

TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL ELITE IN AZERBAIJAN

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## ABSTRACT

### TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL ELITE IN AZERBAIJAN

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This thesis explores the transformation of political elite in the context of post-Soviet authoritarian consolidation. The study is primarily based on semi-structured in-depth interviews and field findings are evaluated within a theoretical and historical framework. A common characteristic of many post-Soviet regimes is their reliance on hybrid regimes. By not rejecting democratic principles and practices altogether, these regimes differ from classical authoritarian regimes of the past century. In the case of Azerbaijan hybrid regime is associated with regional networks, patronage, and strict control of elite by controlling information flows. The changes and continuities between the rules of Heydar Aliyev, the founder of the authoritarian system and his successor Ilham Aliyev in terms of the structure and functioning of elite are also among the findings. While securing state authority was a priority during Heydar Aliyev, democratic rights and freedoms were relatively advanced despite the fact that democracy was not a part of the discourse. During Ilham Aliyev, monopoly of power was secured, but these rights and freedoms were severely curtailed despite the democratic discourse. Occasional changes of cadre occurring within the ruling elite serve authoritarian rule rather than representing a democratizing dynamic. Consequently, hybrid regime is characterized by a hybrid elite. In accordance with the elite theories, the primary role of the elite in defining the political system is affirmed.

Political transformation is an elite-led processes, but this study also acknowledges that their construction can be better understood in the background of historical experiences.

**Keywords:** Elite theory, political elite, hybrid regimes, post-Soviet, Azerbaijan.

## ÖZ

### AZERBAYCAN'DA SİYASAL SEÇKİNLERİN DÖNÜŞÜMÜ

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Bu tezin amacı Azerbaycan'da siyasal seçkinlerin dönüşümünü Sovyet sonrası dönemde otoriter siyasi sistemin pekiştirilmesi bağlamında incelemektir. Çalışma temel olarak saha çalışması ve yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakatlar aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Saha verileri, kuramsal çerçeve ve tarihsel arka plan kapsamında değerlendirilmiştir. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından pek çok Sovyet mirasçısı cumhuriyette farklı şekillerde işleyen otoriter yönetimler ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu yönetimlerin ortak özelliği hibrit rejimlere dayanması, yani klasik otoriter yönetimlerden farklı olarak kimi demokratik söylem ve pratikleri tamamen reddetmemeleridir. Azerbaycan örneğinde otoriter yönetim, siyasal seçkinlerin bölgesel ağlar, bilgi akışının sıkı kontrolü ve patronaj ağları aracılığı ile birlikte anılmaktadır. Ayrıca babadan oğula iktidar transferinin başarılı şekilde gerçekleştiği ülkede otoriter sistemin kurucusu Haydar Aliyev ile onu devam ettiren oğlu Haydar Aliyev'in iktidarları arasında iktidar seçkinlerinin yapısı ve işleyişi bakımından süreklilik ve kopuşlar da bulgular arasındadır. Baba Aliyev döneminde devlet iktidarının güvenceye alınması öncelikliken, demokrasi bir amaç olarak ifade edilmemesine rağmen fiiliyatta demokratik hak ve özgürlükler kısıtlı da olsa kullanılabilmiştir. İlham Aliyev döneminde ise iktidar tekeli tamamen kurulmuş,



demokratik söylemin daha çok kullanılmasına rağmen uygulamada hak ve özgürlüklerin büyük ölçüde engellenmiştir. Ayrıca iktidar seçkinlerinde ve daha alt düzeyde gerçekleşen kadro değişikliklerinin demokratikleşme yönünde bir dinamik ortaya çıkarmaktan çok otoriter yönetime hizmet ettiği vurgulanmalıdır. Sonuç olarak hibrit rejimin inşası görünürde demokratik söyleme daha yakın, ancak uygulamada otoriter bir hibrit seçkin grubu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Siyasal seçkinler kuramının öngördüğü üzere seçkinlerin siyasal sistemi tanımlamada birincil konum sahip olduğu, yani demokratik veya otoriter sistemin inşasındaki aktörler olduğu varsayımına dayanan tez, bu inşa sürecinin tarihsel geçmiş ve deneyimler temelinde gerçekleştiğini de yadsımamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Seçkinler kuramı, siyasal seçkinler, hibrit rejim, post-Sovyet, Azerbaycan.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this study is to understand the consolidation of authoritarianism through the transformation of the political elite in Azerbaijan. Like many of the former Soviet countries, Azerbaijan provided more positive prospects for democratization at the outset of independence in 1991. Azerbaijani independence was the result of a popular movement and a corresponding new political leadership. The emergence of new political parties, civic associations, independent media organizations were all regarded as a source of optimism for the consolidation of democracy once the old system and regime were overthrown. Yet, after a relatively short period of nationalist-democratic governance in 1992 and 1993, former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (CPAz) Heydar Aliyev returned as the new president of the country. The Popular Front (PF) government was unsuccessful in responding the economic crisis and more importantly, the ethno-territorial conflict over Mountainous Karabagh region. The armed conflict was a major obstacle in reforming the political system, and the PF government was compelled to work with the 1978 Soviet constitution and a legislative body elected in 1990.

As of 2020, Azerbaijan has been ruled by the members of the same family for twenty-seven years. Despite being identified as a democratic country (Azerbaijani Constitution, Article 7.1) where elections are defined as the only mechanism for the exercise of popular sovereignty (Azerbaijani Constitution, Article 2.2), the possibility of changing the president and the government via popular elections seems rather low, given the electoral practices and results in the past two decades. Thus, the democracy ratings of the Azerbaijan have been steadily declining except for the approximately first decade of independence where these ratings allowed the categorization of the

country as a semi-democratic country.<sup>1</sup> This situation was not peculiar to Azerbaijan and the consolidation of authoritarian regimes with different characteristics throughout the post-Soviet space resulted in a shift of focus from democratization to the forms and dynamics of authoritarian rule, this time with new concepts and data (Diamond 2002).

The durability of the “Sultanistic” regime in Azerbaijan can be explained through multiple perspectives. In this study, I have attempted to investigate the sources of authoritarian consolidation and stability through the transformation of political elite. By the term “transformation” I refer to the changes in the structure of the national elite, where the word “structure” corresponds to the “amalgam of attitudes, values, and interpersonal relations among factions making up the elite.” (Burton & Higley 1987: 296). The structure of the national elite is believed to be an important parameter in defining the type of political regime in a given country (Mosca 1939: 51). Thus I am trying to understand how the degree of monopoly of power is achieved in Azerbaijan, how the category of political elite with actual power has reduced to a significantly small size, and how the structure and functioning of the ruling coalition contributes to the apparent stability and potential instability. In other words, I will be trying to explain the mechanisms whereby authoritarianism was established in a similar way scholars try to explain democratization.

Like many other definitions in political sociology, the term authoritarian in political sociology is an ideal type, constructed to understand and explain political systems in which the right to design and implement political decision making is not obtained via democratic practices. An ideal type, in turn, refers to differences among authoritarian regimes not only in terms of form but also substance. Furthermore, the increase in the number of political regimes which correspond to what is known as the “gray zone” introduces new questions about the study of these political systems. The presence of formal political parties, elections that are recognized to meet the minimum standards at least by the international observers, a limited space for independent civil society and mass media organizations pose new challenges for the study of these “hybrid regimes.” (Brownlee 2009; Diamond 2015; Levitsky & Way 2010;

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom House (2019) “Nations in Transit,” URL: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/azerbaijan> accessed 20.04.2019.

An important lesson of the authoritarian breakdowns in the last three decades, namely the collapse of communism, the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring, is to avoid evaluating authoritarian regimes as stable, static entities. Yet, after approximately one decade after the disintegration of the USSR, majority of successor states became authoritarian regimes with various adjectives. Furthermore, the authoritarian systems in these countries differed significantly from each other. All newly independent states faced the challenges of “triple transition” (Offe & Adler 1991; Kuzio 2001) in the absence of strong political institutions, a robust civil society and an economy able to afford minimum quality of life to the citizens. Thus, on the one hand, the rise of authoritarian regimes might be seen as a natural outcome. Yet, this approach has no explanatory power simply because the new regimes have created new rules for the sharing of political and economic resources. History, geographical location, the level of socio-economic development all play an important role in understanding the trajectories of political systems provided that these trajectories are drawn by actors, that is, the political elite. In turn, the structure and dynamics defining the political elite in a country is changed. So, this dissertation focuses on how the political elite in Azerbaijan is transformed and how this process can be understood within the context of the country’s peculiar characteristics, without contradicting with the basic premises of the theory. The elite theory argues that any initiative necessitating change including authoritarianism and democracy is an elite preference. Particularly in the FSU, including Azerbaijan proves the basic promises of the elite theory in cases where the ruling elite remains in initiating democratization and consequently authoritarian systems persist. However, the dominance and the peculiarities of the political elite is also determined by the historical legacies in the case of Azerbaijan. This is regionalism and patronage which has its roots in the Soviet times.

As is well known, the final years of the Soviet Union witnessed an explosion of social movements in various forms willing to demonstrate their discontent with the current governments, but united in terms of pursuing a nationalist agenda. Their criticisms and proposed solution to the problems varied to a large extent, and this variation was represented by the leadership of the mass movements. In Azerbaijan, these broad sets of movements were gathered under the Azerbaijani Popular Front or Popular Front of Azerbaijan (APF), which was primarily characterized by nationalist-

democratic discourse. The years of early independence therefore witnessed an explosion of civil society organizations, media organizations and political parties. The APF government fell in 1993 due to their failure to respond effectively to the violent conflict over Mountainous Karabagh region and their cadres' inexperience in state affairs (Cornell 2011: 128-129). The following years were characterized first, by the consolidation of state authority and power under Heydar Aliyev, and later, the consolidation of authoritarianism under Ilham Aliyev. To summarize, the sphere of political elite in Azerbaijan has significantly narrowed. This process was also part of the global retreat of democracy and rise of illiberal regimes, especially after the post-9/11 world. With the shrinking of the political sphere and politics becoming a strictly intra-elite affair to preserve and increase the control over political and economic power, studies of politics in countries like Azerbaijan started to resemble the Kremlinology of the Cold War era. Politics in Azerbaijan is often perceived as the struggle between the small number of groups and individuals for more political and economic control, and the potential instability of the political system is disguised by the highly opaque mechanisms to sustain a balance among the ruling coalition. With the hope of providing a broader look at the political sphere, at the center of which I put the undeniable importance of political elite, I have written this dissertation.

### **1.1 The Structure of the Dissertation**

This introductory chapter is followed by the second chapter on methodology of the research, where I first make an overview of challenges of studying political transformations and the political elite. In the light of my experiences during the research, both at the desk and in the field, the first problem is related to definitions. All social scientific concepts we use are in fact constructs and “ideal types.” (Weber 2019: 79-99). The transformation of the political system on the basis of its' elite structures therefore require clarification and elaboration of the “regime type” the country is affiliated with. The historical peculiarities as well as continuities and changes in the sphere of political elite are therefore crucial in understanding the mechanisms of establishing, consolidating and sustaining an authoritarian rule. Is Azerbaijan (still) a post-Soviet country? Is it authoritarian, and if yes, does it have



adjectives? What are the historical sources and actors of the nationalism in Azerbaijan? What are the successes and failures of the political elite in different periods of the country's history in terms of nation and state building? Most importantly, the criteria for being considered as a member of the political elite were a contested issue between the researcher and the respondents, as well as among the respondents themselves. Throughout the field research and afterwards, I have constantly tried to negotiate these different positions and tried to establish a meaningful unity out of these distinct interpretations in order to obtain a perspective about the political system and elite in Azerbaijan. The second issue elaborated in this chapter is related to the first problem and includes the interactions between the researcher and the respondents in the field. As I explained above, respondents' answer to the same questions differed from each other. Furthermore, sometimes the interviewees also transgressed to the area of research question and design. Part of the solution I came up with was to listen to what my interviewees' definition systems included. Then I tried to categorize these interpretations as common frameworks to make sense of the political system and society. Finally, the data collection was also heavily influenced by the negotiation of identities in the field. The construction of relations in the field on the basis of insider and outsider roles was discussed in this section.

The third chapter provides an overview of three interrelated topics. First, I will outline the role of political elite in democracies and democratization. Following this, I will discuss how and why the political elite are indispensable for modern political system, in addition to the potential dangers of the inevitability of political elites. The final section in this chapter will include the conditions of democratic governance if we are to assume that the distinction between the elite and non-elite is inevitable. This way discussions regarding the differences between regime types as well as transitions from one type of political regime to another can be made on the basis of the formation, circulation and reproduction of elites as well as the institutional framework and historical factors in a given society.

The fourth chapter includes an overview and discussion of political elite in the Soviet Union. With its distinct qualities rooted in the ideological and practical aspects, the Soviet political system is believed to play an important role not only in the

formation and practices of the political elite, but also in the state-society relations. I contend that elite and mass perceptions about politics, governance and, civic and political rights are still partly determined by the Soviet experience. In turn, it is argued that the political elite transformation in the post-Soviet era can be better understood in the background of the Soviet era.

The fifth chapter includes a historical analysis of Azerbaijani society and politics, with an emphasis on political elite. As a sociologist studying political transformation, my purpose was to understand the important themes and issues which were discussed as important reference points in interpreting the present course of nation and state building in the country. The peculiar aspects of national identity and dynamics of political system are elaborated in accordance with the aim of understanding the political actors, institutions and regime dynamics. Acknowledging the fact that political power possesses some autonomy from other processes, I argue that the accumulation and exercise of political power is legitimized by the use of symbols and values, which are retrospectively constructed and put into circulation. Furthermore, the consolidation of political authoritarianism is accompanied by conceptual frameworks formulated to justify its practices. In this respect, it can be said that Azerbaijani history is processed selectively for specific political agendas. The Turkic, Islamic, Persian, Russian and European influences are the most important ones shaping the national identity, religion, culture, norms and practices. However, these elements with their various aspects have been interpreted differently during the Azerbaijani enlightenment, Soviet, early independence and recent eras. Among these, especially the Soviet and APF era stand in stark contrast. I argue that the shaping of national identity and references of state building in the post-independence and recent eras can be understood within a perspective of opportunities, challenges and constraints. As a country with little independent statehood, Azerbaijani national identity is a complex web stretched between European, Persian, Russian, Turkic and Islamic identities. The violent experiences of the late Soviet and early independence periods are thus used to justify the more moderate, even vague policies regarding the official approaches to history. To summarize, this chapter is intended to be a reference source for understanding the evolution of the Azerbaijani nationhood and statehood.

