time. The participants stated that they learned Russian and English in order to better follow the literature due to their professions; they benefited, and still do, from sources in Russian and English to develop their knowledge and to follow the West. One participant stated that since Azerbaijani youth have the chance to follow the literature in Turkish and that they can easily learn and understand this language, Turkish is now seen as an alternative to Russian language.<sup>64</sup> However, the vast majority of interviewees emphasized the importance of knowing English due to its prevalence. Based on the data of the fieldwork, it should be noted that between generations there are differences in terms of the reasons for learning Russian. Interviewees explained their reasons for learning Russian as a necessity for both communication and for career opportunities since they were a part of USSR. On the other hand, although Azerbaijan is an independent country and knowing

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with an academician (11)

<sup>64</sup> Interview with an expert (15)

Russian is not a necessity compared to the past, interviewees still encourage their children to learn Russian due to the scientific and regional importance of Russian. Hence, Russian language still maintains its dominance and younger generation learns Russian to be able to read Russian literature, to become more educated, and to feel having a privileged status in the society and so on. An interviewee explained this situation as a heritage of colonial history. With the own words of the interviewee:

English is the world's language. The best books are written in English in the world, the best intellectuals of the world communicate in English. The communication tool for benefitting from avant-garde ideas in political science, biology or engineering is English. People who don't know English can't benefit from it and they will be lost in translations. That's why English really is a must. For example, I feel antipathy for Russian language, because Russian isn't a must. People in Azerbaijan speak Russian not out of necessity. Rather, they speak Russian because it's a remnant of the colonial history. ... They have an instinct like Pavlov's dog that if they don't know Russian, it won't be good for them. But there is no rational ground for it, Russians aren't in Azerbaijan. People speak in Russian not because of the fact that there are Russians here and that they don't understand them. Rather, it's their preference. They feel that their social status is superior. In my opinion English is inevitable. In my view a large portion of university education should be taught in English, but I don't want it in primary or secondary schools because it prevents children from growing up as Azerbaijani.<sup>65</sup>

Based on my fieldwork, receiving primary education in different languages is seen as estrangement from common values. In other words, language is perceived as a means of being part of that culture, so it plays a prominent role in boundary-making process in Azerbaijan. As worded by an interviewee:

It isn't just the issue of language, it is also politics because children who get education in Russian schools will read Tolstoy, Pushkin, Lermontov. Not Nizami, Fuzuli. They will tend to Russian culture, like me. Whenever I go to a bookshop, I involuntarily go to the Russian literature section or the Russian books section. Because I read and understand Azerbaijani, I also read and understand everything in English, but I'm more comfortable reading in Russian since my academic background is in Russian. I struggle speaking in Russian as I don't use it at home or out in the streets, I use only English at work and only Azerbaijani at home. I can feel that my spoken Russian is getting weaker, but when it comes to reading, I feel more comfortable with Russian, I mean, I feel like I'm reading in my mother tongue, the native language. This education has these types of impacts.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with an academician (5)

<sup>66</sup> Interview with an expert (12)

Azerbaijanis try to keep boundaries by preserving their language as they did in the past. Culture as mentioned above is mainly Russian culture via the Russian language. Moreover, being a nationalist is perceived as being anti-Russian for some people. As stated by a respondent:

Some people said to my father send your son to a Russian medium school in Azerbaijan. My father said I don't want my son to grow up like a Russian. In this sense my father was a nationalist person. I should also note that I was born in 1974, and everybody call their fathers *papa* without any exception at that time. We always called my father *ata* and my mother *ana*. Everybody was laughing at us. ... He always said my son's mother tongue should be our own language, not Russian. So, he sent me to an Azerbaijani school without any hesitation.<sup>67</sup>

Considering my field research, it is possible to claim that the interviewees were not against knowing Russian, rather they criticized receiving primary and secondary school education in a different language, especially in Russian. On the other hand, the same interviewee ironically stated that he sent their children to a Russian medium school. The interviewee explained this as follows:

I'm talking big about nationalism, but I'm sending my children to a Russian medium school because we communicate with each other in Azerbaijani at home and read books in Azerbaijani. There are two different worlds in Azerbaijan: Russophone and Azerbaijani. There are cultural differences between these two realms. I just wanted my children to feel this cosmopolitan culture. But in my view their mother tongue is Azerbaijani. After three or four years, I will send them to an Azerbaijani school.<sup>68</sup>

Almost all of the interviewees claimed that there is an increasing trend of sending their children to Russian medium schools among parents in Azerbaijan, especially in recent years. Although Russia's soft-power strategy is influential for the dissemination Russian language in the post-Soviet countries, another main reason for increasing demand for Russian medium schools is associated with the quality of education. Parents still believe that Russian medium schools ensure more qualified education compared to Azerbaijani medium schools, and they are also funded by the state. However, English medium schools are private and even middle-income families cannot afford these schools (Rahimov, 2018). An interviewee

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with an academician (5)

<sup>68</sup> Interview with an academician (5)



explained the reasons for the increasing tendency of Azerbaijani parents to send their children to Russian medium schools as below:

In the past, people perceived Russian as the language of the elite class, but it has decreased. Unfortunately, there is also the possibility of a resurgence of Russian language since it has been increasing again in Azerbaijan. The reason for this is the quality of education. Throughout the Soviet period, there was a public opinion that the Russian medium schools ensured more qualified education and that its alumni had a broader worldview. I checked the statistical data. The seventy-five per cent of the students in Baku received education in the Russian language in 1989, whereas this percentage was changed the other way round in 1997, seventy five per cent turned to the Azerbaijani language. For my part, the influence of the Russian language considerably decreased by 2013-2014. The number of Russian medium schools didn't decrease, but people's interest in the Russian language dropped. According to me, after 2013-2014 the interest in the Russian language has notably increased. Because people still believe that the Russian medium schools provide more qualified education. Another reason is the Azerbaijanis living in Russia. These Azerbaijanis have some problems related to the Russian language. They are planning to take their families to Russia in the future, so they encourage their children and relatives to receive education only in the Russian language. That's why the trend of education in the Russian language has been increasing. Another choice could be the English medium schools, but they are very expensive. For example, the annual cost of the English medium schools in Azerbaijan varies between 4.000 to 30.000 US dollars, which the middle-income families can never afford. ... Another reason is the policy of Russia related to the penetration of the Russian language. After 2008, Russia particularly created institutions to improve the Russian language. So, Russia put it into practice through pilot programs. In 2011 and 2012, Russia actualized these pilot programs through the Ministry of Education in Azerbaijan, and then they ensured free of charge Russian language courses. Later, they obligated to know the Russian language to work in Russia as a migrant. So, let me put it this way, this is a part of the policy of Russia which is directed at the whole post-Soviet space.<sup>69</sup>

Some of the participants stated that children who were educated in Russian instead of their mother tongue had a different worldview which would lead to divergence in society. They also stated that education in one's mother tongue was crucial for the sustainability and development of the Azerbaijani language and namely its identity. In this sense, although some of the participants acknowledged that Russian medium schools were of better quality, they said that they would not allow their children to be educated in the Russian language. However, interestingly, they encouraged their children to learn Russian as a foreign language since learning Russian as a second language was not considered as causing harm to their ethnic identity/belonging or their national identity. The interviewees who send their children to the Russian medium schools claimed that they speak in Azerbaijani language at their homes and teach their traditions and cultural values to their children to ensure that

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with an expert (17)

there will be no doubt or confusion about their national values. In other words, they did not want their children to lose their cultural/traditional and national values. They also claimed that although English has special importance as the world language, getting an education in the English medium schools are very expensive; thus, they decided to send their children to the Russian medium schools believing that their children will get a qualified education and learn a foreign language which has always been advantageous in the region. It is very interesting to note that, although some of the interviewees claimed that they did not like Russia, they are still sending their children to the Russian medium schools. When the reason for this was asked, an interviewee answered as below:

Russian language is a scientific language. There are great literary works in Russian language. Currently, there is a division in Azerbaijan between learning the Russian language and hatred against Russia. For example, I hate Russia because it's an enemy of us, but my children have been receiving education in the Russian language. ... The hatred for the Russian state and for the policies of the Russian state is one thing, learning a scientific language is another thing.<sup>70</sup>

Although receiving education in a foreign language (mainly in Russian) is considered as estrangement from national values by having a different mentality and cultural values, an interviewee claimed that being Russophone should not be considered as being not patriotic and being a fan of Russia since they learn Russian for opportunities.<sup>71</sup> Based on all these arguments, it can be claimed that the Russian language still maintains its importance in Azerbaijan due to various reasons. Azerbaijanis still need to learn Russian language as it is still a lingua franca in the post-Soviet region. Additionally, they think that knowing Russian helps to find a better job, to have a status in the society, to benefit from Russian sources in their academic activities and so on. Hence, the language issue in the relationships between Russia and Azerbaijan is very important due to both symbolic and practical reasons. Russia follows a soft-power strategy for the dissemination of Russian in the post-Soviet geography. In turn, Azerbaijan does not take serious steps against Russian language due to their expectations from Russia about the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Hence, although Azerbaijan is an independent country, Azerbaijan stills pays attention to Russia due to unresolved regional and external issues.

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with an academician (4)

<sup>71</sup> Interview with an expert (15)

Based on Smith's analysis, one of the functions of national identity is that the socialization of individuals as citizens and nationals by means of standardized, public mass education which inculcates a homogeneous culture into the members of a nation (1991, p.16). In this regard, although Azerbaijani has a sole status as the official language, existence of Russian medium schools as public schools may overshadow the enhancement and sole status of Azerbaijani language. Besides, Russian medium schools may prevent the development of a homogenous culture among the Azerbaijani society which constitutes an obstacle for national identity formation.