In turn, the problems of national identity and state building as well as the justifications used to legitimize the practices of government can be analyzed.

The sixth and seventh chapters are composed of discussions of a number of different aspects of political elite transformation on the basis of field findings. Here, I firstly focus on the relationship between nation-state building and the political elite. Since Azerbaijan is evaluated as a country with limited experience of independent statehood and national identity-building process, the political elite is attributed a central importance by all respondents. In other words, many challenges of building a democratic regime and society are evaluated from this perspective. Also, the interpretations of Azerbaijan's dependency on political developments in its immediate geographical and cultural environment are discussed. Again, the relationship between nation-state building and the political elite are discussed in the background of the opportunities, challenges and constraints arising from the historical-political experiences. The meaning of independence, sovereignty and state-society relations in the Azerbaijani context are also focused through the perspectives on political elite. Secondly, findings about the evolution and dynamics of informal networks in Azerbaijani politics are presented and discussed. Also referred to as "clan politics", the structure and functioning of the informal groups associated with regional affiliations are focused. Here, it is important to note that "clan politics" in Azerbaijan demonstrates significant differences from other such examples in the former Soviet countries. Furthermore, as authoritarianism consolidated, the characteristics of informal politics have changed. As the structure of Azerbaijani political leadership, as well as control over economic resources tightened, the regime acquired traits defined by "sultanistic" characteristics, and the implications for elite formation, circulation and reproduction are addressed. Thirdly, I will go over the findings about the relationship between economic and political power. The overlapping of these resources is not uncommon in other societies, however, in authoritarian systems these resources are monopolized by a small group of persons, who might or might not be in formal positions of power. The oligarchic characteristics of Azerbaijani political regime are thus discussed within the context of problems of state building. In the post-Soviet Azerbaijan, positions of power and authority are associated with certain individuals and groups, as opposed to the principle of "impersonal character" of such

positions. Positions in government, bureaucracy and official institutions are divided among such groups and individuals as exclusive spheres of authority. In other words, the personal character of state institutions is reviewed as a reflection of the rules on “who gets what” in the country. The weakness of state institutions, the changing form of corruption, the mechanisms whereby the ruling elite is consolidated and finally, the ways in which the emergence of opposition movements and parties through personal control over political and economic resources are discussed. The implications of the lack of a basis for polyarchy (Dahl 1971), i.e. the presence of autonomous contenders for power are also conferred here. Fourthly, I exhibit and discuss the findings on the recruitment and circulation of the political elite. Methods and mechanisms for achieving elite unity, prevention of the emergence of alternative contenders for power are presented in this section. As I have stated above, the lack of autonomous state institutions, a strong civil society, independent media are assumed to account for the emergence of “strategic elites” who play an important role as a source for elite recruitment and circulation. In addition, the tightening structure of the Azerbaijani political elite allows recruitment mostly via family ties and connections. To summarize, the outlook and transformation of patronage network and nepotism are presented in this part. I finally focus on the implications of generational change in Azerbaijani politics. As a young candidate for presidency, Ilham Aliyev was greeted by many Azerbaijanis as a new opportunity to move towards a more democratic polity. Similarly, the increased number of professionals and experts with Western higher education was expected to play a role in the democratization of the country. Thus, I have presented and discussed my findings about generational change as a probable (or improbable) source of political change. In the eighth and final chapter I summarize my findings and evaluations of the Azerbaijani political elite.

This dissertation, as the formation of Azerbaijani political elite, is constructed by opportunities, challenges and constraints. These factors arise from the formulation of the research question and framing of the research. The topic of political transformation is usually dealt by political scientists and preferably in comparative perspective. I, on the other hand, have attempted to preserve a perspective to construct a narrative based on how existing theoretical knowledge in political science and sociology can be tested in the peculiar characteristics of Azerbaijan. The role of

history, culture, institutions, actors, and international environment are all crucial in shaping the political sphere of a country, including its political elite. The way in which all these factors are interpreted by the elite and masses, I believe, cannot be used to sustain arguments of “singularity” of cases, but to understand why socio-political analysis should be ready to grasp the nuances if we want to contribute to theory.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH**

The primary sources of the research are a series of semi-structured and in-depth interviews conducted with some members of government, opposition, academy and print-media. The fieldwork was conducted in four stages in December 2007, June-July and November-December 2008, December 2009 and December 2010. The interviews were aimed at defining and understanding several aspects of elite formation and change in Azerbaijan. On the most basic level, their profile (i.e. personal background, orientations, motivations and agenda) of members of the political elite is investigated. Secondly, a special importance is attributed to specific periods and events of the Soviet era, which are important in terms of the national elite formation. To name, these are the early years of Soviet rule, Stalin era, the “thaw”, and years of glasnost and perestroika. In this chronology, the late Soviet era represents a critical moment with the emergence of the leadership of a movement society, that is, a period where newly emerging political elite was extremely influential in bringing about regime change. This era is assumed to be important also for the struggle between and among elite groups forming around different political ends and their responses to the crisis of regime, visible at many reference points the political elite adopted in late Soviet and early independence years. Third, in line with the view that the country has shifted towards authoritarian tendencies, the process through which the opposition/government dichotomy has become a reality, and afterwards completely removed from political analysis is focused. Similar to a number of post-Soviet countries, Azerbaijan represents a harsh environment for those in opposition parties and government change through elections seems hard because of the antagonistic environment of political sphere. Finally, the place and meaning of the elite in the present day Azerbaijan with a future prospect is kept as

an important purpose. Azerbaijan has been experiencing a period of rapid change during the years in which the fieldwork for this research was conducted, due to the climax in oil revenues and important steps in external politics, and decisions of the present day should be expected to have considerable impact upon the future of the country. Therefore, finding out how these decisions are made and implemented by the leadership, what some probable consequences for the political and social life might be are crucial.

By keeping the above mentioned points, investigation on elite profile, recruitment, attitudes, behaviors are also taken into consideration. Rather than trying to create a map of elite networks, alliances/antagonisms based on interest, ideology or politics, the present study aims at defining the basic factors affecting such formations, elite identities and behaviors. In other words, the aim here is not to focus on intra-elite relations exclusively as a dynamic of political sphere. Rather the purpose is to establish links between the social, cultural, economic and political sphere with respect to the political elite, who are seen as the makers and products of these very spheres at once. A dynamic understanding of the transformation of political elite would require this.

The main methods employed for this study are qualitative. In depth interviews conducted during several field trips account for the core of the ethnographic work. Five field trips to Baku, Azerbaijan, were made between 2007 and 2010. The trips lasted between 3 to 5 weeks, and the major purpose of the trips was to conduct in-depth interviews with the prominent members of the Azerbaijani politics, as well as members of the academy, civil society and media about the topic. In other words, elite and expert interviewing are used together. For the interviews, semi-structured questionnaires are used in order to facilitate the interviewees' free expression of their personal views. All interviewees received the same questions, but the probing of the questions varied as their background and/or field of expertise were not homogeneous. Recurrent themes and issues including the evaluation of Azerbaijani political system, regime, elite and culture in different periods; evaluation of the Azerbaijani experience of nation and state building; social, political, economic processes and trends are investigated in all interviews. These processes and trends are evaluated as important turning point where changes and continuities in the structure and dynamics of the

sphere of political elite could be traced. Throughout the interviews, the respondents made several statements about elections, constitutional amendments, important public events and protests, and sometimes even anecdotal information as evidence for their arguments. Furthermore, sometimes respondents are allowed to elaborate their interpretations of the topics investigated. For example, when an interviewee wanted to give a detailed explanation about the historical roots of the norms and behavior of the political elite, or the causes and implications of the lack of a vibrant civil society, s/he is allowed to do so. Although this has sometimes extended the duration of the interviews, the information and perspectives they offered provided me with important insights about my original research question.

## **2.1 The Fieldwork**

Relations in the field constitute an important dimension of data collection process in ethnographic research. The high level of interaction with the informants in this sort of research, aspects of the researcher and the interviewees are of crucial importance, as their relationship will inevitably influence the data obtained this way. In other words, the ethnographic nature of this study necessitates an evaluation of the interaction between the researcher and the researched, in order to assess the reliability of the data collected. In this section I will outline the major aspects of this mutual relationship and briefly discuss their possible effects at different levels of the study, especially data collection, primarily through in-depth interviews and analysis of the data, which rests on establishing analytical links between the data and theory.

I should admit that throughout my fieldwork, I was impressed by the analytical and intellectual capacity of my interlocutors. Of course, not all my interviews went as smooth and rich as others, but looking back at my interviews I can say that the richness and depth of intellectual thinking of my interviewees improved my understanding of Azerbaijan a great deal. I still feel anxious whether I was capable of comprehending and reflecting their thoughts during and after the field work. Looking back as I write this dissertation, I should reemphasize the quality of their understanding of what I call as the “Azerbaijani situation,” notwithstanding their differences of interpretation. Their evaluation of the pre-Soviet and Soviet past, challenges of independence,



modernization, globalization, identity and political transformation have demonstrated a framework of thinking about Azerbaijan in a very complex and distinct way. This complexity and distinctiveness has helped me to overcome the tendency to think in an outcome-oriented way that can be seen in some of the democratization studies. The awareness of the ways in which Azerbaijani people think about their own experiences of political transformation did not lead me to think about the distinctiveness of the Azerbaijani case but on the contrary, made me to constantly rethink about the possibilities of looking at political change in a broader way.

Immediately following the first interviews, I have noticed three set of problems that influenced the quality of the data generated. Since these issues were having a common impact upon the research, I choose to reflect and elaborate on them together. These problems are related to the nature of the field in which I have conducted the research. Requiring an immediate response, I attempted to formulate these three problems and provide adequate solutions during the field trips.

First of these issues was related with the peculiarities of the political sphere in Azerbaijan. The most striking of these peculiarities is that the political sphere in Azerbaijan was still extremely polarized (Ergun 2010: 77). In the second half of the 2000s when I conducted my research, the governing elite enjoyed an unprecedented level of autonomy while the formal opposition demonstrated a high level of political and organizational weakness.<sup>2</sup> In Azerbaijan, where the main principle of politics is winner takes all, views on politics are expressed in absolute terms. This is true for most of the government and opposition members, while more objective approaches and authentic explanations were also present. Thus, the sharp divisions in political alignments were a major factor skewing the answers to interview questions to both extremes.

Another factor of “contamination” was related to the Azerbaijani-Turkish relations in the independence era. Immediately following the independence in 1991, contacts between two societies increased enormously. However, majority of those who were interested in establishing close ties belonged to right-wing political views

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<sup>2</sup> In the following pages, I will further clarify what I mean by “powerful” government and “weak” opposition. Here I only want to note that apparent “weakness” of formal political parties does not always point to the lack of discontent among the society.

in Turkey. Ultra-nationalists, also motivated by the Karabagh conflict, and religious organizations represented Turkey disproportionately in the first years of independence. In my opinion, the implication of this phenomenon in terms of an academic field research is that Azerbaijanis, regardless of their political view, tend to assume all Turkish citizens equally nationalistic and religious. My impression was that as a Turkish citizen, my interest in the history and future of socio-political developments were apparently interpreted as a declaration of a certain political positioning. Therefore, in relation to the problem of polarization I explained above, the respondents were rather keen in learning about my own political views. Since the perception of the researcher by the respondents constitutes an important aspect of field relations<sup>3</sup>, it required some effort to satisfy their curiosity without jeopardizing the relationship of trust. At times when I was asked about my political orientations, and my interviewees were usually disappointed by my answers, both when I chose giving neutral answers or explain the truth. I usually preferred telling the truth about my worldview, since I believed my respondents were more experienced in making inferences about the people they meet. I therefore contended that trying to conceal my “true colors” would jeopardize the rapport between me and my respondents. However, this situation did not result in a noticeable change in their attitudes towards me. My assumption is that two factors explain their behavior: first, regardless of their position in the political spectrum, Azerbaijanis I interviewed were well aware of the need for academic studies about their society. Lack of scientific research on Azerbaijani society was unanimously admitted and therefore I was always welcome. Furthermore, such studies were perceived instrumental in representing Azerbaijani perspectives in international realm. Due to the feelings of misunderstanding, injustice and isolation against the world public opinion, interest shown in Azerbaijani society is highly valued and appreciated. Secondly, Azerbaijani society is defined by tolerance and moderation, and therefore my interviewees could easily adapt to the new situation when their expectations or assumptions are not met. I should note, however, that some interviewees were not at all interested in my views on politics.

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<sup>3</sup> For discussions of the researcher and respondent relations from different perspectives, see Ergun & Erdemir 2010; Merton 1972; Adams 1999.

A third dimension of the “contamination” was related with the fact that the Azerbaijani political elite and experts on politics have been “over-interviewed.” As a relatively small community, they have been on the focus of several foreign researchers, professors, diplomats, graduate students, journalists, political parties, NGO representatives, and so forth. During interviews, some respondents even referred to previous interviews they responded to when answering my questions. In other words, having to respond to numerous requests for interviews, my respondents were experienced interviewees. This usually meant being rather confident during the interviews with answers ready for every question, but sometimes also an uninterested attitude.

The major source of information collected for this thesis was in depth interviews conducted during the field trips. As I mentioned before, these trips lasted between three to five weeks. Before traveling to Baku for the first time, my thesis advisor provided me with phone numbers of some of the Azerbaijani politicians, political experts and civil society representatives, who were considered as potential interviewees, contact persons, or both. In other words, besides having extensive knowledge of the Azerbaijani political sphere, these individuals were also good contact persons to reach other possible interviewees and snowball my sampling. While asking for other possible interviewees, I have also attempted to balance their political affiliation or sphere of activity such as government, political parties, civil society, media and academy. Thus, after getting to Baku and settled in some small apartment, first I contacted these individuals and got appointments. Later, the list of interviewees grew through snowballing.