Another disputed issue is related to the dissemination of (Anatolian) Turkish in Azerbaijan. Regarding Turkish, there are two clashing attitudes. The majority of the interviewees claimed that Turkish is widely spoken by children through the Turkish TV channels. Turkish TV serials and the cartoons are commonly watched in Azerbaijan. Some people perceive knowing Turkish as the development of relations with Turkey where cognates of Azerbaijani Turks live. Thus, they evaluate it as rapprochement with their ethnic kin group. On the other hand, certain people think that the spread of Turkish will harm the purity of Azerbaijani language and block the advancement of it. Thus, they want to protect the Azerbaijani language from the diffusion of Turkish. A number of participants expressed that some words borrowed from Turkish do not quite fit to their accent. They had worries about these words taken from Turkish that it would damage the essence of the Azerbaijani language. As it was discussed by an interviewee:

Personally, speaking Turkish was frightening for me because in 1992, people were speaking in (Anatolian) Turkish everywhere rather than Azerbaijani. When they used Turkish words, I was getting angry. I mean, I have my own language. Turkish is also a very beautiful language, but my language is Azerbaijani. I don't approve using Turkish words. We should produce new words. But taking words from Turkish means that 30 or 40 per cent of our population will completely lose their language, and our language will become Turkish. Maybe it's a good thing, I don't know. If you want this ... let's create a common Turkic language and learn it, but let my Azerbaijani language survive. I mean, I want to call East as *Şerq*, I don't want to say *Doğu*, it doesn't fit my language. Or I don't want to say *Batı* (West in English), I want to say *Qerb*, do you understand me? I say *Şimal*, *Cenub* (North, South in English), they say *Kuzey*, *Güney*, it doesn't fit my language, I've been speaking in this language while I was growing up ... I don't let my family to watch Turkish TV channels because I'm scared that they will change their language. ... Besides, when Turks come to Azerbaijan, they don't speak in Azerbaijani language, they start to speak in Turkish. My people also start to speak in (Anatolian) Turkish. ... Well, if I go to Turkey, I will speak in your language, but if you come here, you will speak in my language.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with an academician (1)

The opinions of the interviewees regarding attempts for creating a common language or alphabet for Turkic states were also asked. The majority claimed that it was not possible in today's reality because there is no commonality in the languages and alphabet in the Turkic world. A few interviewees suggested to choose Turkish as a common language probably because of Turkey's soft power strategy. However, some participants evaluated this as a new kind of domination (of Turkey) after seventy years of Soviet domination. Moreover, considering ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan, an interviewee said:

They can perceive it as if we're imposing the language of a different state (Turkey) on them. Also, there are pro-Russians here, why Turkish and Turkey? And Russia might react. In my view this isn't realistic.<sup>73</sup>

An interviewee claimed that politics of Azerbaijani state has changed and the reason for this is the identity issue. In the beginning of the 1990s, rapprochement with Turkey was a political and strategic decision since they were more romantic, and having a similar language facilitated this rapprochement. After a while, national pride has been much more important in the context of identity politics and they have started to emphasize that they had their own state and own language rather than highlighting brotherhood with Turkey.<sup>74</sup> In this sense, it can be asserted that for the sake of national identity formation, the relationship between Turkey and Azerbaijan has been continuing at a more pragmatic level rather than romantic as in the past. Although having good relations with Turkey is still important for Azerbaijan due to the regional importance of Turkey, Azerbaijan should take more careful steps for furthering bilateral relations with Turkey by considering the various ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan since these ethnic groups might feel excluded and this can be dangerous for Azerbaijan's national unity. As argued by Smith, pattern of similarities and differences is important for the national identity (1991, p.75). If the pattern of similarities is correlated with Turks in Turkey, the differences become more prominent for various ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan. As exemplified by an interviewee:

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with an expert (12)

<sup>74</sup> Interview with an expert (13)

Do you know when my ethnic identity comes to my mind? When Turkish nationalism emerges. For example, they say that Turkey and Azerbaijan are brothers, we are brothers, we are the same nation. Then I notice that aha! I'm not from the same nation. ... ethnically I'm different. ... when I'm kind of excluded, I start searching my identity.<sup>75</sup>

Lastly, it is important to note that regionalism is still an important issue in Azerbaijan. Indeed, it is a great challenge for the national identity of Azerbaijan because many people define themselves according to their region. When I asked to the interviewees about this issue, many said that it is very common to define themselves in association with the region they come from. However, many of them emphasized that they do not see this as an important issue with respect to their professional lives. Rather, it was important in their daily lives. Remarkable examples from two of my interviews are as follows:

I'm Azerbaijani. Our family is also attached to a region. For example, me and my wife are from the Gazakh region of Azerbaijan. We always say that this district is the real place of Turks because its residents are predominantly Sunni and Turk. The residents living in other regions are overwhelmingly Shii. Besides, our language is very similar to the (Anatolian) Turkish language. So, we define the identity of the Gazakh community as Turks, we're the real Turks. They try not to marry people from different regions of Azerbaijan. They don't let mixing with people from different regions. Rather, intermarriage is between peoples from the Gazakh region.<sup>76</sup>

(People define themselves) according to their region. Most people who know me won't define me according to my regional identity. This is very common, but I try not to reveal my regional identity. People sometimes criticise me saying that they can't guess my region from my accent. They say I speak TV language and that they can't guess where I am from.<sup>77</sup>

Some regions have more importance than others. For instance, many interviewees mentioned the region of Nakhchivan in association with political power relations. This was because many leading political elites including the presidents of Azerbaijan are from Nakhchivan. In this context, it was argued that regionalism in Azerbaijan is mainly based on power relations rather than ethnic cleavages. Additionally, a clear majority of the interviewees mentioned some districts (*rayon* in Azerbaijani) where different national minority groups such as Talysh, Lezgins, Tats, Kurds, Khinalugs densely live. However, they think that such kind of classification can be dangerous due to the sensitivity of the issue

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with an expert (16)

<sup>76</sup> Interview with an academician (1)

<sup>77</sup> Interview with an academician (2)

as it can give rise to possible separatist movements. Hence, they believe that they have to abstain from regionalism since they have an intermingled culture as a result of living together for centuries.

In general, most of the interviewees stated that although many people define themselves according to their regions, regionalism (*yerliçilik*<sup>78</sup> in Azerbaijani) may lead to the fragmentation of Azerbaijan. In this context, they underline the ideology of Azerbaijanism by saying, “we are Azerbaijani”. As worded by two different interviewees:

This is a major topic of discussion in Azerbaijan. We all say let’s not divide Azerbaijan into regions. We’re all Azerbaijanis ... We have unofficial divisions such as the west, east, south and north. For example, Nakhchivani (*Naxçıvanlılıq* in Azerbaijani). This isn’t an official division. The state is also a bit against this. ... We are all Azerbaijanis. Whether from Ganja or Quba or Lezgi or Nakhchivani, it doesn’t matter. ... Other kinds of naming, firstly, isn’t ethical and normal. Secondly, it may also lead to discrimination.<sup>79</sup>

Azerbaijani as an embracing identity unified the entire ethnic spectrum in Azerbaijan. It has been a very successful policy and ideology. We call this ideology as Azerbaijanism which has been our state policy.... Regardless the harsh conditions such as the war in the 1990s, economic difficulties and so on, Azerbaijan recovered very quickly and measures were taken to heal the traces of these ethnic wounds ... Not only ethnic but also religious harmony was ensured. Both the national minorities and the Jewish and Christian minorities living here don’t feel like a minority and they don’t feel any pressures. What I mean, we have a common historical background. ... For example, Jews didn’t come here in the Soviet era, their roots go back to the period of Tsarism. Or Christians as well. ... Today, people don’t discriminate others by saying you’re a Lezgin, Talysh, Turk etc. in their daily lives. I don’t encounter such things, except maybe about Nakhchivan.<sup>80</sup>

It is also important to mention that the regionalism during the Soviet period was different from its current meaning. An interviewee argued that in the Soviet period, regionalism meant division among the states in this region such as Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, and aimed the protection of the interests of Azerbaijan SSR towards these states. However, when nationalism started to strengthen in Azerbaijan, Russians promoted regionalism in

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<sup>78</sup>*Yerliçilik* refers to the favouring of people who live in or come from the same region. Thus, it can be understood as a kind of nepotism based on fellow-townsmanship. For further information about regionalism in Azerbaijan, see (Cornell, 2011, pp. 167-170; Tokluoğlu, 2005)

<sup>79</sup> Interview with an academician (4)

<sup>80</sup> Interview with an academician (11)

Azerbaijan in a different way which created new divisions inside the country aiming to prevent the rise of ethnic nationalism in Azerbaijan.<sup>81</sup>

As a concluding remark, it can be said that both internally and externally there are many obstacles for the formation of national identity in Azerbaijan. Some of these obstacles stem from the Soviet heritage and some of them depend on the political conjuncture of Azerbaijan. Besides, the interests of regional powers also negatively affect the national identity formation in Azerbaijan. As Russia is still the dominant power in the region, Azerbaijan adjusts its politics by considering Russia as well as other regional actors. For the sake of state formation and nation building, unlike the first years of independence, the ties with Turkey now has been based on more pragmatic reasons instead of ethnic/romantic feelings. When the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is taken into account, national unity becomes more essential for Azerbaijan. Hence, Azerbaijan try to ensure national unity by attributing a symbolic meaning to language. Defining the national identity as Azerbaijani (*Azərbaycanlı* in Azerbaijani) and the language as Azerbaijani language (*Azərbaycanca* in Azerbaijani) are symbolically important for the formation of Azerbaijani national identity since it is believed that this geography-based definition constitutes a common ground for Azerbaijani society.

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with a political analyst (3)

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

In 1923, Azerbaijan replaced the Arabic alphabet with the Latin alphabet on its own request since Azerbaijani intellectuals evaluated the Arabic alphabet as a symbol of backwardness and illiteracy due to the difficulties in learning the Arabic alphabet. Later on, Azerbaijan adopted the Cyrillic alphabet under Soviet pressure in 1939 and used the Cyrillic alphabet until it became independent again in 1991. During this period, 131 delegates from different countries participated in the Turkology Congress held in Baku in 1926 for the first time and decided to make initiatives on creating a common alphabet and common literary language for Turkic peoples. However, the adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet in 1939 took place under the pressure of Soviet administration and intellectuals who expressed opposition to these changes were exiled, imprisoned or killed by accusations of being Pan-Turkist and anti-regime. This situation was highlighted by the people I have interviewed; it was claimed that Azerbaijani intellectuals were subject of a tremendous carnage at that time. For all these reasons, the Cyrillic alphabet was seen as a symbol of Russian hegemony, and immediately after the re-independence of Azerbaijan, it was tried to move away from among the symbols representing this hegemony. Consequently, the Latin alphabet was adopted in 1991 as an indicator of Azerbaijan's desire to get closer with the West and Turkey and to move away from Russia's cultural and political sphere.

The transition from Cyrillic to Latin was criticized regarding the problems the older generations and Russophone people would experience, which they did. Younger generations, on the other hand, accepted the new alphabet easily due to the widespread use of computers and because they could speak English. The participants whose average of age was approximately thirty-five stated that the transition to the Latin alphabet did not lead to any difficulty for their professional and daily lives. They even claimed that the alphabet switch facilitated their academic activities since they could follow the literature both in Turkey and in the West. However, their parents had some difficulties since they could not learn it at all. Additionally, it was underlined that as a state which changed its alphabet three



times in a century, many literary works disappeared and these abrupt changes damaged their literary heritage. Alphabet changes constituted an impediment for the researchers as well. For example, a historian who wants to investigate the history of Azerbaijan in the last century or a writer who wants to explore the literature of Azerbaijan should know three different alphabets, Arabic, Latin and Cyrillic.

Another topic about the alphabet changes, unlike its neighbors in the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan changed its alphabet three times in a comparatively short time span with the influence of clashing ideologies each aiming to name the nation differently. Divergently, both Georgia and Armenia had their own alphabets which played an important role in the persistence of their identities. In other words, their alphabets were not switched based on different ideologies in any period of time. In general, the alphabet changes in Azerbaijan are evaluated as an injustice and a trick towards Azerbaijan.

Each alphabet of Azerbaijan symbolizes the state of belonging to a different culture and civilization. The Arabic alphabet signifies belonging to the Islamic world, the first version of the Latin alphabet symbolizes the desire for modernization, the Cyrillic alphabet stands for belonging to Russian culture, and lastly, the Latin alphabet adopted after independence symbolizes the desire not only to get closer to the West and Turkey but also to end their Soviet heritage.

The ideology of Turkism (awareness of Turkishness) began to develop with the efforts of Azerbaijani intellectuals at the beginning of the 1900s. It gained momentum and political ground with the representation of Turkification, Islamization and Modernization motto on the flag of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (1918-1920) where the blue color represents Turkishness, green represents Islam, and red represents modernization. Although it lasted for 23 months with the entrance of the Red Army into Baku, the consciousness of being the first democratic and secular Turkish state established in the East remains as a source of national pride for Azerbaijan.

In the early years of Soviet rule, while the Azerbaijanis could define their identity as Turk and their language as Turkic language, after the mid-1930s, Turkish identity was suppressed by Stalin's rule and replaced by Azerbaijani identity, which is a territorial based identity

rather than ethnicity. The name of the language and the nation have been started to be defined as Azerbaijani. Switching to the Cyrillic alphabet served the same purpose as it did for Turkey who started to use Latin during the same period. This development was perceived as a danger by Stalin in terms of the possibility of the formation of a Turkish union. Another point is that Stalin forced Turkic speaking peoples to change their alphabet to Cyrillic, even some letters were modified, and variations in the Cyrillic alphabet were purposefully created to prevent unity among Turkic speaking peoples. In general, the consciousness of Turkishness and Turkish identity was suppressed for a long time. The January massacre, the clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh, the loss of land and the belief that Russia takes side with Armenia paved the way for the popular movement in Azerbaijan and fostered an anti-Russian attitude; these events triggered the re-emergence of the repressed Turkish identity. Azerbaijanis believe that they were not aware of their Turkishness since the Soviet administration defined them as Azerbaijani not as Turks. Moreover, the term Azerbaijan is the name of a geographical area and does not refer to an ethnic root. In this sense, it formed a barrier against the feeling of belonging to land or against the feeling of homeland. However, Azerbaijanis also think that it was inevitable that this identity which was repressed for a very long time one day would re-appear with great passion. Azerbaijanis widely share the idea that Armenians always, and still do, had a grudge towards them since they have always considered them as Turks; that they had old scores to pay off against them on the 1915 events. Azerbaijanis were not expecting such a conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and they were not prepared for a war since they have lived side by side with the Armenians for years and in peace. Accordingly, loss of land has caused great disappointment which at the same time strengthened Turkishness and national integration. In other words, ethnicity played a major role in the awakening of Azerbaijani national consciousness.

The ideology of Turkism has been associated with Elchibey following Azerbaijan's independence in 1992. His strong emphasis on Turkishness, his pro-Turkish stance and his so-called irredentist policy towards Iran are the sources for this association. This was as a return to the old field of struggle. Azerbaijan's re-independence has necessitated the need for an ideological ground which would form the basis for uniting the nation once again under a different name. This ideological ground was shaped in line with the perspectives of the ruling elite, and also under the influence of various internal and external (regional) factors. Azerbaijanism was posed against Turkism once again; the struggle between these

two competing ideologies left a mark on Azerbaijan's politics especially during the first decade after its independence. In line with the ideology of Turkism, Elchibey underlined the ethnic identity of the titular nation (Turks) and named the state language as Turkish/Turkic by a law adopted in 1992, which is claimed that it created discontent among non-Turkish ethnic groups. It was also argued that naming the language as Turkish was inaccurate according to a dialect of Turkish language. It is believed that Elchibey's emphasis on Turkishness led to the emergence of separatist movements of various ethnic groups and that Azerbaijan was exposed to the danger of disintegration. This claim is based on assumed support of Russia and Iran to Lezgins and Talysh. As claimed by my respondents, even some of those fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh war questioned who were the real sides of the war, Turks versus Armenians or Azerbaijanis versus Armenians? Azerbaijanis believe that separatist movements were stirred and supported by regional powers for various reasons. In sum, Elchibey's anti-Russian and anti-Iranian stance moved Azerbaijan to a political gridlock both in foreign policy and internal affairs. Disobedience of Colonel Surat Huseynov to orders coming from Baku, who was allegedly supported by Russia, resulted in new land losses, and Elchibey was forced to leave his office.

Apparently, the ideology of Turkism is still thought of as a potential source of tension as it was in the past; certain segments of the population have doubts about Turkish identity. This is because certain ethnic groups other than majority who consider themselves as Turks fear assimilation or discrimination. Moreover, Turkey was not welcomed as the new big-brother (a new hegemonic power), replacing Russia's former role in the region. Elchibey's siding with Turkey and his pro-Turkish attitude also discomfited Russia.

Heydar Aliyev, who came to power after Elchibey, adopted the ideology of Azerbaijanism aiming to unite all of the ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanism was defined as a civic-based, territorial identity instead of referring to a specific ethnic identity. In line with the ideology of Azerbaijanism, Heydar Aliyev changed the name of the state language from Azerbaijani Turkish to Azerbaijani language in the Constitution of Azerbaijan adopted in 1995. Based on my field work, this ideology appears to be welcomed even by some of the opponents of the regime who claim that Azerbaijanism does not exclude the ideology of Turkism and that Azerbaijani identity embraces Turkish identity as well. The majority of my respondents also supported the ideology of Azerbaijanism which suggest that this policy

of Heydar Aliyev has been internalized substantially. As discussed throughout the thesis, it is a difficult task to measure if the ideology of Azerbaijanism is widely accepted and deep-rooted as claimed by the respondents.

There are several reasons for criticizing the ideology of Azerbaijanism. First, it is argued that various ethnic groups can easily reveal their ethnic identities due to the ideology of Azerbaijanism. However, it was argued that Azerbaijani Turks who constitute the majority cannot freely reveal their ethnic identities because they feel pressured by ethnic minorities. Thus, they argue that if there is only one Azerbaijani identity, then other identities like Turks, Talyshs, Lezgins, Avars, Udins, and Kurds should not be overemphasized. Second, it is argued that Azerbaijani identity was initiated by the Soviet rule aiming to estrange Azerbaijani Turks from their ethnic roots. Indeed, Azerbaijanism has been reformulated as a buffer against Russian and Turkish impacts as two competing powers in the region. This can also be interpreted as a reflection of Heydar Aliyev's balanced foreign policy against interference from Russia, Turkey and Iran.

Ilham Aliyev maintained the ideology of Azerbaijanism, the old ideology reformulated by his father Heydar Aliyev, but added the policy of multiculturalism into this ideology. The idea of multiculturalism appears to be a less accepted policy compared to Azerbaijanism. Based on my research, this policy is not perceived as fitting to the conditions in Azerbaijan basically because unlike Europe, Azerbaijani society is composed of culturally intertwined ethnic groups who have been living together for centuries. Azerbaijanis are proud of their geographic location and their colorful and rich history, which is basically characterized as the mixing of different cultures and peoples. In this context, some argue that the policy of multiculturalism is seen as contrary to the ideology of Azerbaijanism since Azerbaijanism does not emphasize ethnicity.

In the light of the above discussions, the significant increase in the demand for Russian medium schools in recent years provides important clues about the issue of language in Azerbaijan, which is again related to the name of the nation. The main reason for the high demand for Russian medium schools is Russia's policy for the dissemination of Russian language back again. The second reason is the advice of Azerbaijani people working in Russia to their relatives living in Azerbaijan about the necessity for speaking Russian to be

able to work in Russia. The third reason is the belief that Russian medium schools ensure more qualified education compared to others. Even some participants who directly expressed their anti-Russian ideas said that their children were receiving education in Russian. Their justifications were as follows: Russian is a scientific language, the education given in this language is more qualified, it is still an important language in the region, and English medium schools are very expensive even for the middle income families in Azerbaijan. These participants also believe that even though their children are receiving education in the Russian language, it will not bring any damage on their national values since they speak Azerbaijani in their homes. Again the majority of the participants emphasized that education in the mother tongue is very important for the protection of both national identity and national values. It has been suggested that at least primary education should be taken in the mother tongue because education in a different language affects children's worldview and the culture in the end.

Some participants stated that there are two different worlds in Azerbaijan, one Russian-speaking world and one Azerbaijani-speaking world. These two worldviews are exclusive and critical of each other. This is because the graduates of Russian medium schools define themselves as open-minded, well-educated, and more sophisticated, whereas the graduates of Azerbaijani medium schools see themselves as more patriotic who preserved their language and national values. In other words, they are true Azerbaijanis. It can be concluded that not only the ethnic and regional identities but also the language of instruction contributes to the existing divisions in Azerbaijani society.