In the first interviews, I have used mostly Turkish whereas my respondents used Azerbaijani. Before traveling to Azerbaijan, I knew little about the Azerbaijani Turkish. Although Turkish language in Turkey and Azerbaijani Turkish are mutually comprehensible because they share the same grammar and most of the vocabulary, they also possessed important differences which sometimes made it difficult for me to understand my interviewees fully. Therefore, when I missed a word (those were mostly words borrowed from Persian or Russian languages), I stopped and asked the meaning of it. In my first visits, differences in language also caused minor problems

such as in determining the accurate time of meeting.<sup>4</sup> Azerbaijani Turkish as a whole was reminiscent to an older version of Turkish before purification of language, with more Arabic and Persian vocabulary. In this respect, I wondered how Azerbaijani language one century ago and now were more similar compared to Turkish language which transformed more radically through the same period of time.<sup>5</sup> As I have used every opportunity to attend public events, follow mass media and spend time with Azerbaijani friends, I have managed to learn Azerbaijani better. Thus, when increased competence in language combined with physical appearance not much different from average Azerbaijani, in my final visits I could barely convince some of my interviewees that I was actually from Turkey or not related to Azerbaijani immigrants in Turkey. Learning Azerbaijani Turkish instead of insisting on communicating in my native dialectic has definitely helped to enhance the rapport between me and my respondents.

The locations of the interviews were generally the respondents' offices. At times, interviews are also conducted in traditional tea houses, as well as fancier coffee houses. Because of the age and status differences between me and my respondents, but more importantly because of the codes of hospitality in Azerbaijan, my offers to pay for the tea or coffee were rejected every time. A couple of times interviews took place in interviewees' homes, where I was also offered dinner and observe the daily life and family of Azerbaijanis. Twice I had to complete the interviews while strolling on the streets and parks of Baku, despite my efforts to convince them that sitting on a place would be much better for recording the interviews. When interviews were conducted in respondents' offices and workplaces, the interviews were sometimes interrupted by phone calls or visitors. In such instances, I have stopped recording and taking notes, and managed to continue the interview where it had stopped.

For the interviews, my initial plan was to record them on an electronic voice recorder. However, very few of my respondents (both from those who support the

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<sup>4</sup> When I first heard the phrase "Saat 2 yarım'da görüşelim" on the phone I thought my respondent said "Let's meet at two-thirty" whereas he actually said "Half past one." We nevertheless managed to meet, although almost one hour late.

<sup>5</sup> According to my observations, although the Soviet regime was less interested in changing the language itself, the Azerbaijani language as a whole was undermined by the cultural and economic advantages of knowing Russian language.

government or oppose) agreed to grant permission to do so. Their reluctance to get their interviews recorded by a foreigner was understandable to a degree. Furthermore, this also implied the fragility of the freedom of speech in the country. Thus, for many of my interviews, I had to take extensive notes and later reconstruct them in the most correct way possible.

During my fieldwork, I have tried to attend as many public roundtables, presentations and discussions in Baku. During the years in which I have conducted my fieldwork in Azerbaijan, the civil society sphere was still relatively active<sup>6</sup> and several non-state organizations were still able to organize such events. Although most of these events were not directly related to my research topic, I attended them for two reasons. First, these events provided me with a deeper insight of Azerbaijani politics. From the question of Russian-speaking population of Baku to the role of West and media in the Azerbaijani politics, from the management of oil funds to the situation of local governance, I have collected much valuable information via these events. Secondly, the events were a good platform to get acquainted new contacts and possible interviewees for my research. I should also say that I have made several new friends via these meetings, who not only shared their opinions about the Azerbaijani political life but also offered their assistance in case I needed any.

Finally, there were other subtler disadvantages and problems in data collection besides I described above. Collecting information in a politically repressive and sensitive environment is already documented in the literature. Several times my respondents admitted the difficulties of conducting a research on Azerbaijani domestic politics. Before entering the field, I have read and admitted the difficulties in interviewing in similar environments. Of course, politics in every society and the sphere of political elite has a “conspiracy” dimension. Yet, what was important for me was to see what my informants were ready to share with me, without questioning whether they were actually telling the truth or not. Therefore, I tried to meet with politicians, political experts, civil society representatives and academics from different backgrounds and political dispositions as possible. Due to the polarized political environment, many of the interviewees were keen to convince me to the validity of

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<sup>6</sup> The Freedom House scores for civil society in Azerbaijan were 5.25 for 2007 and 2008, 5.50 for 2009 and 5.75 for 2010 and 2011, compared to 6.0 for 2012, 6.25 for 2013, 6.50 for 2014, 6.75 for 2015, and 7 for 2016, 2017, and 2018.

their perspective and often they expected me to affirm their version of the story. In the face of such situations, I have emphasized my impartial position whenever necessary. I frequently repeated that I am not there to judge their views and I only wanted to know many perspectives as possible. Older interviewees, both from the government and opposition side, expressed their expectations about me “getting the story the right way.” Well-known mutual accusations, like “the moving away from democracy” and “the risk of putting the country in danger” were often repeated implicitly and explicitly. Interestingly, younger respondents were less interested in my affirmation of their views. When evaluating the interviews, I have tried to actively avoid being normative and tried to stick to my principle of understanding the dynamics of Azerbaijani politics and political elite.

After having transcribed the interviews, I did not use any computer technologies specifically designed for qualitative analysis. Instead, I have categorized parts of the interviews on same questions or topics. Afterwards, I tried to see the differences and similarities in these answers. Depending on the political affiliation or sphere of activity of the respondents, I have tried to compare and contrast similar and different answers to same questions in an attempt to discover the prevalent tendencies in interpreting the political sphere and specifically the political elite. This way, I reorganized my primary data under sections on different subjects and later tried to make conclusions about them.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter includes an overview and discussion of theories relevant for this dissertation. My purpose here is to demonstrate first, the inevitability of the elites for political systems, especially for modern ones. The formations of modern state are characterized by increased division of labor based on professionalization and this includes the political realm. Secondly, distinguishing political systems and changes in it through the formations and changes in the structure of political elite and their rules of operation, written and unwritten, is a useful approach. In other words, conditions of entry into political elite positions and status as well as the major dynamics of elite circulation and reproduction help us define how a political system can be categorized for analytical and comparative purposes. Below I am presenting the major assumptions and arguments of different approaches in elite theory from the earliest period to the era of modern democracies following a brief discussion of modern democracy, classes and political elite.

#### **3.1 Problematizing the Role of Political Elite in Democratization**

The large-scale transformations starting in late 18th century can be seen as the major drive behind the proliferation of scientific study of both society and politics. Major changes such as the democratic-bourgeois revolutions, emergence of nation-states and modern forms of government necessitated new explanations. In this sense, two important developments can be seen as the primary context behind the emergence of elite theories: increased bureaucratization in governance and increased influence of liberal democracy.

Modern era politics is characterized by two contradicting but at the same time complementary processes. On the one hand, the governance of human societies has become a field of activity defined and guided by rationality and science. In other words, principles of rationality and science were applied to systems of governance. What can be summarized as the bureaucratization of state had a number of implications for politics. First of all, increased bureaucratization resulted in an unprecedented growth in the capabilities of the state. In other words, the rationalization of government practices and processes allowed states penetrate areas of political, economic and social life in extents that were unimaginable by previous political systems. Secondly, the running of state institutions necessitated a rather large group of bureaucrats and technocrats, who held their respective positions due to their education and expertise, i.e. not due to attained but achieved status. Also, their positions were temporary and impersonal. Thirdly, the ascension of the bureaucrats and technocrats did not only mean a quantitative increase in state's capabilities. Now ruling in the name of science and rationality, the bureaucracy assumed the role of policy makers without being actually accountable to the public, regardless of the character of the regime.

The other major characteristic of modern era politics was the invention of popular will and popular democracy as its operating system. In Western Europe and elsewhere, modern democracy was closely associated with the inclusion of masses into political processes through universally defined citizenship and suffrage. Extension of voting rights to masses was not based only on the egalitarian principles of democracy as the ideology of enlightenment. Another concern was to transform society into the guardians of liberties. This could be achieved by creating a wide electoral basis, upon which different elite groups would compete to obtain support in elections. The opening of politics to masses, which were previously excluded from it, could this way prevent the formation of fixed elite leaderships like aristocracies.

Democracy, the idea of the rule of people by the people, was the promise of bourgeois revolutions, primarily in Western Europe and later elsewhere in the world. As a result, popular elections became the single mechanism through which the rulers in a society were chosen. The application of science and rationality while opening up to masses, new politics was not exempt from criticism. The leading political agenda



in industrial world of nineteenth century, the liberal democratic ideal, was not interpreted uniformly across the representatives of ideological spectrum. The first comprehensive critique of liberal democracy, interpreted as the political system envisioned within and subject to the capitalist economic system, was developed by Karl Marx who argued that the proletarian revolution was the only and inevitable way through which democratic ideal could be possible. In other words, his analysis was based on the argument that liberal democracy is the curtain behind which the bourgeois legitimized its oppression of masses. It is crucial here to emphasize that Marxist theory retained the democratic ideal and more importantly, relegated politics to economy. State power, according to Marx, was not an end in itself but largely a means for the bourgeoisie to continue capitalist system for more exploitation and profit. In other words, the bourgeoisie was in power because they controlled the economic system. Another critique of modern political formations can be observed in Weber's studies of industrial societies. As I mentioned before, the prioritized role of bureaucrats and technocrats in policy making was justified by the claims of scientific and rational governance. However, Weber defines a tendency that contradicts with the democratic principles in bureaucratic systems. In line with his attempt to question the deterministic role of economy and ownership, Weber asserts that bureaucracy, without owning the means of production, or top positions for decision making, tends to develop into an independent power. Included in his analysis of modern state's organization, Weber describes an inherent drive for more power as characteristic of bureaucrats. In Weber's words, "Rational calculation . . . reduces every worker to a cog in this bureaucratic machine and, seeing himself in this light, he will merely ask how to transform himself... to a bigger cog... The passion for bureaucratization at this meeting drives us to despair." (Weber 1978: xx) For Weber, the alarming observation is that the bureaucratic system inherently pushes its members to dismiss the neutral, scientific and rational principle and prioritize their personal career advancement. At this point, it is possible to argue that Marx and Weber share two important intellectual frameworks. First, despite their diverging approaches and conclusions, they were both concerned primarily with the relative position of economy and politics. For Marx, politics was largely determined by the class character of the state. The parameters within which individuals interpreted their own political views were in fact a reflection

of the economic system. Weber, on the other hand, reversed this explanation and demonstrated how ideas could be effective in changing the material world. Accordingly, the roots of capitalist mode of production are argued to reside in a specific religious world-view (Die Protestantische Ethik). Another common feature of Marx and Weber is that both have reached normative conclusions as a result of their scientific study of the political and economic organization of industrial societies. The normative evaluations were made possible because democracy is taken as an ideal against which observable realities of political formations can be measured. For Marx, liberal democracy is the mechanism through which the owners of the means of production mask their rule. In a different vein, Weber warns about the process of politics becoming a vocation and the tendency of bureaucracy to become an independent power without being accountable to public. It is against this background which we can position the elite theorists' critique of democracy.

The analyses of early elitists were based on two suspicions. One was about Marx's glorification of masses', i.e. working classes' role in politics. The other, and in my opinion the more substantial suspicion, was directed towards the democratic ideal through which liberal democratic regimes legitimized their rule. For elite theorists, both Marx's proposition of a political system based on the rule of ordinary individuals, and the idea of electing the rulers through popular vote as in liberal democracies were flawed in the same way: democracy as an ideal was unattainable. Marx's or liberal democrats' formulation of politics was impossible, if not undesirable. They agreed with Marx that liberal democracy conceals the rule of a small minority, however, their response was to admit this reality and accept as an unchangeable given. Early elite theorists' methodological maneuver to counter the Marxist bias was to choose a feature of the political systems they believed to be universal as subject. Despite the criticisms of a flawed, ahistorical methodology, and reaching normative conclusions with reference to the place of politics in society, classical elite theories succeeded in emphasizing the independence of politics as a field of study. In other words, their underlying assumption was that politics is not determined by the economic system. In this respect, classical elite theorists formed a theoretical background upon which later theorists could build their studies for the

autonomy of politics. Therefore, before reviewing more recent theories about political elite, I will briefly outline the classical elite theories.

### **3.2 The Inevitability of Elite: Classical Elite Theories**

The first attempt to the scientific study of politics where society is defined broadly in terms of two opposing groups defined as the rulers and the ruled was made by Vilfredo Pareto. Formerly, the term “elite” was in circulation as early as seventeenth century with reference to things with superior quality. The usage of the word later included upper social groups like “crack military units” and “high ranking nobility” (Bottomore 1964:1). The term entered dictionaries in 1823 (Oxford English Dictionary) and became a subject in social and political studies in Europe from late 19<sup>th</sup> century on and only in 1930s in Britain and America. Pareto’s work on elite was part of his general sociology, which explains social action by human psychological attributes. These attributes, according to Pareto, were fixed in human nature and guided all human activity, including politics. In other words, human societies were governed by universal rules; these rules were, however, not formulated within the field of social relations but by non-changing psychological attributes.

For Pareto, all human societies are composed of the elite and non-elite – a distinction which he made on a simple basis. If every human individual were to be evaluated in their respective job, vocation or type of activity, it will be seen that some of them are much more superior in their skills or expertise.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, a segment of highly successful individuals exist for every field of activity. One crucial point here is that Pareto stresses the neutral evaluation of the elite position, that is, an evaluation devoid of moral or normative values. As there can be elite lawyers, there may be elite robbers. The same division of elite and non-elite also apply to politics, where a small minority talented in governance rules the untalented or less talented masses. The distribution of skills in leadership and governance, according to Pareto, was a natural phenomenon and demonstrated a normal mathematical distribution. Initially described as two naturally occurring groups between which the relation is unclear, the ruler and

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<sup>7</sup> V. Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, III, pp. 1422-3.

the ruled were later defined by a simple opposition by Pareto, probably with the influence of Mosca's works (Bottomore 1990: 3). However, the basis of the distinction still remains a psychological one.