Changing of the name of the state language and the alphabet should be evaluated in a broader context. Additionally, the symbolic meanings of these changes should not be ignored. These alterations do not only signify belonging to other cultures and circles of civilizations, but also the proximity to certain states which reside in these circles of civilizations. Therefore, the Cyrillic alphabet stands for proximity to Russia, while the Latin alphabet symbolizes being close to Turkey and the West. In the same way, naming the language as Turkish language means intimacy with Turkey, whereas naming it as Azerbaijani language shows that Azerbaijan has sui generis characteristics both linguistically and culturally. Besides, the Azerbaijani language is seen as lingua franca by various ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan. In this context, some participants stated that if Turkishness is emphasized in the name of the

language, it will bring out alienation against this language among other ethnic groups. It is also claimed that this language has been internalized by various ethnic groups and that everyone knew that it is one of the dialects of the Turkic language. Thus, there was no need for overemphasizing Turkishness since it may cause further cleavages in the Azerbaijani society. However, the majority of the respondents believe that Azerbaijani Turkish is the most appropriate naming in terms of linguistics. Others, on the other hand, claimed that although naming this language as Azerbaijani is not linguistically correct, it was an accurate political decision for the nation building process. Another concern mentioned was the translation problems if the language was called Turkish, especially for foreigners.

The ideological differences, internal issues, and regional dynamics are the sources of long-lasting debates on the alphabet changes and the name of the language in Azerbaijan, which explains the failure to reach a consensus over these issues. The continuity of the Azerbaijani national identity, shaped by these dynamics and ideologies, very much depends on the political perspectives of the ruling elite. A well-developed understanding of a national identity shared by the entire Azerbaijani society appears to be at a distance since the Azerbaijani elite are still divided on these issues and since the same regional actors are still in play in the Caucasus.

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## APPENDICES

### A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/ MÜLAKAT SORULARI

1) What is your mother tongue?

Ana diliniz nədir? / Anadiliniz nedir?

2) In which language did you receive education? Why?

Hansı dildə təhsil aldınız? Niyə? / Hangi dilde eğitim aldınız? Neden?

3) Do you know any other languages?

Başqa dillər bilirsinizmi? / Bildiyiniz başqa diller nelerdir?

4) Why did you learn languages other than your mother tongue?

Ana dilinizdən başqa dilləri nə üçün öyrəndiniz? / Neden anadilinizden başqa diller de öğrendiniz?

5) Was it your decision to learn foreign languages?

Ana dilinizdən başqa dilləri öyrənməyi özünüz mü istədiniz? / Anadilinizden başqa diller öğrenmeyi siz mi istediniz?

6) What is your parents' mother tongue?

Valideynlərinizin ana dili nədir? / Anne-babanızın anadili nedir?

7) Do your parents know any other languages other than their mother tongue?

Valideynləriniz ana dillərindən başqa dilləri bilirlərmi? / Anne-babanız anadillerinden başqa dil bilirlər mi?

8) In which language do you want your children to be educated?

Uşaqlarınızın hansı dildə təhsil almağını istəyirdiniz? / Çocuklarınızın hangi dilde eğitim almasını istersiniz?

9) Which languages do you want your children to learn other than their mother tongue?  
Why?

Uşaqlarınızın ana dilindən başqa hansı dilləri öyrənməsini istəyirsiniz? Niyə? /  
Çocuklarınızın anadilden başqa hangi dilleri öğrenmesini istersiniz? Neden?

10) Which language is the most known and spoken in Azerbaijan? Why?

Azərbaycanda ən çox bilinən və danışılan dil hansıdır? Niyə? / Azərbaycan'da en çok  
bilinen, konuşulan dil hangisi? Neden?

11) How was it before, how is it now? Why do you think it changed?

Əvvəllər necə idi, indi necə? Sizə görə dəyişməyinin səbəbi nədir(nədəndir)? Eskiden  
nasıldı, şimdi nasıl? Sizce neden değişiyor?

12) According to the constitution of Azerbaijan, the official name of the state language is  
Azerbaijani. Do you agree with this naming? Why?

Konstitusiyaya görə dilinizin rəsmi adı Azərbaycan dilidir. Bu təsvirlə (ifadə ilə)  
razısınız mı? Niyə? / Dilinizin resmi adı Azərbaycan dili? Bu tanımdan memnun musunuz?  
Neden?

13) What do you think about a society having 2 or 3 languages?

Bir cəmiyyətin 2-3 dilli olmağı haqqında nə düşünürsünüz? / Bir toplumun 2-3 dilli olması  
hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?

14) What do you think about language and multiculturalism?

Dil və multikulturalizm haqqında nə fikirləşirsiniz? / Dil ve çok kültürlülük hakkında ne  
düşünüyorsunuz?

15) How do you define your national identity and culture?

Milli kimliyinizi ve mədəniyyətinizi necə ifadə edirsiniz(adlandırırırsınız)? / Milli kimliğinizi  
ve kültürünüzü nasıl tanımlarsınız?

16) Is there any other ethno-cultural sub-identity which you feel you belong to?

Milli kimliyinizin altında özünüzü aid hiss etdiyiniz digər etno-mədəni sub-şəxsiyyətlər varmı? / Milli kimliğin altında kendinizi ait hissettiyiniz başqa bir etno-kültürel alt kimlik var mı?

17) How did you acquire this identity / belonging?

Bu kimliyi / aidiyeti nasıl kazandınız? Milli kimliyiniz və digər etno-mədəni sub-şəxsiyyətləriniz necə yarandı?

18) How do the other groups define you? According to what do they define you? (Language, ethnicity, regionalism?)

Digər qruplar sizi necə adlandırır? Bu adlandırmanı nəyə görə edirlər? (dil, etnik mənsubiyyət, region?) / Digər qruplar sizi nasıl tanımlıyor? Bu tanımlamayı neye göre yapıyorlar? (dil, etnisite, bölgecilik?)

19) Are there any elements that ensure the continuity of identity? What are these elements in your opinion, and which elements do you think are effective in the continuity of your identity? Did Karabakh have an effect?

Kimliyin davamlılığını təmin edən üsürlər varmı? Sizcə bu üsürlər nələrdir və siz öz kimliyinizin davamlılığına hansı üsürlərin təsir etdiyini fikirləşirsiniz? Qarabağın təsiri varmı? / Kimliğin davamlılığını sağlayan unsurlar var mıdır? Size görə bu unsurlar nelerdir ve siz kendi kimliyinizin davamlılığında hangi unsurların etkili olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz? Karabağ'ın etkisi oldu mu?

20) Do you think your identity is influenced by other ethnic groups? If yes, which ethnic groups are these and how have they affected, if no, why?

Kimliyinizin digər etnik qruplardan təsirləndiyini düşünürsünüzmü? Əgər elədirsə, bunlar hansı etnik qruplardır və necə təsir edir, elə deyilsə, səbəb? / Kimliyinizin digər etnik qruplardan etkiləndiyini düşünüyor musunuz? Evetse, bunlar hangi etnik qruplardır ve ne şekilde etkilemiştir, hayırsa neden?

21) What do you think about ethnicity and multiculturalism?

Etnik mənsubiyyət və multikulturalizm barədə nə düşünürsünüz? / Etnisite ve çokkültürlülük hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?



22) Did the change in the alphabet, the laws regarding the name and status of the language affect your professional life and your daily life? If yes, how did it affect you?

Əlifba dəyişikliyi, dilin adı və statusu haqqında qanunlar sizin peşəkar fəaliyyətinizə və gündəlik həyatınıza təsir etdimi? Əgər elədirsə, necə təsir etdi? / Alfabe dəyişikliyi, dilin adı və statusu ilə ilgili yasalar iş hayatınızı və gündəlik həyatınızı etkiledi mi? Evet ise nasıl etkiledi?

23) How did these laws affect different ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan?

Bu qanunlar Azərbaycan'da yaşayan müxtəlif etnik qruplara necə təsir göstərdi? / Bu yasalar Azərbaycan'da yaşayan fərqli etnik qrupları nasıl etkiledi?

24) Have minority groups living in Azerbaijan since independence ever reacted to these laws?

Müstəqillikdən bugünə qədər Azərbaycan'da yaşayan azsaylı xalqların bu qanunlara reaksiyaları necə oldu? / Bağımsızlıqdan günümüze Azərbaycan'da yaşayan azınlıq qrupların bu yasalara tepkileri oldu mu?

25) Did these laws affect your relations with different ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan?

Bu qanunlar Azərbaycan'da yaşayan müxtəlif etnik qruplarla əlaqələrinizə təsir etdimi? / Bu yasalar Azərbaycanda yaşayan fərqli etnik qruplarla iştirakinizi etkiledi mi?

26) The alphabet in Azerbaijan has been changed several times. Is the alphabet (Arabic, Cyrillic, Latin) important for Azerbaijani identity? Why?

Azərbaycan'da əlifba bir neçə dəfə dəyişdirilmişdir. Əlifba (ərəb, kiril, latın) Azərbaycanlı kimliyi baxımından əhəmiyyətliymi? Niyə? / Azərbaycan'da alfabe bir kaç kez dəyiştirildi. Alfabe (Arap, Kiril, Latin) Azərbaycanlı kimliyi açısından önəmli mi? Neden?

27) Is the alphabet more related to language or ethnicity? What does the alphabet mean in terms of Azerbaijani identity?

Əlifba dil, yoxsa etnik mənsubiyyət ilə daha çox əlaqəlidir? Əlifba, Azərbaycanlı kimliyi baxımından nə deməkdir? / Alfabe daha çok dille mi ilgili bir konu, etnisiteyle mi ilgili? Alfabe Azərbaycanlı kimliyi açısından ne ifade ediyor?

28) Is the Azerbaijani society generally satisfied with the latest alphabet change? Why?

Azərbaycan cəmiyyəti ümumiyyətlə ən son əlifba dəyişikliyindən razıdır mı? Səbəb? / Azərbaycan toplumu genel olarak son alfabe değişikliğinden memnun mu? Neden?

29) Is Turkish (as spoken in Turkey) and Azerbaijani language alike or different? Why?

Türkiyə Türkcəsi və Azərbaycan dili bir-birinə bənzəyirmi(oxşar), yoxsa fərqlidir? Niyə? / Türkiyə Türkçesi ve Azərbaycan dili birbirine benzer mi, farklı mı? Neden?

30) From past the present, there were some attempts to familiarize these two languages and to form a common alphabet. Both in Azerbaijan and in Turkey, there have been discussions according to this issue. What is your opinion about this issue?

Keçmişdən indiyə kimi ortaq əlifba və bu iki dili yaxınlaşdırmaq üçün bəzi təşəbbüslər edilib. Həm Türkiyə'də həm də Azərbaycan'da bu barədə müzakirələr olunubdur. Siz bu mövzuda ne fikirləşirsiniz? / Geçmişten günümüze kadar ortak alfabe ve iki dili yakınlaştırmak için bazı girişimler yapılmıştır, hem Azerbaycan'da hem de Türkiye'de bazı çevreler arasında buna yönelik tartışmalar devam etmektedir. Bu konuda ne düşünüyorsunuz?

31) Do you think that the different letters (q,x,ə) in your alphabet make the Azerbaijani language unique, and differentiate it from the Turkish (as spoken in Turkey)?

Azərbaycan əlifbasındakı fərqli hərflərin Azərbaycan dilini unikallaşdırdığını və Türkiyə Türkcəsindən fərqləndirdiyini fikirləşirsinizmi? / Alfabenizdeki farklı harflerin (q,x,ə) Azerbaycan dilini benzersizləşdirdiğini ve Türkiye Türkçesinden farklılaştırdığını düşünüyor musunuz?

32) Do you think that your language is under the influence of Turkish (due to Turkish TV channels)? What is your opinion about this?

Dilinizin Türkiyə Türkcəsinin təsiri altında qaldığını (Türk TV kanalları səbəbiylə) düşünürsünüzmü? Bu haqda nə fikirləşirsiniz? / Dilinizin Türkiye Türkçesinin etkisi altında kaldığını (Türk TV kanalları nedeniyle) düşünüyor musunuz? Bu konuda ne düşünüyorsunuz?

33) What do you think about the translation requirement imposed on foreign broadcasting? How do you assess the application of this necessity to Turkish broadcasts?

Xarici verilişler üçün tərçümə zəruriyyətinin olmağı barəsində ne fikirləşirsiniz? Bu zəruriyyətin Türkçe yayımlarına da tətbiq olunmağı barəsində nə fikirləşirsiniz? / Yabancı yayınlara getirilen çeviri zorunluluğunu nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? Bu zorunluluğun Türkçe yayınları da kapsamasını nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?

34) I think that Turkish spoken in Azerbaijan is the original one, not Turkish spoken in Turkey. Do you agree with this opinion of mine?

Mən fikirləşirəm ki, Azərbaycan'da danışılan dil əsl Türkcədir, Türkiyə'də danışılan isə əsl Türkcə deyil. Siz mənim bu fikrimlə razılaşsınız mı? / Bence orijinal olan Azərbaycan'da konuşulan Türkçe, Türkiye'de konuşulan değil. Bu fikrime katılıyor musunuz?

## **B. LIST OF INTERVIEWEES BY PROFESSION AND THE INTERVIEW DATE**

- Interviewee 1, Academician (International Relations), September 13, 2018
- Interviewee 2, Academician (International Relations), September 23, 2018
- Interviewee 3, Retired Academician (History) / Political Analyst, September 24, 2018
- Interviewee 4, Academician (Philology), September 12, 2018
- Interviewee 5, Academician (International Relations), September 12, 2018
- Interviewee 6, Former Academician (Law) / Politician, September 19, 2018
- Interviewee 7, Academician (Philology), September 18, 2018
- Interviewee 8, Expert (Policy Analysis), September 11, 2018
- Interviewee 9, Academician (Philology), September 25, 2018
- Interviewee 10, Academician (History), September 11, 2018
- Interviewee 11, Academician (Political Science), September 7, 2018
- Interviewee 12, Expert (at the related International Organization), September 7, 2018
- Interviewee 13, Expert (Political Analysis), September 10, 2018
- Interviewee 14, Academician (International Relations), September 13, 2018
- Interviewee 15, Expert (at the related International Organization), September 6, 2018
- Interviewee 16, Expert (Law), September 25, 2018
- Interviewee 17, Expert (Security and Policy Analysis), September 17, 2018
- Interviewee 18, Academician (History), September 13, 2018

## **C. ARAŞTIRMAYA GÖNÜLLÜ KATILIM FORMU / INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Bu araştırma, ODTÜ Avrasya Çalışmaları Programı yüksek lisans öğrencisi Selma Akyıldız tarafından Prof. Dr. Ayşe Ceylan Tokluoğlu danışmanlığında yürütülen, “Bağımsızlık Sonrası Azerbaycan’da Milli Kimlik İnşasında Dil Politikalarının Rolü ve Milliyetçiliğin Yansımaları” başlıklı yüksek lisans tezi için veri toplamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu form sizi araştırma koşulları hakkında bilgilendirmek için hazırlanmıştır.

### **Çalışmanın Amacı Nedir?**

Araştırmanın amacı, katılımcıların milli kimlik inşasında dilin rolü hakkındaki görüşleriyle ilgili bilgi toplamaktır.

### **Bize Nasıl Yardımcı Olmanızı İsteyeceğiz?**

Araştırmaya katılmayı kabul ederseniz, sizden beklenen, mülakat sırasında sorulan 34 açık uçlu soruyu kısaca cevaplandırmanızdır. Bu çalışmaya katılım ortalama olarak 60 dakika sürmektedir.

### **Sizden Topladığımız Bilgileri Nasıl Kullanacağız?**

Araştırmaya katılımınız tamamen gönüllülük temelinde olmalıdır. Cevaplarınız tamamıyla gizli tutulacak, sadece araştırmacılar tarafından değerlendirilecektir. Katılımcılardan elde edilecek bilgiler toplu halde değerlendirilecek ve bilimsel yayımlarda kullanılacaktır. Sağladığımız veriler gönüllü katılım formlarında toplanan kimlik bilgileri ile eşleştirilmeyecektir.

### **Katılımınızla ilgili bilmeniz gerekenler:**

Mülakat, genel olarak kişisel rahatsızlık verecek sorular içermemektedir. Ancak, katılım sırasında sorulardan ya da herhangi başka bir nedenden ötürü kendinizi rahatsız

hissederseniz görüşmeyi sonlandırmakta serbestsiniz. Böyle bir durumda mülakat yapan kişiye, görüşmeyi sonlandırmak istediğinizi söylemek yeterli olacaktır.

Araştırmayla ilgili daha fazla bilgi almak isterseniz:

Mülakat sonunda, bu çalışmayla ilgili sorularınız cevaplanacaktır. Bu çalışmaya katıldığınız için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz. Çalışma hakkında daha fazla bilgi almak için Avrasya Çalışmaları Programı yüksek lisans öğrencisi Selma Akyıldız (E-posta: selma.akyildiz@metu.edu.tr) ya da tez danışmanı Prof. Dr. Ayşe Ceylan Tokluoğlu (E-posta: ctoklu@metu.edu.tr) ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz.

Yukarıdaki bilgileri okudum ve bu çalışmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum.

(Formu doldurup imzaladıktan sonra uygulayıcıya geri veriniz).

İsim Soyad

Tarih

İmza

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## D. APPROVAL OF METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



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08 AĞUSTOS 2018

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu


Sayın Prof.Dr. Ayşe Ceylan TOKLUOĞLU


Danışmanlığını yaptığınız yüksek lisans öğrencisi Selma AKYILDIZ 'ın "**Bağımsızlık Sonrası Azerbeycan'da Millî Kimlik İnşasında Dil Politikalarının Rolü ve Milliyetçiliğin Yansımaları**" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay **2018-SOS-141** protokol numarası ile **08.08.2018 - 30.08.2019** tarihleri arasında geçerli olmak üzere verilmiştir.

Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.

  
Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN

Başkan V

  
Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL  
Üye

  
Prof. Dr. Ayhan Gürbüz DEMİR  
Üye

  
Doç. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKCI  
Üye

  
Doç. Dr. Zana ÇITAK  
Üye

  
Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK  
Üye

  
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Pınar KAYGAN  
Üye

## E. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasıyla birlikte, eski Sovyet coğrafyasında bağımsızlığını kazanan devletler kendi ulus ve devlet inşa süreçlerine başlamışlardır. Azerbaycan da bu devletlerden biridir. Ancak, Azerbaycan'ın 1918 yılında Azerbaycan Halk Cumhuriyeti şeklinde adlandırılan ve Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak ve Muasırlaşmak ilkelerini temel alan demokratik ve seküler bir devlet kurmuş olması, onu eski Sovyet coğrafyasındaki bazı devletlerden farklı kılmaktadır. Böyle bir mirasa sahip olması Azerbaycan'ın ulus ve devlet inşasına dayanak noktası oluşturmuştur. Bu süreçte, Azerbaycan siyasi elitleri Sovyet mirasından uzaklaşmaya çalışmış ve bir dizi dil politikaları aracılığıyla da milli kimliği yeniden oluşturmayı amaçlamıştır. Bu bağlamda, dil, önce Türk kimliğini, daha sonra Azerbaycanlı kimliğini geliştirmek için siyasi bir araç olarak kullanılmıştır.

Azerbaycan'da dil üzerine yapılan tartışmalar, alfabe değişiklikleri ve dilin adı tartışmalarının yanısıra Azerbaycan'daki bölgesel ayrımları ve Azerbaycan'da yaşayan çeşitli etnik grupların olası itirazlarını da kapsamaktadır. Bu tartışmaların temelinde, Dağlık Karabağ'da yaşanan çatışmalarla topraklarının %20'sini kaybeden Azerbaycan'ın, Azerbaycan'da yaşayan çeşitli etnik grupların, bölgesel güçlerin de etkisiyle ayrılıkçı fikirlere kapılarak, olası başka bir toprak kaybı yaşanmasına dair duyulan endişe de yatmaktadır. Azerbaycan'ın bağımsızlığını tekrar kazanmasıyla birlikte yeniden gündeme gelen alfabenin değiştirilmesi ve dilin adı konusundaki tartışmalar, çeşitli ideolojiler ve bölgesel dinamiklere bağlı olarak şekillenmiştir. Bu nedenle, bu tartışmalar görüldüğünden çok daha fazla katmana sahiptir.