According to Pareto, human activities cannot be explained by logic. He defines two set of factors shaping person's actions: The first one, derivatives, correspond to frames of reference used in justifying action. Derivatives correspond to what Marx defines as ideology and include changeable views, theories and doctrines about the politics or other sub-systems of human societies (Vergin 2007: 112). Pareto claims that however they may seem to rely on logical explanations, derivatives are non-logical. The second set is comprised of residues, namely unchanging attributes in human psychology, which account for non-logical, unexplainable actions. Two major types of residues, one serving to creativity, imagination and novelty and, the other to permanence, stability and order are seen as the real basis upon which human actions can be understood. While majority of the people are characterized by the second type of residues, most rulers possess first type. The distinction between the two types of residues also help explain different styles of political rule, thus enabling an early attempt to define a basis for comparative study of politics: while one group of politicians are more skilled in using creative methods for coming to power and preserving it, the others rely more on order and stability. For Pareto, like it is for Machiavelli, the ideal ruler needs to possess both sets of skills in order to extend their rule (Parry 1969: 47). However, this is not the actual situation and different elite groups tend to be characterized by either type. Dubbed by Pareto as "foxes" and "lions", respectively, two types of leaders tend to replace each other as they often fail to compensate for their lack of either cunning or stability. This continuous circulation of elites is best understood in his expression stating that "history is a graveyard of aristocracies". Another dimension of elite circulation is related to the failure to provide a certain level of openness of the elite structure. When elites fail to make sure that new talented and ambitious individuals are recruited, "social equilibrium" is distorted and the elite falls from power. In this case, that is when the elite fails to be replaced gradually, a wholesale replacement of elite, i.e. revolutions, occur.

Later studies of political systems were also crucial in stressing the inevitability of elites in political systems. In turn, this approach was important in establishing

politics as an independent area of study. One relevant figure in this respect was Robert Michels, a student of Max Weber. In line with Mosca's emphasis on organization as the distinguishing feature and source of power of the elite, which I will discuss later, Michels focuses on basic principles of modern political organizations. Instead of personal characteristics, he points to the logic inherent in political organizations as the basis of the elite power. Michels defines a two-fold relationship between organization and elite: while organization is the basis of elite power, organizations inevitably produce its own elite. In Michels' well-known phrase, "Who says organization, says oligarchy." (1999: 365). The emphasis made by Michels is both on the requirement for individuals possessing the knowledge necessary for running the organization, as well as the unprecedented capacity of any type of modern organizations. An implication of this perspective is that equality in terms of being able to influence decision making is impossible in modern societies. The way in which Michels puts his claim forward is worth mentioning here as he distinguishes from other classical elite theorists by his empirical approach.

Michels first defines a universal "law" which explicitly states that organizations tend to create their own oligarchies, hence the "iron law of oligarchy." For the purpose of demonstrating his point, he focuses on the German Social Democratic Party for testing his hypothesis. For Michels, the fact that a political party strictly committed for the establishment of an ideal egalitarian society is governed by the same principles that apply to any other modern organization proves his point. His argument is that this "iron law" is above ideological commitments, even in the case of a political party defining democracy as an ideal situation where every member of the society has equal access to decision making. On the contrary, Michels starts with a straightforward observation that any human organization needs a form leadership in order to sustain itself or grow. In other words, leadership is a technical indispensability for organizations. The leadership may compose of few individuals possessing operational skills and expertise. Their distinct qualities enable them to have a distinct position in the organization, and even if the leaders are elected democratically by the members of the organization, this distinct position decreases the accountability of the leader. The way in which the leadership position tends to sustain and consolidate itself is formulated in a similar way as Mosca does. In Michels' formulation, "power breeds

power”, as a natural result of universal dynamics of political organization. For example, the privileged position of the leaders can be seen through the cycles of electoral struggle.

The principle purpose of political parties, at least for the vast majority of them, is to obtain the electoral support and get elected for power positions which will enable them to shape policy decisions. The privileged status of party elite becomes further complicated with election to official posts. When elected into representative bodies, like a parliament, party elites’ immunity against party members strengthens because of their increased indispensability. Since the electoral success is not only through the membership to the party but also support of a larger electorate, party elites cannot be replaced without damaging the success of the party (Perry 1969: 43-44). Michels contends that, in line with Weber’s observation about bureaucrats, expert party bureaucrats are more interested in techniques of power, i.e. obtaining and preserving positions of responsibility and power rather than party ideology and principles. Therefore, even in a working class party, leaders may become “bourgeoisified” and thus act counter to the party principles of egalitarianism.

Despite the centrality of empirical approach in Michels’ study, it should also be noted that his argument for the powerful oligarchical tendencies in modern political organizations has a social-psychological aspect, too. Michels assumes that, as a rule, majority of people are not interested in leadership. Apathy, submission and deference are traits that are parallel to the lack of skill and expertise to run organizations. Masses, he contends, are neither willing to assume leadership, nor capable of it. What is more important, according to Michels, is that they are glad that someone is there to fulfill the tasks required for the survival and success of the organization. In this respect, it becomes somewhat unclear whether it is the universal principles driving modern political organizations or social-psychological attributes of individuals that underlie the distinction between the elite and non-elite. One can infer from Michels’ position that the unequal distribution of resources, knowledge and opportunities for developing leadership skills is irrelevant for the practical results for the “iron law.”

Michels’ arguments are developed primarily on his study of political parties. However, his findings about parties are applicable to any kind of organization, and even to the society as a whole. In any society, Michels contends, an individual is

powerless and in order to voice their demands, people must be organized. Therefore, the main dilemma in modern societies is the incompatibility between the need to organize and impossibility to apply democratic principles. Yet, Michels' own solution to the dilemma is to propose a plurality of political parties. The existence of multiple different elite groups and competition among them might prevent authoritarian rule. Multiple oligarchies can support a relatively democratic governance, although it is impossible to eliminate the oligarchic tendencies themselves. Like Mosca, therefore, Michels can be considered as one of the precursors of pluralist theory of democracy, which has become more fashionable in the decades following Second World War.

The early elite theorists, namely Pareto, Mosca and Michels were united in their suspicion towards mass democracy and readiness to accept more autocratic regimes. While they emphasized the impossibility of applying democratic rule, they evaluated this as an unchangeable, universal fact and refrained from adopting a critical view on various obstacles for the development of democracy in terms of increasing popular participation in policy making. In varying degrees, they explain the power of elite through individual talent and psychological factors. In the post Second World War period, however, attempts were made to explain elite's power through social-structural variables, which were deliberately excluded by early elite theorists.

C. Wright Mills answers the question of who the elite are and what their position in the society using a critical framework. Before Mills, Burnham formulated and an institutional explanation for the basis of elite power using both class and elite frameworks. According to Burnham, the elite were able to monopolize political power through their control of the means of production. Mills, on the other hand, formulated an explanation where he argued that the composition of elite is determined by a wider institutional setting rather than economic control only (Mills 1956). The definition of the 'power elite' according to Mills refers to those "...in positions to make decisions having major consequences...in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society" (Mills 1956: 4). This definition suggests that not elite position is not determined simply by the actual exercise of power, but also the potential to influence the decision making processes (Parry 1969: 53). The broader institutional setting in advanced industrial societies is the context within which the elite's privileged position can be understood.

In Mills' study, the holders of top-positions in advanced industrial democracies appear to have developed all aspects of a "ruling class": conspiracy, consciousness and cohesion. In his research focusing on the ways in which political power is structured in the United States of America, Mills states that the three crucial and interrelated institutions monopolize decision making in key policy issues. Top-members of the political executive, the military and big corporations form what he calls the "power elite." They are comprised of not only three more-or-less distinct institutional structures, but he also argues that they form a cohesive group highly conscious of their interrelated interests and therefore represent a collective agency. The cohesiveness is primarily driven by the common interests, and the exchanges of individuals between the three institutional structures facilitate the cohesion. According to Mills observations, the members of military elite and political executive often switch to top positions in businesses and foundations; making use of their former networks to further the common interests. In other words, this exchange of individuals not only adds to the objective coherence of the 'power elite,' but also increases the subjective consciousness, turning the top members of three institutions into one group.

According to Mills, a pattern of recruitment practices is key for the continuity of the "power elite." The recruitment of new members into the top-positions is strictly controlled by the power elite, and although this process is not controlled by few powerful families, membership to wealthier classes is essential (Parry 1969: 53). On this basis, Mills also opposes the plurality of elites' thesis, which he labels as a 'myth' and asserts that the elite of the US has a historically unprecedented narrow basis. He points to the almost unlimited actual and potential of the "power elite" in shaping the society's future, but he surprisingly does not call for the abolition of the "power elite" who are disproportionally privileged. Accordingly, Mills does not defend a political system where increased popular participation might balance the power of the few. Instead, his proposal for the existing situation derives from an acknowledgement of the requirements of advanced industrial societies. The fact that fewer individuals possess almost absolute control over key policy decisions can be prevented from becoming a danger only if the power elite can be made responsible to the "free intellect," i.e. the intellectual, who is subjected to the political elite in the example of US (Sociological Imagination p. 183? Ref. on Bachrach 1967: 57). This way,



according to Mills, the “power elite” can play a positive role: “The rise of the power elite is a token of the centralization of the means of history-making itself – and this fact opens up new opportunities for the willful making of history.” (C.W. Mills *Causes of the World War Three* p. 37).

Pointing to the composition and inner mechanisms of elite in a highly industrialized Western society, Mills’ study explains the importance of institutional framework in determining the basis and distribution of power in a modern society. Power, as an attribute of elite position, is neither a personal, psychological achievement, nor the result of economic control. On the contrary, power in modern industrial societies is closely related to a more complex institutional setting that forms the basis of a “ruling class,” first described by Gaetano Mosca.

Among the classical elite theorists, one figure is prominent in being evaluated as a crucial link between classical elitism and theories of democratic pluralism and democratic elitism. In this respect, later theories of elitism, which discuss the compatibility or even necessity of elitism for democracy, are partly based on the ideas of another classical elite theorist, Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941).

Mosca distinguishes from Pareto with his replacement of social factors with psychological traits as the source of elite change. Furthermore, his analyses can be evaluated within the framework of pluralist politics and democratic elitism. His basic assumption about the nature of political power is that it can be exercised neither by a single person nor by the masses. Similar to Pareto, he identifies the division of the society in two broad groups, the ruler and the ruled, but he also labels both as a “class,” pointing to the dynamic structure and social basis of these dynamics (Mosca 1939). He proposes a positional definition of elite, relating different types of power (financial, religious, political etc.) to socially constructed authority positions. Furthermore, individuals holding the top power positions are identified as a “ruling class,” explicitly pointing to a cohesive, collective identity formed around some form of common interest. In explaining the power of the ruling class, Mosca points out an organizational approach. Accordingly, the power of the ruling class stems from the simple fact that they are a minority. Mosca states that “The power of any minority is irresistible as against each single individual in the majority, who stands alone before the totality of the organized minority” (*The Ruling Class*, Ch. II, §3, p.53). Since an organization

with a very large membership basis cannot be efficient enough, the organized minority has always an advantage in designing and carrying out an action plan of their own willing.

While the self-evident advantages of organization and cohesion form the basis of the ruling elite's power, monopolization of the talented individuals also account for the continuity of the ruling class. Since a ruling class represent a social group extending beyond the sum of specific individuals, recruitment is crucial for continuity. According to Mosca, continuous recruitment of lower-class individuals with superior qualities is essential for the survival of elite. Otherwise, they tend to become hereditary and decay. In Mosca's words, "A political organization, a nation, a civilization, be immortal, provided it learns how to transform itself continually without falling apart." (Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, p. 462). The emphasis on the need to recruit new talented members is complemented by Mosca's division of the ruling class into two broad sub-categories. The top decision-makers on the one hand, take the most important decisions whereas they technically cannot rule without the lower stratum of elite who carry out more time-consuming tasks. The upper-stratum of the ruling class is responsible for top policy decisions, however, the most critical task of the upper ruling elites, or 'grand electors' is to pick the candidates for lower elite positions and ensure the renewal of elite. Mosca stresses the impossibility of democratic rule by critically examining the election procedure. When discussing the inclusion of new members into the elite in democratic regimes, Mosca asserts that a representative in a democracy is not actually elected by the electorate, but by the members of the elite class. In Parry's (1969: 38) words, "Such party bosses existing, as they did, behind the scenes and having no constitutional or legal standing, were in no way accountable to the electorate. The representatives are the mere tools of the bosses." The privileged position of the organization's elite thus extends beyond the organization and becomes the primary mechanism whereby democracy is subverted.

Mosca argues that his analyses of political systems are based on universally determined uniform experiences and like Pareto or Michels, contends that his theory is valid for all political systems. Despite these claims of the uniformity of human nature and experience, however, Mosca can also be seen as an early contributor to the comparative study of political systems. In other words, the uniformities he points out

do not prevent a differentiation about various types of political regimes. His classification of political systems on the basis of two axes, the direction of the flow of authority (autocratic vs. liberal) and the source of recruitment into the ruling class (aristocratic vs. democratic), is used in defining distinct types of regimes.

The transformation observed in Mosca's later interpretations of elite theory can be seen contradictory with regard to early elitists claim to be objective and non-ideological. The emphasis on the "three C's" as the basis of the elite as a ruling class is weakened in relation to his observations of mass politics (Parry 1969: 41). The ruling class is defined merely as a group of top-people, and electoral politics is seen as a disruptive element for the autonomy of the elite. During the electoral process, competing sides within the elite tend to make political and economic concessions to the electorate, whose vast majority is defined by mediocre moral standards and ignorance of political and economic issues (Parry 1969: 41). In relation to this analysis of the impact of the masses' indirect role in electoral politics, Mosca abandons the elitist claim for neutrality and impartiality. In his solution offered for an ideal politics, Mosca attributes a moral leadership role for the elite. His definition of elite as a cohesive category aware of its interests is therefore turned into a normative definition where the elite are expected to be comprised of individuals who idealistically value common good of the society above everything. According to Mosca, the elite "must become aware that it is a ruling class, and so gain a clear conception of its rights and duties." (Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, Ch. XVII, §6, p. 493.) In terms of the theory of democratic elitism, the connection of the legitimacy and source of elite power to a common good that can be achieved only by an elite autonomous of public intervention is crucial. Although at some point he admits that the solution he proposes would be the abolition of universal suffrage, Mosca acknowledges the impossibility of this (Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, Ch. XVII, §6, p. 492). Instead, in line with classical liberal agenda, he argues that the decentralization of the political authority in order to make sure that more members of the lower stratum of the elite can join decision making in localities. Therefore, in its final form, Mosca's theory provides one of the earlier formulations of liberal-oriented middle-class political theories (Parry 1969: 42). Three key ideas are, however, borrowed by later elite theorist in formulations of democratic elitism: the idea that the elite are plural; the political systems are comparable on

objective basis and elitism can be defended on the basis of the common good of the society.