Azerbaycanlı aydınların Arap alfabesinin öğrenilmesindeki güçlükleri öne sürmesiyle Arap alfabesinden Latin alfabesine 1923 yılında kendi isteğiyle geçen Azerbaycan, 1939 yılında Sovyet baskısı altında Kiril alfabesini kabul etmiş ve 1991'de tekrar bağımsız oluncaya kadar Kiril alfabesini kullanmıştır. Bu dönemde, ilk defa 1926'da Bakü'de düzenlenen Türkoloji Kurultayı'nda farklı ülkelerden katılım gösteren 131 delege Türk halkları için ortak bir alfabe ve ortak edebi dil oluşturmak üzerine de girişimlerde bulunma kararı almışlardır. Ancak, 1939'da Kiril alfabesine geçiş, Stalin ve dolayısıyla Sovyet yönetiminin baskısıyla gerçekleşmiş, bu değişikliklere karşıt görüş bildiren aydınlar Pan-Türkçü ve



rejim karşıtı olarak adlandırılarak sürgün edilmiş, hapse atılmış ya da öldürülmüştür. Bu durum, mülakat yaptığım kişiler tarafından da vurgulanmış ve Azerbaycanlı aydınların büyük bir kıyımına uğradıkları öne sürülmüştür. Tüm bu nedenlerden dolayı, Kiril alfabesi Rus hegemonyasının bir sembolü olarak görülmüş, Azerbaycan'ın yeniden bağımsızlığına kavuşmasının hemen ardından bu hegemonyayı temsil eden sembollerden uzaklaşmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, Azerbaycan'ın Batı'ya ve Türkiye'ye yaklaşma ve Rusya'nın kültür alanından uzaklaşma isteğinin bir göstergesi olarak 1991 yılında Latin alfabesi kabul edilmiştir.

Bu alfabeye geçişin, yaşlı nesil ve Rus dilli insanlar tarafından zorluk yaratacağı hususunda eleştiriler dile getirilse de, Latin alfabesine geçişin 10 yıllık bir sürece yayılması, genç neslin İngilizce öğrenmeye başlaması ve bilgisayarların kullanılmaya başlanması büyük çoğunluk için bu süreci kolaylaştırmıştır. Yaş ortalaması yaklaşık 35 olan katılımcılar, Latin alfabesine geçişin günlük yaşamlarında ve iş hayatlarında bir zorluğa yol açmadığını, hatta akademik faaliyetleri için Batı'daki ve Türkiye'deki literatürü takip edebilmeleri açısından daha iyi olduğunu ifade etmişlerdir. Ancak katılımcılar ebeveynlerinin yeni alfabeye geçiş konusunda sıkıntılar yaşadıklarını, hatta bazılarının Latin alfabesini hiç öğrenemediğini de dile getirmişlerdir. Bunun yanı sıra, katılımcılar bir asırda üç kez alfabe değiştiren bir devlet olarak bu süreçte birçok edebi eserin yok olduğunu, bu değişikliklerin edebi miraslarına zarar verdiğini de dile getirmişlerdir. Örneğin; Azerbaycan'ın son yüzyıldaki tarihini araştırmak isteyen bir tarihçinin, edebiyatını araştırmak isteyen bir edebiyatçının Arap, Latin ve Kiril olmak üzere üç farklı alfabeyi de bilmesi gerektiğini dile getirmişler, bu nedenle bu alfabe değişikliklerinin araştırmacılar açısından engel teşkil ettiğini belirtmişlerdir. Alfabe değişikliklerine dair bir diğer önemli bir eleştiri ise Güney Kafkasya'daki komşularından farklı olarak alfabelerinin farklı ideolojiler yüzünden üç kez değiştirilmiş olmasıdır. Katılımcılar, hem Gürcistan'ın hem de Ermenistan'ın kendilerine ait bir alfabelerinin olduğunu, kimliklerinin devamlılığında alfabelerinin önemli bir rol oynadığını ve bu alfabelerinin hiçbir dönemde bir ideolojiye göre değiştirilmediğini dile getirmişlerdir. Bu değişiklikleri, Azerbaycanlılara yapılan bir haksızlık ve oynanan bir oyun şeklinde nitelendirmişlerdir.

Mülakatlarda her alfabenin farklı bir kültüre ve medeniyete ait olma durumunu sembolize ettiği de öne sürülmüştür. Katılımcıların tamamı, Arap alfabesinin İslam dünyasına aidiyeti

ifade ettiğini, Latin alfabesinin kabul edilen ilk versiyonunun modernleşme isteğini sembolize ettiğini, Kiril alfabesinin Rus kültürüne aidiyeti ifade ettiğini, bağımsızlık sonrası kabul edilen Latin alfabesinin ise Batı'ya ve Türkiye'ye yakınlaşma isteğini ve Rus hegemonyasından kurtulma isteğini sembolize ettiğini belirtmişlerdir. Dolayısıyla, dil ve alfabenin hem kimlik meselesiyle hem de Azerbaycan'ın Rusya, Türkiye ve İran'la ilişkilerinde bir araç olduğu ve bu aracın çok büyük bir sembolik gücü olduğu öne sürülebilir.

Dilin adına yönelik tartışmalar ise birbiriyle rekabet halinde olan Türkçülük ve Azerbaycancılık ideolojilerinin doğrultusunda, kimlik arayışının dil üzerinden şekillendirilme sürecinin bir yansıması olarak değerlendirilebilir. Aydınların çabalarıyla, 1900lü yılların başında Azerbaycan'da gelişmeye başlayan Türklük bilinci, Türkçülük ideoloji ile ivme kazanmış, 1918'de kurulan Azerbaycan Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin (1918-1920) temellerinin dayandığı Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak sloganının Azerbaycan bayrağında temsiliyle de siyasi bir zemin edinmiştir. Bu nedenle, Azerbaycan bayrağındaki mavi renk Türklüğü, yeşil renk İslamı, kırmızı renk ise çağdaşlaşmayı temsil eder. Bu devletin ömrü Kızıl Ordu'nun Bakü'ye girişiyle 23 ay sürse de, Doğu'da kurulan ilk demokratik ve seküler devlet olma bilinci Azerbaycan için bir ulusal gurur kaynağıdır.

Azerbaycanlılar Çarlık Rusya döneminde Tatar ya da Müslüman olarak tanımlanmalarına rağmen, 1900lü yılların başlarından itibaren aydınların çabalarıyla ortaya çıkan milli bilinç ekseninde kendilerini Türk olarak tanımlamaya başlamışlardır. Sovyet hakimiyetinin ilk yıllarında Azerbaycan Türkleri kimliklerini ve dillerini Türk olarak ifade edebilirken, 1930lu yılların ortalarından sonra Stalin'in kararıyla Türk kimliği bastırılmak istenmiş ve yerine etnik bir anlam barındırmayan, coğrafyaya, toprağa dayalı bir kimlik anlayışı olan Azerbaycanlı kimliği getirilmiştir. Dilin adı ve milletin adı Azerbaycan dili ve Azerbaycanlı terimleri ile ifade edilmeye başlanır. Bu dönemde kabul edilen Kiril alfabesinin ise yine bu doğrultuda yapıldığı, Türkiye'nin de Latin alfabesine geçmesiyle birlikte Stalin'in bunu bir tehdit olarak algıladığı ve Türk dilli halkları Kiril alfabesine geçmeye zorladığı, hatta bu Türk dilli halklara sunulan Kiril alfabesinde bile bazı harflerde farklılıklar yapılarak bir Türk birliği oluşması tehlikesinin önlenmeye çalışıldığı da katılımcılar tarafından ifade edilmiştir. Bu doğrultuda, uzun müddet boyunca bastırılmaya çalışılan Türklük bilinci ve Türk kimliği; 20 Ocak katliamı, Dağlık-Karabağ'da yaşanan çatışmalar, toprak kayıpları ve

Rusya'nın Ermenistan'ın tarafını tuttuğuna dair inanç, Azerbaycan'daki halk hareketininin Rusya karşıtı bir tutum geliştirmesine ve bastırılan Türk kimliğinin tekrar ortaya çıkmasına zemin hazırlamıştır. Bazı katılımcılar, uzun müddet boyunca bastırılan bu kimliğin büyük bir patlayışla tekrar ortaya çıkışının kaçınılmaz bir durum olduğunu ifade ederken; bazı katılımcılar ise Sovyet yönetiminin onları Azerbaycanlı olarak tanımlaması yüzünden, halk Türklük bilinci ekseninde hareket etmezken, Ermenilerin onları daima Türk olarak gördüğü için nefret beslediğini ve 1915 olaylarının hıncını onlardan almaya çalıştıklarını dile getirmişlerdir. Dolayısıyla, Ermenilerle yıllar boyu birlikte sorunsuzca yaşadıklarını düşünürken, böyle bir çatışmanın çıkmasını beklemediklerini ve büyük bir hayal kırıklığı yaşadıklarını ve savaşa hazırlıklı olmadıkları için de büyük bir toprak kaybı yaşadıklarını ifade eden katılımcılar olmuştur. Bu nedenle, savaşın çıkışında etnik kökenin rol oynamasıyla da Türklük vurgusunun bir anda güçlendiğini belirtmişlerdir.

Türkçülük ideolojisi, Elçibey'in Türk kimliği vurgusu yapması, İran'daki soydaşlarıyla birleşmeye yönelik fikirleri ve Türkiye yanlısı tutumu ile Azerbaycan'ın siyasi düzleminde tekrar yerini bulmuştur. Dolayısıyla, Elçibey'in Türklük vurgusu ile Türkçülük ideolojisinin tekrar önem kazanması, eski mücadele alanına geri dönüş olarak yorumlanabilir. Azerbaycan'ın yeniden bağımsızlığını elde etmesi, ulus ve devlet inşasının çerçevesini oluşturacak bir ideolojik zemin ihtiyacını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu ideolojik zeminin ne olacağı ise iktidara gelen hükümet ve siyasi elitlerin perspektifleri doğrultusunda belirlenmiş ve zaman içinde iç ve dış faktörlerin etkisiyle şekillenmiştir. Bu bağlamda, Türkçülük ve Azerbaycancılık birbiriyle rekabet halinde olan iki ideoloji olarak ulus inşası sürecinde rol oynamıştır.

Elçibey, Türkçülük ideolojisi doğrultusunda titüler halkın (Türk) etnik kimliğine yani Türklüğe vurgu yapmış ve 1992 yılında kabul edilen bir yasayla devlet dili Türk dili olarak değiştirilmiştir. Bu yasa, Türk olmayan etnik gruplar için hoşnutsuzluk yaratacağı iddialarıyla ve dilbilimsel açıdan Türk dilinin bir kolunu oluşturan bir lehçeye bu genel adın verilmesinin doğru olmamasından dolayı eleştirilmiştir. Ayrıca, Elçibey'in Türklük vurgusunun farklı etnik gruplarda ayrılıkçı hareketlerin ortaya çıkışına yol açtığı ve ülkenin bölünme tehlikesiyle karşı karşıya kaldığına dair söylemler mevcuttur. Hatta bazı katılımcılar, Türklük ve Türk askeri vurgusunun Dağlık-Karabağ Savaşı'nda ön saflarda savaşan Türk olmayan etnik gruplarda bu savaşın Türk-Ermeni savaşı olduğu fikrine

kapılmalarına neden olduğunu ve kendilerinin savaşta varlıklarını sorgulamaya ittiğini iddia etmişlerdir. Mülakatlarda bu ayrılıkçı hareketlerin gerçekte yapay bir sorun olduğu, bu etnik gruplara mensup yerel halk tarafından destek görmediği, çeşitli nedenlerle bazı bölgesel güçler tarafından suni olarak ortaya çıkarılan ve desteklenen bir mesele olduğu iddia edilmiştir. Bu sorunların kısa sürede bastırılabilmiş olması, problemin suni oluşuyla ilişkilendirilmiştir. Katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu Azerbaycan'da yaşayan diğer etnik gruplara mensup insanları kardeşleri olarak tanımlamış ve hiç problem yaşamadan bir arada yaşadıklarını, dış güçlerin manipulasyonları olmadıkça hiçbir sorun yaşanmayacağını ifade etmişlerdir. Dolayısıyla, Elçibey'in Rusya ve İran karşıtı tutumunun hem dış politikada hem de içişlerinde Azerbaycan'ı çıkmaza sürüklediği iddia edilmektedir. Albay Suret Huseynov'un Bakü'den gelen emirlere itaatsizliği yeni toprak kayıplarına yol açmış ve durumu kontrol altına alamayan Elçibey görevi bırakmak zorunda kalmıştır.

Azerbaycan'da Türklük olgusu her zaman olduğu gibi tehlikeli görülen bir olgudur ve bu kimliğe çok vurgu yapıldığı zaman bastırılmaktadır. Nasıl ki Çarlık Rusya döneminde Müslüman ya da Tatar olarak tanımlanan bu insanlar kendilerini Türk olarak tanımlayarak bu eksenle hareket etmeye başladıklarında, Türk kimliği Sovyet yönetimi tarafından tehlikeli görülüp bastırıldıysa, Elçibey döneminde tekrar vurgulanan bu kimlik yine farklı nedenlerle bastırılmıştır. Azerbaycan'da Türk kimliği belli bir kesim tarafından kuşkuyla yaklaşılan bir kimliktir. Bunun nedenlerinden biri olarak, Azerbaycan'da 20'den fazla etnik grubun yaşaması gösterilebilir. Çoğunluğu oluşturan Azerbaycan Türklerinin etnik kimliklerine fazla vurgu yapılması, çeşitli etnik azınlıklarda asimile olma tehlikesi ya da ayrımcılığa uğrama endişesine yol açacağı ileri sürülmektedir. Azerbaycan Türklerinin bir kısmı ise, Elçibey dönemindeki bazı ayrılıkçı hareketlerden referansla Türkçülük vurgusunun ülkenin bölünmesine yol açacağına dair endişeler taşımaktadır. Halihazırda topraklarının beşte biri işgal altında olan Azerbaycan'da, halkın bu endişeyi derinden hissetmesi anlaşılabilir bir durumdur. Buna ek olarak, Türklük vurgusu Azerbaycan-Türkiye arasındaki ilişki ekseninde değerlendirildiğinde Elçibey'in Türkiye yanlısı tutumu da bazı çevreler tarafından endişeyle karşılanmıştır çünkü bazı kesimlerde Sovyet hegemonyasından kurtularak bağımsızlığını kazanan Azerbaycan için Türkiye'nin yeni bir hegemonik güç olabileceği endişesini doğurmuştur.

Elçibey'den sonra iktidara gelen ve Azerbaycancılık ideolojisini benimseyen Haydar Aliyev, etnisite yerine Azerbaycan coğrafyasını esas alan bir sivil kimlik etrafında Azerbaycan'da yaşayan tüm etnik grupları birleştirmeyi amaçlamıştır. Azerbaycancılık ve Türkçülük birbirine rakip iki ideoloji olsa da, bazı katılımcılar, Azerbaycancılığın aslında Türkçülüğü dışlayan bir ideoloji olmadığını, Azerbaycanlı kimliğinin Türk kimliğini de kapsadığını, dolayısıyla bunların birbirine zıt ideolojiler olmadığını ifade etmişlerdir.

Haydar Aliyev iktidara geldiğinde toplumu bir arada tutabilecek, birleştirici bir ideolojiye ihtiyaç olduğu inancından hareketle, Azerbaycancılık ideolojisini devlet ideolojisi olarak yeniden formüle etmiştir ve 1995'te kabul edilen Azerbaycan Anayasasında devlet dilinin adı Azerbaycan dili olarak belirlenmiştir. Böylece, çeşitli etnik grupların dışlanma ve ayrımcılığa uğrama hissine neden olduğu iddia edilen Türklük vurgusu ve Türkçülük ideolojisi yerine, Azerbaycancılık ideolojisi ve Azerbaycanlı kimliği Haydar Aliyev sayesinde yeniden önem kazanmıştır.

Mülakata katılanların büyük çoğunluğunun Azerbaycancılık ideolojisini desteklediği göz önünde bulundurulursa, Haydar Aliyev'in Azerbaycancılık politikasının büyük oranda benimsenmiş olduğu öne sürülebilir. Ancak bazı katılımcılar bu politikayı çeşitli nedenlerle eleştirmişlerdir. Azerbaycancılık ideolojisi nedeniyle diğer etnik azınlıklar kendi etnik kimliklerini rahatça ifade edebiliyorken, çoğunluğu oluşturan Türklerin kendilerini etnik kimlikleriyle tanımlayamamaları bu eleştirilerin başında gelmektedir. Bu katılımcıların iddialarına göre, eğer tek bir Azerbaycanlı kimliği varsa, Türk, Talış, Lezgi, Avar, Udin, Kürt vb. gibi kimlikler olmamalıdır. Ancak eğer diğer etnik gruplar kendilerini Talış, Lezgi, Avar vb. gibi tanımlayabiliyorlarsa, Türkler de kendilerini rahatça Türk olarak adlandırabilmeli ve diğer etnik gruplar bunu tehdit olarak algılayıp hoşnutsuzlukla karşılamamalıdır. Bir diğer eleştiri de Azerbaycanlı kimliğinin Sovyet döneminde Azerbaycanlı Türkleri kendi etnik köklerinden uzaklaştırmak amacıyla oluşturulmuş bir kimlik olmasıdır.

Azerbaycancılık aslında hem Rus kimliğine hem de Türk kimliğine karşı bir tampon olarak formüle edilmiştir. Bu tampon, Haydar Aliyev'in izlediği dengeli dış politikanın iç siyasete yansımaları olarak da yorumlanabilir. Dolayısıyla, Azerbaycancılık ideolojisi Rusya, Türkiye ve İran'ın Azerbaycan halkına etkilerini azaltmak ve bu bölgesel güçlere karşı daha dengeli

siyaset uygulayabilmek amacıyla Haydar Aliyev tarafından yeniden formüle edilen, Azerbaycan halkını birleřtirici ve kapsayıcı bir ideoloji olarak görölmektedir. Azerbaycancılık ideolojinin sadece etnik kimlik vurgusunun önüne geçmek için deęil, bölgecilik anlayışına ve bölgesel kimliklere karşı da geliştirilmiş bir ideoloji olduęu dile getirilmiřtir.

Azerbaycan'da dilin adının ve alfabenin deęiřtirilmesine yönelik tartiřmalar daha geniř bir çerçevede deęerlendirilmeli ve bu deęiřikliklerin sembolik anlamlar tařıdıęı göz ardı edilmemelidir. Bu deęiřiklikler sadece bařka bir költüre aidiyeti deęil, bařka medeniyet dairelerine ait olma ve bu medeniyet dairelerindeki devletlere yakınlık anlamına da gelmektedir. Bu nedenle, Kiril alfabesi Rusya'ya yakınlığı temsil ederken, Latin alfabesi Türkiye ve Batı'ya yakınlığı sembolize etmektedir. Aynı řekilde, dilin adının Türk dili olması Türkiye ve Türk dilli halklarla yakınlık anlamına gelirken, Azerbaycan dili olması Azerbaycan'ın dilsel ve költürel olarak kendine has özelliklere sahip olduęunu göstermektedir. Bu dil sadece Azerbaycan Türklerinin dili deęil, Azerbaycan'da yařayan çeřitli etnik gruplar için de bir ortak iletiřim dilidir. Bu nedenle, bazı katılımcılar dilin adında Türk vurgusu yapılırsa bunun diđer etnik gruplarda bu dile karşı yabancılařma yaratacaęını ifade etmiřlerdir. Bu dilin herkes tarafından benimsendięi ve Türk dilinin bir kolu olduęu zaten herkes tarafından biliniyorken, ayrıřtırıcı etkiye sebep olacak bir Türk vurgusuna gerek olmadıęını dile getirmiřlerdir. Farklı etnik gruba mensup bir katılımcıyla yaptıęım mülakatta, katılımcı Türklük vurgusunun yapılmasına kadar bu dili kendi anadili sandıęını ve farklı bir anadili olduęunun farkında bile olmadıęını söylemesi bunun en güzel örneęi olabilir. Bazı katılımcılar bu dilin Azerbaycan dili řeklinde adlandırılmasının dilbilimsel olarak uygun olmadıęını ifade etseler de, bu durumu devlet inřası sürecinin bir parçası olarak deęerlendirdiklerini ve siyasi açıdan doęru bir hamle olduęunu vurgulamıřlardır. Birkaç katılımcı ise dilbilimsel açıdan en uygun adlandırmanın Azerbaycan Türkçesi ifadesi olduęunu iddia etmiřlerdir. Bazı katılımcılar ise bu dil Türk dili řeklinde adlandırılırsa ve bu diller arasında bir çeviri yapılmak istenirse "Türkçeden Türk diline çeviri" ibaresinin yabancılar için kafa karıřtırıcı olacaęını ve bu nedenle de bir farklılařmaya ihtiyaç olduęunu öne sürmüřlerdir.