### **3.3 Democratic Elitism: For the People, by the Elite**

The emergence and evolution of theories of elitism are closely related to major historical developments. The importance of division of labor, meritocracy and the growing need for trained experts was not only a feature of economic life, but also politics, which was understood as the intermediary mechanism for the affluence and happiness of societies. However, the delegative democracy in modern societies could be seen as potentially undemocratic. According to one perspective, “the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century were obsolete before they had been consummated” (Woldin 1967: viii –foreword of Bachrach). The main thrust of this argument is that the indispensable role of the experts in building and maintaining advanced industrial societies was in an apparent contradiction with the ideal of democracy. In one way or another, elite theories rested on the supposition that politics, just like economy or bureaucracy, needed individuals possessing the knowledge and expertise of governance and administration. The problem, according to elitists, was that leaving the task of electing the leaders to the general electorate by universal suffrage was unrealistic. In the highly stratified and differentiated societies, majority of the population lacked the knowledge and expertise on issues relating to a myriad of policy areas. Therefore, according to elitists, including their will in the election of rulers was basically contradictory. It is beyond any discussion that early elite theorists were clearly proponents of more authoritarian political systems and rejected democratic rule on accusations of inefficiency; however, the basic question they attempted to address, namely whether democracy is possible in modern, industrial societies was highly relevant.

A second related historical development was related with the rise of mass political movements. The birth of modern age, symbolized at the French Revolutions, was made possible with the political mobilization of masses, which were formerly isolated from the leadership and policy making processes. In turn, the mobilization of the masses was through the promise of modern democracy. On the other hand,

processes of industrialization, the twin brother of political revolution, transformed the largely rural citizenry into a working class, whose political demands stemmed from their underprivileged position in the society. While the early elite theories were driven primarily by the suspicion towards 19<sup>th</sup> century mass revolutionary movements and socialism, the emergence of authoritarian societies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century paved the way for new discussions of the elite, masses, classes and democracy. While the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany, and of communism in the Soviet Union did not noticeably decrease the democrat's belief in masses' ability to practice and protect democracy. While elite theorists tended to advise limited popular participation in politics as opposed to increased initiative by the rulers, some liberal democrats believed that democracy's failures were because of irresponsible actions of the elite (Bachrach 1967: 28-29). Elite theorists' embracing of democracy was on the basis of opposite arguments of classical democrats. While the latter considered the fewer privileged as a threat for democracy, the former contended that the real threat was the majority, identified by susceptibility to authoritarian ideologies and low moral and intellectual standards. The new framework for elitists was determined by the need to preserve democracy while limiting the general population's impact on politics.

The theoretical and empirical support for democratic elitists' reversed argument for democracy, that is, the elite and not the masses protect democracy, came from three sources, namely theories of mass society, managerial revolution and studies of electoral behavior of lower class citizens. A basic argument made by democratic elitists was that either type of totalitarian regimes was made possible by the masses' inclination towards authoritarianism. In a later formulation of the relationship between the masses and authoritarian regimes, Lipset (1959) contends that, provided that some other factors are also present, lower-class individuals are supportive of non-democratic polities. The twofold implication of his analysis was an approval of elites' indispensability for democracy and a rather limited role for the people. "With the disenchantment with the common man, the classical view of the elite-mass relationship has become reversed: it is the common man, not the elite, who is chiefly suspected of endangering freedom, and it is the elite, not the common man, who is looked upon as the chief guardian of the system." (Bachrach 1967: 32). According to Bachrach, following the examples of authoritarian regimes, a second shift in theory

was observed: the emphasis moved away from extending the borders of democracy towards ensuring the stability of the established systems, a “political equilibrium” (Bachrach 1967: 32). In line with this idea, a relatively passive population is regarded as essential for stable democracies rather than as an indicator of democratic regime.

The questions around which the evaluation of democratic elitism will take place are various, but interrelated: what is the basis for distinguishing the elite from the masses? What is the basis and nature of power? What do equality and accountability mean in democracies? What is the role of the elite in making democracy sustainable? In other words, the following sections will discuss the major issues addressed by democratic elitists, with reference to the classical theories when necessary.

The idea that elitism and democracy are not only compatible but also require each other was first put forward by Schumpeter (1942). The argument was basically established upon a comprehensive retreat from the normative description of democracy. Democracy as an ideal, which assumed a politically highly conscious population, was simply impossible to achieve (Schumpeter 1962). As Cohen and Arato (1994: pp. 4) put it, in Schumpeter’s approach “Democracy is defined not as a kind of society or as a set of moral ends or as a principle of legitimacy but rather as a method for choosing political leaders and organizing governments.” In line with the analyses of Weber and Mosca, political decision making is not something that can be done with the participation of widespread public participation. Key political decisions in democracy are not made by all, but by the elites elected by the electorate. According to Vergin (2007), Schumpeter’s definition of democracy is limited to the right of the electorate choose its rulers. In other words, democracy is not defined as the rule by the people but strictly as a method of choosing leaders.

According to Schumpeter democracy is not an end in itself but an arrangement for reaching political, legislative and administrative decisions. If democracy is a means to reach these ends, then the basic rule is competition of many contestants for people’s votes in order to get elected for power positions. Schumpeter’s formulation of the relationship between and elitist politics and democratic regime is explicitly inspired by liberal market theory. Whereas in the market the consumer makes the decision regarding which product to buy, in politics the voters decide whom to vote

for. In turn, if the customer is satisfied with the product, then s/he buys it again and if the voter is content with the decisions of the elected leader, s/he votes again for the same candidate. It is important, however, that liberal market and competitive politics are not only highly reminiscent to each other in their operations, but also require one another.

Voters in democracies actually delegate their will to the elected representatives. Therefore, they do not have control over the decisions of the leaders they elected, but they can replace them in the next elections if they regard leaders' policy choices wrong. Elite autonomy is crucial in this regard. A political leader "is the person granted the authority to decide, and must be allowed the freedom necessary if he is to deliberate and act in a responsible manner" (Parry 1969: 145). Therefore, in democracies the relationship between the rulers and the ruled should be decreased to voting. The electorate should "respect the division of labour between themselves and the politicians they elect" (Schumpeter 2003: 295).

According to Schumpeter, the actual system of countervailing their power lies in inter-elite competition and independent agencies in democratic systems. In modern political systems, politics has become a vocation (~Weber) and there is a competition among the practitioners of this vocation. Political competition and economic competition are not only similar, but closely related to each other. (Schumpeter in Vergin). The presence of different groups of autonomous elite competing for power is the actual check over elected leaders' choices. The fact that they can be replaced by other elites is the basic mechanism of check. In other words, elite autonomy is key to make sure that elite do not abuse power. Different than other authors stressing elite autonomy, however, Schumpeter considers non-state elites, too. Non-state elites are especially important in limiting the power of elected elites. Those who hold positions of power outside the state, as well as heads of state institutions other than the executive are crucial in ensuring the continuity of a pluralistic, competitive political system.

One of the features of Schumpeter's study worth mentioning is that it considers together the individual and the social factors in explaining the circulation of elites. Upward mobility is not only determined by individual endowments, but also by the degree of openness of the upper classes and new fields of activity crucial for society. Like Mosca, Schumpeter does not explain the circulation of elites by internal decay

but on the contrary, they take into account the social factors. New social groups may be formed and existing groups may lose importance in a society as a result of economic and cultural changes. In Schumpeter's view, a social group's position in a society is determined by the level of importance of this group's function for society and how well this group performs its function. In other words, if a group is or becomes less important, or performs worse in time, then they are replaced by other groups.

As in classical elite theories, the basic underlying purpose of Aron's studies is to demonstrate the autonomous position of politics from society. Therefore, his formulation of the relationship between ownership and political systems is exactly the opposite of the Marxist approach. According to Aron, the "elite structure is more than a mere reflection of the structure of society, and indeed, has a major impact on it." (Etzioni-Halevy, 1993:61). In other words, the political regime in a society is primarily determined by the way the elite is organized and operates.

Aron, like other elitists, assumes that inequality is inescapable, but this does not mean that social inequalities must translate into authoritarianism. Thus he argues that through a relatively open opportunity structure for power positions, Western democracies are able to ensure an elite circulation crucial for a sustainable political system. In Aron's words, "Constitutional-pluralistic regimes, combined with industrial civilization, do not give *all* the citizens the *same* opportunities to reach higher positions; the ideal of the equality of opportunity is never realized, but the politically ruling minority is no longer closed and there are several ways in which it can be reached." (Aron 1965: 84; italics are in original). Central to Aron's argument is the notion of a plurality of elites, for liberty to be ensured. However, the mere presence of different elite groups does not guarantee freedom in a society. In his analyses of the democratic countries of the Western Europe, he demonstrates that, as a consequence of suspicion towards elite, the power of the leaders is kept under control through various historically developed a system of checks and balances. For Aron, therefore, the elite are the guarantors of freedom as long as no elite group is able to monopolize power. The major difference between democratic and undemocratic systems is that in the latter, as in the Soviet Union, power is highly centralized in the hands of an extremely homogenous elite group not only controlling political decision making but also recruitment.



The system of elite recruitment –a defining feature of the elite structure in a society– is important in explaining the requirements for a sustainable democracy, as plurality of elites and a historically evolved system of checks and balances are necessary, but insufficient. As I mentioned above, a degree of openness for the entry into power positions is important in distinguishing democratic systems from non-democratic systems. Aron demonstrates that plurality elites may be observed in different societies such as the Soviet Union and the United States of America. In both systems, there are different elite groups with differing interests such as the bureaucratic, industrial, political executive and military elite. Aron opposes a comparison of Soviet and American societies on the basis of plurality of elites, and argues that the differences in the principles of recruitment and level of cohesion are more important than the mere presence of multiple elite groups. Whereas in the USSR, the elite is highly unified under the ideological monopoly of the Communist Party, in pluralistic societies, the elite is not unified and government is a platform for compromises. In democracies, “(T)hose in power are well aware of their precarious position. They are considerate of the opposition because they themselves have been, and will one day again be, in opposition.” (“Social Structure and the Ruling Class, *British Journal of Sociology*, 1:1, p. 10). In other words, elite in democratic systems are not unified except in compliance with the principle of democracy as “the only game in town.”

In sustainable democratic political systems, an intermediate level of inter-elite consensus is necessary. Accordingly, “while a totally unified elite means the end of freedom, a totally disunited elite means the end of the state. Freedom prevails in the intermediate region...” (Etzioni-Halevy, 1993: 61). Compared to communist societies, Aron contends, political systems of Western democracies are successful because they represent an inter-elite consensus over general issues. As in Western democracies, constant, free and legitimate rivalry of multiple groups over a specific field of power is the essence of liberal democracy. Through competition defined within these parameters, “The composition of the governing elite may be progressively altered, the relative importance of the various groups in the elite may be changed, but a society can only survive and prosper if there is true collaboration between those groups. In one way or another there must be unity of opinion and action

on essential points in the elite.” (Aron on advanced Western societies) (Social Structure and the Ruling Class, *British Journal of Sociology*, 1:2, p. 129) This unity, by and large, is a result of narrow basis for elite recruitment (upper classes) and continuous emphasis on the superiority and indispensability of the elite.

The agreement over the general issues and principles guarantees the distinction between the state and society, unlike in totalitarian societies, where political power disregards this distinction. In short, the practical result of inter-elite agreement is a clearer state-society distinction, and this distinction prevents the elites in power become never strong enough to destroy other elites. On the basis of these analyses, Aron (1950) defines three features of existing liberal democracies. First of all, government authority must be able to settle inter-elite disagreements and enforce its decisions for the common good of all. Secondly, economic administration must follow policies that would facilitate social mobility through incentives. Thirdly, the political system must impose limitations on groups and individuals who demand a large-scale change of regime (Bottomore 1964: 113).

One final important contribution of Aron in terms of the subject of this study relates to the future of communist and democratic systems. Based on the study of political formations in Soviet communism and Western democracies as industrial societies, Aron (1967) and Galbraith (1970) put forward the “convergence” theory. Accordingly, Soviet and advanced Western societies were highly similar on the basis of their technological and economic development. As stated above, the real difference is not between the lifestyles of these societies, but between political systems. However, the forecast made by Aron contradicts with the elitist agenda for the autonomy of politics from other systems in society. Stated explicitly, convergence theory argues that communist and Western democratic societies will eventually become more similar since both are subject to the same laws of modern industrial development. According to one point of view, the collapse of the Soviet Union is an affirmation of convergence theories, resulting in more resemblance between the political systems (Vergin 2007:128-129).

Not an elitist in the narrower meaning of the word, Dahl is an important figure explaining the nature of political power in Western democracies. Elite structure, as in Aron, is an analytical tool in comparing political systems. Dahl differentiates

modernized and less developed societies in terms of their elite structures. In less developed societies, the elite –composed of traditional interest and power groups like big land owners, army, church– is highly unified. Modern societies, on the other hand, are characterized by a diversified elite structure represented by numerous smaller interest groups. A comparison of classical elite theorists' and Dahl's description of society in terms of power relations reveals that the former depict a single pyramid, whereas Dahl's description is similar to an assembly of multiple smaller pyramids. Dahl also assumes that these smaller pyramids, i.e. interest groups do not overlap and therefore an interest group is considered as having no control over other areas of interest. On the basis of this perspective, Aron (1961) rejects the views put forward by C. Wright Mills, who contends that the USA is governed by a highly cohesive and narrowly based elite. On the contrary, Dahl's own explanation was that there are in fact a larger number of different elite groups, whose relationship is defined by competition and compromise. Dahl's (1961) pluralist interpretation of liberal democracy is based on the observation that for democracy to survive, no one power group should be able to control the community. Decisions affecting the society are taken by the elected leaders, but achieving a power position is dependent on cooperation between different interest groups. A multiplicity of elites can compete to secure election to the office only through loose coalitions with smaller local interest groups.

Dahl is also important in defining a broader basis for political power. In explaining the way in which coalitions with other interest groups and political interests are pursued he refers to different types of "political resources" (Dahl 1971: 82-83). Accordingly, a political resource is something which enables one person to influence the other's political behavior, like money, employment, information or force, and they are the means whereby other individuals and groups are convinced to support another individual or candidate. In other words, the political resources, i.e. the capacity to influence others' political decisions, are not distributed equally in a society, but the fact that some groups and individuals possess more political resources does not mean that they are a unified, cohesive political class. Therefore, Pluralist definition of democracy recognizes inequality and diversity as natural and inevitable.

Like other democratic elitists, Dahl does not oppose the idea of democracy itself but claims it to be impossible to practice in complex political systems. However, he also recognizes that social obstacles in front of higher levels of political participation can be reduced. According to Dahl the widespread difficulties in front of realizing the equality principle lies in issues of voting rights, income, wealth, status education and so on. Dahl asserts that these problems can be addressed in democracies and ensure a more equal practice of power. However, he remains an elitist in defining the real difficulty in front of achieving the equality principle as a technical one. In modern, complex societies, "It goes without saying that except in exceedingly small groups, specific decisions must be made by a relatively few people acting in the name of the polity." (Dahl 1964: 12). In other words, by distinguishing political decision making from political participation, Dahl resorts to the classical elitist argument. As in other elitists, we do not find in his studies why democracy is not primarily a principle we should strive for even one recognizes its impossibility.

A relatively contemporary defense of elitist democracy is put forward by Sartori. He suggests that democracy can survive only in the hands of an elite, whose superiority is recognized, while he does not elaborate the details of superiority of elite. In his view, the real danger to democracy does not come from the elite but "mediocrity" is the actual threat. Like other democratic elitists, he reduces democracy to the elections, the procedural minimum of democracy. Elections, according to Sartori, are not meant to enhance the democracy but to choose the leaders of the best quality. Modern complex societies can avoid the excesses of democracy, namely "perfectionism" and "demagoguery," only by the leadership of expert and accountable elites. Sartori's understanding of pluralism is central to his definition of democracy. Accordingly, three points should be taken into consideration in understanding pluralist democracies. First of all, the existence of multiple interest groups does not mean that there is pluralism in a society. Secondly, structural complexity should be differentiated from pluralism. The observation that all large-scale societies demonstrate a high level of complexity does not lead to the conclusion that there is pluralism. Finally, Sartori contends that "Political pluralism refers to "diversification of power [an open polyarchy, in Robert Dahl's terminology] arising from a plural diversity of groups that are both independent and nonexclusive." (Sartori 1997: 62). Dissent, not conflict or

consensus, according to Sartori (1997) is the basis of liberal democracy since the concept of dissent inherently assumes diversity and plurality. This definition of pluralism is crucial for sustaining and legitimizing democratic systems, since it respects a limited majority principle which respects the rights of those who are not in power (Sartori 1997: 63).

A final aspect of Sartori's theory is related to his differentiation between established democracies and the process of democratization. According to Sartori, an extension of the limits of democracy, i.e. a high level of popular participation usually not approved by elite theorists, is possible during the struggles against autocratic regimes. However, with the establishment of a political system, "democracy's excesses" should be limited because democracy's worst enemy is itself.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Based on classical works in elite theory, a number of conclusion can be made. First, politics in modern societies continues to be an elite profession, where the term "elite" is no longer an exclusively ascribed status. Although modern political regimes rely on one form of popular will or another, and different versions of democracy are exercised, the complexity of managing and administering modern societies require the existence of political elite. To make and implement decisions, political elite needs a certain level of independence from the electorate, or the masses, i.e. the non-elite. In other words, there is an inherent anti-democratic aspect to democratic governance, which leads us to the second issue. When not checked and balanced, the political elite can possibly become an anti-democratic force. The lack or weakness of a civil society, popular associations, media, international institutions, and most importantly, other contenders for power, can result in authoritarian rule. The freedom needed by the political elite to exercise their expertise is at the same time a potential threat to democratic governance, because of the simple fact that politics in the final analysis means accumulating, directing and exercising power. The third conclusion can be made regarding the conditions of democratic governance even though societies need political elite to address the complexity of tasks in managing and administering a country. As I already mentioned in the second conclusion, a number of conditions are

needed to have a sustainable political system which relies on political elite acting on behalf of the non-elite or the popular will. A vibrant civil society and media are important, however, the most crucial component is the presence of alternative candidates for positions of authority. Ideally, opposing political parties and politicians ensure the expression of all views and opinions in a society, thereby rendering the process of decision making and implementation for the benefit of all, rather than one or another segment of society. Plurality of elites, who adhere to the rule of coming to and leaving office only by regular popular elections, is the minimum standard of liberal democracies. As a fourth inference, we can say that regular changes in government via free and fair elections, as well as some level of circulation in political factions is an indispensable condition for sustainable democracies. Entry to political elite positions should not be based on ascribed status or wealth, and in turn, being in positions of power and authority should not be instrumental in enrichment or abuse of power.

Based on the above listed criteria, Azerbaijani political system does not qualify as a democratic one. The severity and enormity of the challenges in the immediate post-Soviet period facilitated the establishment of a ruling coalition operating the political mechanisms highly independent from the masses. A weak civil society and independent media, as well as the decreasing factors of international leverage and linkages (Levitsky & Way 2020) where formal opposition is reduced to an ineffective position (Bedford & Vinatier 2018) have resulted in the consolidation of a Sultanistic regime. The structure and rules of operation of the governing elite contradict with the formal political structures without giving rise to any necessity for systemic change, thereby confirming the arguments for “hybrid regime.” Many characteristics and practices of the post-Soviet political systems and their political elite are often associated with the patterns of organization and behavior inherited from the Soviet era. The continuity of the Soviet era patterns within a new institutional and international order is therefore a central issue in understanding the political systems in the former Soviet countries. I will be elaborating on how these patterns are formed and their relevance for understanding the post-independence era in the following sections.

## CHAPTER 4

### POLITICAL ELITE IN THE SOVIET UNION

Studying the political systems, transformations and continuities in the political systems of former Soviet republics inevitably require an understanding of the political system in the Soviet Union. The Soviet political system, with its broad implications and nature of the political regime is usually assumed to play a role in the post-1991 period. From the institutional structures to the popular and elite understandings of politics and democracy, the post-Soviet transformations are deeply influenced by the former era. In addition, regime changes in the Soviet republics took place before the emergence or development of liberal democratic institutions, practices and perceptions. Especially in terms of the sharing of power among a small group of influential people and reduction of democratic practices to a façade, continuities between the Soviet and post-Soviet eras are important. How the political elite were formed, circulated and operated in the Soviet Union is therefore crucial in tracing the continuities and changes in the realm of political elite. Its transformation, i.e. the de facto, if not de jure, destruction of formal opposition, the methods and instruments used in keeping the ruling coalition unified can be better understood if some aspects of political elite in the USSR is discussed.

An overview of the studies on the Soviet Union reveals that majority of these are in fact studies of its political elite. This is unsurprising considering that the USSR represents a highly politicized, centralized and hierarchical structure of political power, which also monopolized the sphere of economic activities by a command economy. This monopoly was legitimized by the ideological premises of the Soviet state. The ideological foundations of the USSR were based on the abolition of inequalities based on class differences, that is, the social differences created by the relations of individuals to means of production. The founders of the USSR contended

that this purpose can be fulfilled by establishing a government that would exercise political power on behalf of the working class. The highest levels of political decision-making, which also determined the policies of economic management, were comprised of the members of the Communist Party, whose politically privileged position was secured by the Soviet Constitution.

As I mentioned above, vast majority of the studies of Soviet society focus on its political elite, due to the fact that the political elite enjoys all political and economic decision making. Combined with the difficulties of conducting researches on Soviet politics and society, this preoccupation with the political elite is understandable. Therefore, attempts to predict the future course of events in Soviet politics were shaped mainly on the inner dynamics of the Soviet political elite. Determining the official positions that correspond to different and interrelated rights of policy making in the Party and state which comprise the political elite is one dimension of these studies. Another dimension entails the mechanisms of elite circulation and reproduction. These studies were sometimes referred to as “Sovietology” and “Kremlinology”, often with a negative connotation after the demise of communist regimes first in the Central and Eastern Europe and then in the Soviet Union. Some studies on the other hand, focused on the composition of formal bodies, like the CC, the Plenum, or the CP itself. The age, education, experience and social background of the individuals in these bodies are assumed to provide inferential information on the future trajectory of political decisions. It is of course neither possible, nor necessary to present a full discussion of all aspects of political elite in the USSR in this section. For our purposes, it is important to discuss the key features of political elite recruitment (*nomenklatura*), the relation between the system of political elite recruitment and the “nationalities question”, and the relation between the transformative final years of the Soviet Union on political elite and Soviet collapse, which might help us understand the post-Soviet dynamics of political elite. The first topic entails the question of the nature of political power in the USSR, i.e. where actual power rested and how decisions concerning the elite recruitment system were made. By trying to answer these questions, we might be able to obtain some clues how and why the demise of the Soviet Union is related to the question of cadre policy. In addition, we also might comment on the way the communist regimes collapsed as a



result of elite-led process. The second topic, the relation between the Soviet nationalities policy and its impact on shaping the republican political elite is also important considering the fact that the USSR disintegrated relatively peacefully and became fifteen different, sovereign nation-states. The Soviet nationalities policy which was implemented on the uniform institutional structure of the Soviet Union was the primary driving dynamic of this process. The third topic, that is, the period of collapse of the Soviet Union starting circa 1986 and ending in 1991 is also crucial in terms of understanding the post-Soviet transformation of the political elite. The relationship between the elite and the masses in the Union republics were radically changed during this era, as the central authority of Moscow was reduced. In other words, the local and central government in the Soviet Union was challenged by a wide range of counter-elite and mass movements. Regardless of the variety of agendas of the elite and masses in question, this era of turmoil has ended with the disintegration of communism and the Union irreversibly.

The limitation of focus on the political elite in the USSR into three themes, I will try to make a basis for the following section on the political elite in the post-Soviet era. The challenges of democratization and the eventual consolidation of authoritarian regimes in most of the former Soviet countries can be related to some features of the Soviet past. But here, I adhere to the view that “the legacy of the past” does not determine the present and future in a straightforward way. Outcomes in the political sphere are the result of struggles between groups and individuals making use of different resources, or capital, like concepts and ideas used in justifying the present course of action. These struggles always contain a high level of uncertainty and probability of unintended consequences, which might hint to the possibility that the past is not a constant and fixed point but still a contested source of reference.

#### **4.1 Historical Overview**

All political regimes are identified by its’ rules on who gets what and how. In other words, types of political regimes are concepts used in explaining how political and economic power is distributed in a society. Also, cases where a very small minority and even one-person monopolized the political decision making, including

who will be given authority to implement these decisions, are not rare in the political history of the modern world. For comparative purposes, one can even admit the structural similarities between communism and fascism, as was made by the theory of totalitarianism. What I contend, however, is that communism possessed significant qualitative differences in comparison to other totalitarian regimes, and these differences influenced elite formation and structures more deeply.

In the mid-1960s, Soviet Marxist historians identified four stages of Soviet history with distinct political, social and economic characteristics. Accordingly, the period between 1917 and 1925 represented the social revolution. From 1926 to 1936 corresponded to socialist industrialization. Between 1936 and 1956, first phase of socialist construction was completed. Finally, 1956 represented the second phase of socialist construction and the building of communism.<sup>8</sup>

By the time the communist power was established and secured in the early 1920s, Soviet societies were socially and economically same as the final years of the Russian Empire. In fact, the destruction of the First World War and the civil war following the Bolshevik Revolution has had rather adverse influences on society and economy. Except for some urban centers like St. Petersburg or Baku, the Russian Empire was characterized by agricultural society and economy. A very low percentage of the society had higher education, and most of them were lost during the World War and Civil War. Some of the remaining technical cadres as well as the cultural and political elite fled the Soviet Union. Therefore, for Soviet leaders, achieving the task of economic stability and consolidating of the new regime at the same time was the primary task.

#### **4.2 *Nomenklatura*: The System of Elite Recruitment in the Soviet Union**

The Soviet states, as well as the communist states of Central and Eastern Europe were established with the ideological principle of administering and managing all aspects of society in order to achieve an ideal society characterized by the abolition of inequalities based on relations to property and means of production. The importance

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<sup>8</sup> *Marksistsko-leninskaya filosofiya i sotsiologiya v SSSR i Evropeiskikh sotsialisticheskikh stran*, 1965, pp. 8-9, cited in Lane 1971: 19.

of communist regimes was that in comparison to other previously known political organizations of state, political and economic power was concentrated in the hands of a relatively very small number of people, whose legitimacy to do so was derived from an ideology of achieving social and economic development. This small group of people in charge of all political and economic decisions in communist societies is usually known as the *nomenklatura*. *Nomenklatura* literally means the list of all positions in a system, including the hierarchy between these positions and the rights and duties assigned to each position (Harasymiw 1969: 494). The roots of the *nomenklatura* system in the USSR dates back to Ninth Party Congress in 1920, where a decision concerning a reporting system between the Party collectivities are formalized. Accordingly, all party bodies had to report to a higher level about the performance of their members and recommend these members for higher positions in future. This practice included keeping detailed files, which included detailed information about the education and experience of these individuals.