Haydar Aliyev, zaman zaman aynı dil ailesine mensup olan Türkçe ve Azerbaycan dili arasındaki benzerlikten bahsetse de, Azerbaycan alfabesinde Q, X, Ə harflerini

vurgulayarak Azerbaycan dilinin kendine has özellikler barındırdığını ifade etmiştir. Bu durum, Azerbaycan dili ile Türkçe arasına belli bir mesafe konulduğu şeklinde yorumlanabilir. Ayrıca, bu durum, milli kimlik oluşturma sürecinde dile atfedilen sembolik rolü yansıtmaktadır. Haydar Aliyev Latin alfabesine geçiş sürecinin 2001 yılında tamamlanmasını sağlamış ve 1 Ağustos gününü Azerbaycan Dili ve Alfabesi Günü olarak ilan etmiştir. Azerbaycan dili ve alfabesi Azerbaycancılık ideolojisinin sembolü olarak gösterildiği için, bu gelişmeler Azerbaycancılık ideolojisinin başarısı olarak yorumlanmış ve Haydar Aliyev bu dilin ve alfabenin koruyucusu olarak gösterilmiştir.

Haydar Aliyev, eskiden var olan bir ideolojiyi tekrar inşa ederken, oğlu İlham Aliyev bu ideolojiyi devam ettirmiş ve bu ideolojiye çokkültürlülük politikasını da eklemiştir. Çokkültürlülük politikası birçok açıdan eleştirilmektedir. Çünkü çokkültürlülük politikasının Avrupa'da ortaya çıkış nedeni, iktisadi nedenlere dayanan göçlerle Avrupa'ya gelen yabancı kültürlerin Avrupa kültürüne entegrasyonunu sağlamaktır. Ancak katılımcılar Azerbaycan'daki durumun Avrupa örneğine uygun olmadığını, çeşitli etnik grupların Azerbaycan'a sonradan gelmediğini, oranın yerli halkı olduklarını, yüzyıllardır bir arada yaşayarak kültürlerinin iç içe geçtiğini, dolayısıyla kültürel bir homojenliğin var olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Bir katılımcı, çokkültürlülük politikasının aslında Azerbaycancılık ideolojisine zıt olduğunu, çünkü Azerbaycancılık ideolojisi etnik kökenlere vurgu yapmayıp orada yaşayan herkesi Azerbaycanlı olarak tanımlamaya ve sivil bir kimlik oluşturmaya dayanırken, çokkültürlülükte bu etnik grupların ülkedeki varlığından bahsedilerek aslında etnik kimlikleri daha görünür hale getirdiğini ifade etmiştir.

Dil konusunda ise, İlham Aliyev'in de müdehaleci bir siyaset izlemediği söylenebilir. İstisnai bir durum olarak, İlham Aliyev'in 2006 yılındaki kararnamesi ile Azerbaycan dilini diğer dillerin etkisinden korumak amacıyla tüm yabancı yayımların Azerbaycan diline çevirilmesi zorunluluğu getirilmiştir. Bu zorunluluğun Türkçe yayımları da kapsamı bazı kesimler tarafından eleştirilere maruz kalmıştır. Bu konu hakkında da katılımcılara fikirleri sorulmuştur. Bazı katılımcılar iki dilin de Türk dilinin lehçeleri olduğunu ve bunlar arasında çeviri yapmaya ihtiyaç olmadığını ifade etmişlerdir. Bazı katılımcılar ise bu zorunluluğun getirilmesinin nedeni olarak Rusça yayımları göstermiş, denge siyasetinin bir sonucu olarak da Türkçe yayımlar için bir istisna yapılmadığını, ancak; kablolu yayınlar sayesinde

Azerbaycanlıların Türkçe yayımları orijinal dilinde izlemeyi tercih ettiklerini dile getirmişlerdir.

Azerbaycan'daki başka bir tartışma konusu ise son dönemlerde Rus dilinde eğitim veren okullara talebin önemli ölçüde artmasıdır. Bu talep artışında Rusya'nın bu yönde bir siyaset uygulaması, Rusya'ya çalışmaya giden Azerbaycanlıların Rusça bilmemekten ötürü yaşadığı zorluklar nedeniyle akrabalarına Rusça öğrenmeleri yönünde telkinde bulunmaları ve Sovyet döneminden kalma bir anlayışla Rus dilinde eğitim veren okulların eğitim kalitesinin daha iyi olduğu inancı rol oynamıştır. Yapılan mülakatlarda açıkça Rusya karşıtı fikirler beyan eden bazı katılımcılar bile çocuklarının Rus dilinde eğitim aldığını söylemişlerdir. Bunun sebebini ise Rusçanın bir ilim dili olması, bu dilde verilen eğitimin daha kaliteli olması, Rusçanın bölge açısından önemli bir dil olması ve İngilizce eğitim veren okulların pahalı olması gibi nedenlerle açıklamışlardır. Bu katılımcılar, çocukları Rus dilinde eğitim alıyor olsa da evde Azerbaycan dilinde konuşulduğu için çocuklarının milli değerlerini kaybedeceklerini düşünmediklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu ise anadilde eğitim almanın milli kimlik ve milli değerlerin korunması açısından çok önemli olduğunu vurgulamıştır. En azından ilköğretimde eğitimin anadilde alınması gerektiği çünkü farklı bir dilde alınan eğitimin çocukların dünya görüşünü ve kültürünü etkilediği öne sürülmüştür. Bu nedenle, bazı katılımcılar Azerbaycan'da Rus dilli ve Azerbaycan dilli şeklinde iki farklı dünyanın olduğunu, bunların dünya görüşlerinin birbirinden farklılaştığını da ifade etmişlerdir. Dünya görüşlerindeki farklılıklar bu gruplar arasında anlaşmazlıklara yol açtığı için Azerbaycan toplumunda bütünleşme sağlanmasına engel teşkil etmektedir. Rus dilinde eğitim almış Azerbaycanlılar kendilerini daha eğitilmiş, modern, açık fikirli görerek toplumun elit kesimini oluşturduklarını düşünmektedir. Yani Rusça eğitim almış olmak onlar için bir elitlik göstergesidir ve toplumdaki sosyal statülerini dil üzerinden konumlandırmaya çalışmaktadırlar. Buna karşın, Azerbaycan dilinde eğitim alan kesim ise kendi anadilinde eğitim aldıkları için ve bu dilde yazılmış edebi eserleri öğrendikleri için kendilerini ulusal değerlerini kaybetmemiş gerçek Azerbaycanlılar olarak görmektedirler. Bu nedenle, Azerbaycan toplumundaki ayrışmalarda sadece etnik kimlikler ve bölgesel kimlikler değil, aynı zamanda alınan eğitimin dilinin de belirleyici olduğu öne sürülebilir.



Yapılan mülakatlarda katılımcılara kimliğin devamlılığını sağlayan unsurlar sorulduğunda, büyük bir çoğunluk en önemli unsurun dil olduğunu ifade etmiştir. Dilin yanısıra gelenek-görenekler, kültür, müzik ve edebiyat da vurgulanmış, halkın kimliği koruma iradesi ve aydınların da çok etkili olduğu dile getirilmiştir. Tüm bunlar gözönünde bulundurulduğunda, dilin kültürün taşıyıcısı olarak görülmesi nedeniyle kimliğin korunmasında ve devamlılığının sağlanmasında önemli bir rol oynadığı söylenebilir. Bu nedenden dolayı, Azerbaycanlı siyasi elitler kimlik inşa sürecinde dile, özel bir sembolik önem atfetmişlerdir.

Yapılan mülakatlarda, Dağlık-Karabağ çatışmasının milli bilincin güçlenmesi açısından önemli bir etkisinin olduğu ve toplumun her kesimi için birleştirici bir faktör olduğu iddia edilmiştir. Böylece, öteki unsuruna karşı gelişen biz olma bilinci Azerbaycanlılar arasında vatana aidiyet duygusu ve dayanışma yaratarak milli kimliğin çerçevesini oluşturmuştur. Kaybedilen topraklar, yitirilen yaşamlar, yaşadığı topraklardan göç etmek zorunda kalan insanlar ve ekonomik tahribatlar göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, bu çatışmanın Azerbaycan'da yol açtığı zararlara rağmen; Azerbaycan halkını birleştiren ve vatan bilincinin oluşmasını sağlayan bir yönünün olduğu da söylenebilir.

Dilin adı ve alfabe üzerine yapılan uzun tartışmaların ve bir fikir birliğine varılamamasının nedeni olarak ideolojik farklılıklar, iç meseleler ve bölgesel dinamikler gösterilebilir. Bu dinamiklere ve ideolojilere bağlı olarak şekillendirilen Azerbaycanlı milli kimliğinin devamlılığı yine bu dinamiklere ve yönetici elitin siyasi perspektifine bağlıdır. Bundan hareketle, Azerbaycan'ın bugünkü siyasi konjonktürü gözönünde bulundurulursa, toplumun bütün kesimleri tarafından benimsenmiş ve tam anlamıyla oturmuş bir milli kimlik anlayışının varlığından söz edilemez.

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