The term *nomenklatura* (Harasymiw 1969; Voslensky 1984; Willerton 1992; Lane 1997: 856-61) is rarely used in public or official usage in the Soviet Union and *nomenklatura* lists are never made public and studies of this group have to construct these lists inferentially from other sources of information and émigrés. In addition, information on how *nomenklatura* lists are made and used is actually rather scarce. The *nomenklatura* system is administered not by the Party as a whole, but by a Party organ formed within a state organization, known as departments of “Party Organizational Work” or “Party Construction and Cadres Work.” It should be noted that *nomenklatura* does not refer to a definite group of individuals, rather lists of people prepared by the corresponding Party organs. The lists include people who are eligible to all important posts in administrative and managerial structures and the lists are always subject to modification. The *nomenklatura* system guarantees the supervision of the Party over all positions of power and authority in the society. The official justification for this practice is to ensure meritocracy in cadre policy while preserving ideological adherence of the people to the political regime. No person can be appointed, dismissed or transferred to another position without the approval of the Party members preparing the *nomenklatura* lists. *Nomenklatura* lists and appointments are not exclusively made of Party members, although the vast majority of such lists

contain them. Non-Party members can be brought to positions of authority as long as the Party approves their appointments. One important feature of this system is that it provides a basis for social stratification in a society where there is officially no class stratification based on the ownership of the means of production. According to Harasymiw, the *nomenklatura* system can be used in understanding some key features of Soviet policy, like “The fact that the CPSU functions more as a simple ‘transmission belt’ than as a political Party in the accepted sense; the ability of one man with authority over a *nomenklatura* to build a power base in the Party and elsewhere and consequently the necessity for purges; and the tendency for Soviet leadership as a whole to become inbred and conservative.” (1969: 494). On the one hand, this was a necessity to provide a more harmonious work environment where centrally set economic and social targets had to be achieved in localities. On the other hand, these networks could be subject to purges in case of systematic corruption or a failure to meet the requirements of the command economy. However, although *nomenklatura* members can be demoted via purges, some studies suggest that there is a high level of continuity in *nomenklatura* membership. Especially in the latter two decades, individuals in certain positions were able to retain their posts for relatively higher periods of time, and even in the case of removal from office, were appointed to other official posts.

Positions included in Party *nomenklatura* lists are predicted to be around three million (Harasymiw 1969: 511). These include the CPSU CC members, republican CC members, oblast committees, city and urban *raion* committees, rural *raion* committees. Certainly, this high figure raises the question about the exercise of actual or autonomous political power. As I mentioned above, not all members of the *nomenklatura* can be considered as members of the political elite, due to the fact that some individuals and collectivities possess the monopoly to create and modify these lists, as well as the exclusive right to appoint, relocate or dismiss *nomenklatura* members (Farmer 1992: 77). Whether a manager of a factory or the members of a *raion* Party committee exercises independent decision making is a valid question.

The critiques of the *nomenklatura* system in the literature on Soviet politics started with the assessment of this system as a source of stratification and inequality in a society which claimed to be egalitarian. According to the earliest critique, Trotsky,

the Soviet Union was a “degenerated workers’ state” in which the political power was hijacked by the bureaucratic clique. The monopoly of power and decision making provided this clique with certain privileges, but this group could not be identified as a class simply because there was no mechanism for transmitting these privileges to their children. Two decades later, Djilas asserted that the control over the distribution of goods and other resources gave rise to a “new class.” It should be noted that the Soviet political system developed certain unwritten measures to prevent inbreeding for higher levels of political authority (Mawdsley & White 2000: 260). For example, the children of *nomenklatura* members are not allowed to serve in positions similar to their parents’. In fact, throughout the Soviet history, very few CC members were born in *nomenklatura* families (Kryshtanovskaiia & White 1996). Furthermore, circulation of high-level cadres including the CC members between different locations in the country and spheres of activity was a common practice. One outcome of this practice, again, was to prevent the formation of local patronal networks. Together with the powerful tendency to recruit the members of the highest collective bodies from different segments of the society, the *nomenklatura* is prevented from becoming a caste-like group. Also, the conventions about family members and circulation between locations and spheres of activity were significantly compromised during the Brezhnev era. Other aspects of the elite recruitment on the other hand, had important negative consequences for the broader political system.

As I mentioned before, the rationale behind the *nomenklatura* system was to reproduce the leading role of the Party over the society by controlling the recruitment and circulation of individuals in positions of power and authority. It can be said that by controlling the appointment to strategic positions, the Party also effectively prevented the emergence of “strategic elites,” functionally differentiated and autonomous in their affairs corresponding to their jurisdiction (Farmer 1992). The prevention of the formation of “strategic elites” therefore can be seen as one of the sources of ineffective administration of the Soviet political and economic activities. Furthermore, the abundance of individuals with mediocre skills and talent at the top-levels of all political and economic units can be explained by the lack of a natural mechanism of elite circulation defined by Pareto. The highly controlled and politicized nature of political elite recruitment practices is believed to drive the increase of such

members of political elite. A third disadvantage created by the relationship between cadre system and the CP. As cited before, it is stated that the Party does not function in the conventionally understood sense of the word, but acts as a “mere transmission belt” in government and administration. This feature gave rise to two characteristic phenomena of the Soviet political elite. First, individuals with control over a *nomenklatura* were given the opportunity to build a power base. Due to the formation of patronal networks, which were conducive to the creation of autonomous power bases and corruption the frequent purges appeared as a second characteristic, especially during the Brezhnev era. The most significant resistance to reforms in the mid-1980s thus came from patronal networks which provided the *nomenklatura* with security and material advantages.

### **4.3 Soviet Nationalities Policy and the Soviet Elite**

An evaluation of political elite in the Soviet Union is incomplete without discussing the institutional structure and the “nationalities policy” of the Soviet state. I contend that the disintegration of the Soviet Union into national republics, in a very short span of time and in a relatively very peaceful way is closely related to the two variables I mentioned. The Soviet Union was established as a federation of national republics, in which titular nations were positively discriminated in ethnically heterogeneous territories. With all the institutional and other formal structures, the Soviet Republics therefore were formally similar to other modern nation-states. The decentralization of control, in the broader sense of the word including political and cultural autonomy, in the final decades and the impact of Gorbachev’s reforms reinstating sovereignty in the republics created decisive dynamics during the Soviet collapse. When the central authority of the CPSU withered, these states were able to assert themselves as sovereign entities. Except for few examples of ethno-territorial conflicts<sup>9</sup>, these states’ right to continue their right as sovereignties was questioned nor internationally nor locally. According to some authors, the Soviet disintegration

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<sup>9</sup> The few examples include the territorial conflicts of Abkhazia, Southern Ossetia, and Mountainous Karabagh and five adjacent regions. The first two autonomous regions were under Georgian jurisdiction by the time of Soviet disintegration whereas the latter was under Azerbaijani jurisdiction.

as a result of nationalist mobilization (Beissinger 2002) was the “revenge of the past” (Suny 1993) but in order to understand how this so-called “revenge” was possible and the characteristics of this process needs clarification. Studying the processes whereby Soviet republics became independent, sovereign national-states in a comparatively peaceful process is therefore important to discuss critically the questions of continuity and rupture in politics in successor states. In other words, how the institutional structure and the accompanying nationalities’ policy has shaped the political leadership in Soviet countries, especially in the peripheries, the distinct aspects of the so-called national elite, and the changing relationship between the elite and masses throughout the Soviet era will be the focus of this section.

Regarding the relationship between the central authority in Moscow and the ethnic groups in the republics, the Soviet Union can be dubbed as an “affirmative action empire.” (Martin 2001). The roots of this idea can be found in the historical analysis of the late Russian Imperial era and the first years of the Soviet Union. The Russian Empire was a state of multi-ethnic groups, where lack of political and economic justice increasingly intensified demands for national and economic rights alike. In Azerbaijan, for example, the discriminated position of Azerbaijani elite and masses in comparison to Russian and Armenian subjects of the Empire was the main drive of the processes that resulted in the establishment of the ADR. In fact, many future Soviet republics have developed nationalist movements to assert more autonomy within the republic, and in the later years of the Empire, to gain independence. Despite limited efforts of the Imperial rule for increased political participation, like creation of the *duma* in 1906, inequality and discrimination remained unsolved in the Empire. The communist movement, on the other hand, capitalized on the unfulfilled demands of freedom and independence in the territories of the Empire. Social democratic and communist movements operated in many regions of the country, including the urban and industrial centers of the Caucasus... The Soviet Union was officially envisaged as an internationalist entity, in which the formerly oppressed people were argued to receive fair treatment for social, cultural and economic development. Despite the fact that Sovietization was achieved mainly through coercive methods, Soviet leaders sought to co-opt locals. It is important to note that the Sovietization of former Russian Imperial territories was possible not only

through coercive methods. On the contrary, the Bolsheviks were able to find allies from the local social democratic and socialist parties, who in the first years of the Soviet rule helped to promote the image of a national sovereign republic. After securing the communist power and the formation of the Soviet nationalities policy as we know, the image of national republic was preserved under strict political control of the CPSU. This was possible by the policy of *korenizatsiia*.

According to Martin, *korenizatsiia*, meaning “indigenization”, was “a prophylactic policy designed to defuse and prevent the development of nationalism among the formerly oppressed non-Russian colonial peoples through the provision of national territories, languages, elites, and cultures.” (2001: 126). In line with its emancipatory promise and the design of the nationalities policy, the CPSU leadership actively promoted the practice of positive discrimination of local ethnic groups. Accordingly, the heads of the national Communist Parties, as well as important positions in government and bureaucracy were chosen from locals. The rationale behind the policy of indigenization was *sblizheniie*, the process of drawing together and *sliianiie*, the process of fusing together. Parallel to the modernization paradigm, it was assumed that the inequalities among and between the people of different ethno-national entities were to diminish as modernization creates similar cultural and social structures in respective societies. In other words, *sblizheniie* was the expected result of socialist policies, whereby ethnic groups with significantly different levels of social and economic development would resemble each other. Similarly, *sliiania* was a measure of communism, which would be achieved when these different ethnic groups would resemble a single society, that is, Soviet society. This ideological purpose, on the other hand, was implemented on the basis of an institutional framework.

The first step of soviet nationalities policy was to create identical structures of state and other components of social and political organization throughout the Soviet Union. From the lowest primary party organizations to the state administration, from writer’s associations to the workers’ union, all Soviet republics possessed same political and social formations that operated according to the same ideological principles. While the decisions regarding the selection of cadres for these institutions and associations were made, the issue of ethnic representation was also considered. Because the redistributive character of the Soviet political economy, providing just



and equal opportunities in representation in the state institutions was crucial. Thus, for example, depending on the specific ethnic composition of the country in question, the members of the titular nationality and others received numerically and hierarchically different seats in the government and party.

Observers noted that the CP of the former SU was well aware of the patronalism which is backed up or supported by regionalism. Yet they were reluctant in dealing with the issue seriously since they considered it as a source of consolidation of the local CP elite (Willerton 1992).

#### **4.4 Political Elite at the End of the Soviet Union**

As of 1980s the Soviet Union was facing several problems to which the previous governments were unable to respond. Soviet economy was suffering from structural problems, and these problems were exacerbated by the growth of the “second economy” which initiated serious shortages on consumer products and growth of a capitalist economy within socialist economy. In addition to economic stagnation, Party leadership was unable to develop political formulas to address the social and economic problems. Furthermore, the reforms initiated by Gorbachev and his advisors to respond to these problems opened up new and unexpected avenues for the transformation of the political elite. The economy has been declining for several years, together with the relations between the center and periphery of the Union. After the short leaderships of Andropov and Chernenko, who served from 1982 to 1984 and 1984 to 1985, respectively, Gorbachev was elected as the new general secretary of the CPSU. Contrary to his predecessors, Gorbachev was a younger leader, who decided to implement policies to reverse the process. Broadly speaking, his policies envisaged a mixture of economic and political reforms, which aimed at reducing the role of central planning and the monopoly of power of the Communist Party. However, instead of stimulating economic performance and abolition of patronage networks created in the peripheries, his reforms unleashed powerful dynamics that led to the marketization of the economy and nationalist movements. These dynamics were not similarly strong throughout the republics. While these dynamics were stronger and more assertive in the three Baltic and the three Southern Caucasus republics, five

Central Asian republics were less influenced by them, although they were equally affected by the problems of economic and political administration.

The social and political environment in the final years of communism were similar throughout the USSR. With the economic and political reforms, strong mass movements emerged, which were led by a new type of political elite. In a sense, the Soviet political elite ceased to be consensually unified and became divided. Politics became contentious, where mass demands for more freedom, national rights and democracy was unified with the counter elite, who challenged the established rules and norms between Moscow and republics. The emergence of nationalism as a new driving force in the Soviet Union was not without a basis. As I outlined before, the Soviet nationalities policy was rather successful in creating nation-states, i.e. states with all the formal institutions of a nation-state.

The broad-based movements opposing with the regime were created by a number of factors. It should be admitted that a broad range of criticism of the state policies existed throughout the Soviet rule. These criticisms came from different social segments and were based on different ideological dispositions. Marxist-Leninist critiques for reforms within the system: putting the revolution on the right track. Religious and nationalist critiques were less visible due to the coercive methods applied to them. Expectations for a solution to problems within the system have met with significant resistance. First, during the thaw, when the short-lived post-Stalin rehabilitations were kept limited on the basis of nationalism and secondly when the Soviet armies intervened in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The hopes for change further declined with the stability of cadres, when the reform-oriented individuals (including *shestdesiatniki*) were prevented from advancing to positions of authority. On the one hand, there were the people whose career advancement was prevented by the stability of cadres. The institutional structure was eroded especially during Brezhnev period, when republican leaders were allowed to initiate a limited but important rehabilitation of their cultural past.

## 4.5 Conclusion

For the purposes of this dissertation, I focused on three interrelated aspects of the political elite formation in the Soviet Union. First, I made an overview of the system of political elite recruitment in the Soviet Union. The *nomenklatura* system was the principal method which instituted certain norms and practices of elite formation. Secondly, the policy of nativization of republican cadres was discussed. As a result of the institutional structure of the USSR as a federal union, *korenizatsiia* has facilitated the state building in republics. Thirdly, I provided an analysis of the final years of the Soviet Union, where the limits to central authority and the Communist Party effectively accelerated the emergence of a vibrant civil society and the counter elite to initiate the transformation. Based on these three central dynamics, I have also tried to explain the relation of three important issues and themes on the formation of political elite in the USSR. First, the Soviet nationalities policy, which was based on certain principles set by Stalin but nevertheless underwent modifications. This policy has determined the relationship between the center and the periphery, giving the political leaders in republics a distinct role between Kremlin and their societies. Secondly, I have discussed whether the relationship between the elite and society can be understood within the perspective of class and stratification. In the background of organization of political and economic life, I tried to understand the concept of control in explaining how power was exercised in the Soviet Union. The issue of inequality as well as political and economic control was considered crucial in approaching the Soviet collapse and the emergence of new regimes which established new rules for distributing political and economic power in society. Finally, I included the theme of generations in the analysis of political elite in the Soviet Union. As a site of rapid political, social, and economic development, Soviet countries were ruled by leaders whose political socialization took place in significantly different environments. The profile, experiences, and expectations of these generations are considered to shape the Soviet political life. Most importantly, the failure of reform in the post-Stalin era (namely, in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968) combined with decreased chances of ascendance into elite positions fueled the movements in the final years of the Soviet Union.

It should be noted that the focus on *nomenklatura* system and *korenizatsia* also pose limitations to the understanding of political elite formation in the USSR. First of all, there exist very few research on the actual mechanisms of either practices and therefore little is known about how they are practiced. Majority of studies conducted during the Soviet era are in fact information obtained from émigrés and inferential studies observing changes in organizational practices and accompanying changes in cadre composition. Of course, the selection of elite cadres in all modern political systems exhibits some degree of secrecy in accordance with the nature of the phenomenon itself. However, as I mentioned before, elite recruitment is a highly ideological and politicized process in the Soviet single-party regime. Moreover, in this regime, the Party is not a political institution in the generally known meaning of the word. The need to comply with centrally set political and economic goals was increasing uncertainty for all individuals occupying a leadership position, who were organized in a strict hierarchy of control. This fact gives rise the question of the source and nature of actual political power in the Soviet society. To put it differently, can we consider a CC member, a *raion* Party secretary, or a factory manager as a member of the political elite, if they are obliged to fulfill the expectations of their superiors and inferiors at the same time? How can they be attributed political control if their whole political career can be reversed as it happened during frequent purges?<sup>10</sup>

Several post-Soviet regimes witnessed the continued presence of former Soviet elites, who now transformed into nationalists, supporters of democracy and capitalist economic order in varying degrees. However, in their attempt to sustain and increase their control over political and economic power, they utilized the methods of the former era. The failures and shortcomings of democratic transformations in the former communist countries were often explained by the “legacy of the past” by scholars and even by the natives of such countries. Like many students of the post-Soviet region, during the fieldwork I frequently came across explanations of authoritarian practices as a problem of so-called mentality. According to this view, both elite and mass views on what constitutes the best type of governance are often shaped by the values and behavioral codes deeply instituted by the Soviet state. It is

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<sup>10</sup> As I noted before, Harasymiw contends that purges point to a built-in flaw of the *nomenklatura* system, which allows one individual with some degree of decision-making power built a patronal network as a power basis.

even suggested that successful democratizations need democrats in the first place, whose value and norm systems are somehow unaffected by the same legacy. Similarly, lack of demand for democratic governance by the masses is related to the question of “mentality.” Interestingly, during my fieldwork, the “mentality” criticism was directed by both by older and younger opponents of the political regime, while younger proponents of the government were more inclined to do the same also for the opposition. Whether this latter phenomenon can be evaluated as a “survivor’s bias” is irrelevant at this point, since this tendency implied the new ways through which the younger generations construct new cognitive structures whereby they relate the Soviet past and post-Soviet authoritarian present. For the new educated professionals who are potential leaders of near future not only the Soviet era, but also the Popular Front era represents a distant past.

## CHAPTER 5

### HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL ELITE IN AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan, located in the southern part of the Caucasus region, is one of the world's ethnically and culturally most complex regions. First Arabian travelers to arrive the region were so surprised by the ethnic and linguistic richness that they called the Caucasus as *Jabal al-Asun*, "Mountain of Languages." (de Waal 2010: 7). Besides being located in one of the world's culturally most complex regions, the territories of Azerbaijan, including the modern Azerbaijani Republic and the region known as the Iranian Azerbaijan, has always been at the center of the political and military competition between major regional powers throughout history. These competing forces, often representing religious, ethnic, political and ideological differences, have helped shaping the culture and identity of Azerbaijani Turks in a complex way.

Present day Azerbaijani identity is significantly defined by elements of Islamic, Turkic, Iranian, Russian and modern culture. This complexity is further increased by the political history of the country: the lack of territorial and administrative integrity up to Russian conquest, colonial rule under Russian Empire, a brief period of independent statehood with a liberal, democratic framework, seven decades of communist rule with its deep and broad implications for all aspects of politics and society, reintroduction of independent statehood and the loss of territorial integrity, coupled with difficulties in re-establishing nation, state, and political system in a global world. The implications of this complex and probably incomplete list of historical experiences are difficult to cope with, considering the nation, state and regime building processes in post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

In the following section, I am going to provide an overview of the cornerstones of Azerbaijani political history, based on secondary sources. It should be noted that not all periods of Azerbaijani history are studied at satisfactory levels. Furthermore, histories are always constructions being reformulated in accordance with the changing power relations. Yet, it is still possible to ascertain the major social and political dynamics, which are closely interlinked in understanding the recurrent process of state and society relations in Azerbaijan. In this regard, I will attempt to outline and comment on major aspects of national identity, political institutions and ideas that provide a basis for divergent interpretations of past, present and future in Azerbaijan.

### **5.1 Azerbaijan under Russian Imperial Rule**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the authority of the Safavid Empire was weakening. After the Russo-Iranian war of 1722-1723, Russians briefly controlled Azerbaijan, but were later defeated by Shah Abbas. In 1722, the Safavid Empire has collapsed and the Afsharid dynasty started ruling in Azerbaijan. However, with the assassination of Afsharid ruler Nadir Shah in 1747, central authority in Azerbaijani regions has totally dissolved and local rulers started exerting their power in the form of several khanates. The rulers of these khanates, who were “apparently Turks” (Altstadt 1992: 8), were vassals and subjects of the Iranian shah but acted with a significant degree of autonomy with regard to their internal affairs (Schultz 1985: 457). The khanates’ main source of income was the international trade routed between Central Asia and the West, but internal rivalries of khanates often led to instability and violence in the region. After the defeat of Ottoman and Iranian armies by the Russian Empire, whole Caucasus became vulnerable to Russian conquest. At the eve of Russian conquest, Azerbaijan lacked political unity and several khanates were in a violent competition for economic and political power. As a result, Russian Empire was able to permanently annex northern Azerbaijani territories in a relatively short period of time in early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite the lack of conclusive evidences, historical periods until the arrival of Islamic armies and Turkic tribes are an important source for contested views on the origins of Azerbaijani society. It is important to note that modern historiography was scarce prior to the foundation of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. Therefore,

Soviet researchers' contribution to the body of historical, ethnographic and anthropological literature about Caucasus is immense, although Soviet historiography was heavily determined by ideological premises of the Soviet regime.

In the Stalin era, in an attempt to curtail the claims to Turkic and Islamic heritages, Soviet Azerbaijani historians were forced to relate their history in Northern and Southern Azerbaijan to the Medes. The Caucasian Albanians are regarded as the autochthonous people of the Caucasus, and historians in post-Stalin Soviet Azerbaijan have sought to relate the modern Azerbaijanis to the Caucasian Albanians and Atropatenes in the post-Stalin period (Astourian 1994, cited in Bolukbasi 2001: 45). Starting with 1970s, Azerbaijani historiography put greater emphasis on Turkic past, but related the creation of Azerbaijani nation and identity to Medes, Atropatenes, Caucasian Albanians alongside with Turks, thereby effectively preventing the writing of a history exclusively based on Turkic origins (Altstadt 1994: 113). In addition, in the post-war historiography of Azerbaijan, Shah Ismail and the Safavid State were defined as genuinely Azerbaijani, instead of Turks (Altstadt 1992: 159).

The relations between Southern Caucasus and Russia were limited up until 15<sup>th</sup> century due to the natural barriers created by the Caucasus Mountains. Russian State's<sup>11</sup> trade relationship with Azerbaijan has intensified after 15<sup>th</sup> century with the increasing role of Baku as an important trading city for the Volga and Caspian basins. As early as 1722-23, with the collapse of the Safavid Empire, Russian armies invaded Baku and Derbent, but their presence was not permanent. In the face of ongoing threat of Qajar invasion of Georgia, 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk put Georgia under Russian protectorate. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Russia invaded Baku and Derbent alongside with Ganja, Quba and Shamakhi. Russian presence in the Caucasus became permanent in 1801 when Georgia was annexed by the former. In 1805, Qarabagh and Shirvan Khanates became subjects of Russian Empire. The Russo-Iranian war of 1804-1813 ended with the defeat of Iranian state of Qajars and the treaty of Gulistan was signed between Russian Empire and Qajars. In 1826, in violation with the terms of the treaty, Russian Empire invaded Erevan Khanate, and the second Russo-Iranian war of 1826-28 was ended with the Turkmenchay treaty which reaffirmed the Russian

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<sup>11</sup> The term "Empire" was first used for the Russian state in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, after the annexation of several regions across Russian borders by Tsar Peter the Great.



supremacy in the region. Accordingly, Iranian state of Qajars has ceded sovereignty over Erevan, Nakhchivan and Lenkeran Khanates and therefore lost control of all regions north of Araz River. The effective division of the Azerbaijani Turkish population between Russian and Iranian controlled territories became a major problematic for the Azerbaijani national identity since then, but the consequences of the Russian conquest for the northern Azerbaijan were far more complex and multi-layered.

The changes in administrative, economic and political structures of Azerbaijan defined the circumstances within which the nation and state building processes took place. These processes can be understood by three interrelated dynamics: First, the gradual inclusion of Azerbaijan into the central administrative structure of Russia; second, transformation of economy, especially the introduction of large-scale private industrial oil production; and third, the process of politicization, which were set in motion by the changes in administrative and economic structures. These three dynamics put Azerbaijanis from all strata into a disadvantaged position, thereby creating the impetus for the Azerbaijani nation building.

Russian Empire's presence in northern Azerbaijan has influenced the religious composition of the region. Before, the disparity between Sunni and Shia populations was not high. However, between 1830 and 1860, majority of the Sunni population of Azerbaijan, especially those in the north-western regions were exiled. As a result, in 1916, out of 2 million registered Muslims in Azerbaijan, 38% were Sunni and 62% were Shia (De Waal 2010: 23). Following the Russian invasion, the region was subject to unification under the establishment of imperial legal and administrative system.<sup>12</sup> Until 1840s, Azerbaijan was kept under direct military rule. Governance was characterized by a mixture of local and imperial laws, but in fact the military commanders were ignorant about local customary and religious laws. Their application of the imperial law with disregard of local laws was a source of content among the population. Russia's presence in Azerbaijan had a twofold meaning. On the one hand, it has initiated the development of resentment against the new rulers. Because of the vast differences between the local people and imperial rulers in terms

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<sup>12</sup> For detailed accounts of Russia's imperial expansion, see Rywkin (1988) and Gibson (2002).

of religion and culture, the Russian's existence in the country posed several challenges to the social, economic and political processes in Azerbaijan. The view of the Russians as alien invaders was first emerged with the Russo-Iranian wars of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when the region suffered significant human and economic losses. These losses were the result of the violent means Russian military leaders employed. During the first Russo-Iranian war, some of the khanates even supported Russia against the Qajars, probably to improve their own power (Altstadt 1992: 17). However, contact with Russian forces demonstrated the new allies' perception of the local population. During their campaign, Russian troops profaned mosques and forcefully used people's houses. The anti-Islamic character of military operations, disrespect for the religion and cultures of local population contributed to the perception of Russia as an enemy rather than saviors, as was in the cases of Armenia and Georgia.<sup>13</sup> The destruction of Ganja, the second largest city of Azerbaijan during the first Russo-Iranian war, and its renaming as Elizavetpol is exemplar. Violent methods with which Russian domination in the region was achieved had also results for the future social, political and economic developments in Azerbaijan. Neglect of agriculture, especially irrigation systems, indirectly caused accelerated migration of rural populations to Baku in following years (Swietochowski 1995: 17).

The second result of Russian domination was the unification of Azerbaijani khanates and later the imposition of a modernizing process. An important question for the new rulers of Azerbaijan was to choose between colonial and direct rule. In 1840s, that is less than a decade after the Russian Empire has established full control over the Caucasus with the second Russo-Iranian war, Russia chose to incorporate the new lands to the Russian imperial administrative system. In fact, the changing policy with regard to newly conquered peripheral regions of the Empire changed after 1831 revolt in Poland, which demonstrated the vulnerability of the new regions. In the following years, administrative structure in Azerbaijan together with other regions, were re-structured in accordance with centralism. In 1840's Azerbaijan, alongside with other Caucasus territories was divided into artificially created *gubernii*, where Russian Imperial legal system was imposed. The impact of foreign domination was so decisive

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<sup>13</sup> Non-Muslim communities of Azerbaijan were in a comparatively disadvantaged position vis-à-vis the Muslims, but they were rarely actively persecuted. (Atkin 1980, cited in Altstadt 1992: 8).

that according to Altstadt (1992: 15) “Russian rule set the tone and established policies that shaped Caucasia for at least two centuries.” For Azerbaijan, this meant the unification of khanates under a single economic and political system. It is also important to note that with the practice of centralization and Russian legal system, the transformation of inter-ethnic inequalities was initiated. For one thing, Armenians started to play an increasingly important role in the administration of the Caucasus. On the other hand, Imperial centralism was also instrumental in the transformation of former feudal power structures in Azerbaijan. In other words, the Imperial rule in did not simply destroy the feudal elite, but also transformed it. One policy in this regard was to co-opt members of the local elite. They were appointed as civil servants and provided with land. Their children were given opportunities to receive education in Russian institutions of higher education.<sup>14</sup> “Simultaneously, Russia tried to co-opt segments of the local elites, focusing in particular on the increasingly powerless *beys* and *aghas*, providing them with opportunities for civil service careers and granting them title to land – the latter measure constituting the introduction of private landownership in Azerbaijan.” (Cornell 2011: 9).

Incorporation of Azerbaijan into Russian Imperial administrative system was further deepened as a result of reforms in 1860s and 70s. The abolition of serfdom and distribution of land to landless peasants was the main dynamics behind increasing Russian settlements in Azerbaijan, while other reforms related to land facilitated the development of oil production in industrial scales. In this regard, the role of political and economic dynamics driven by oil production in the emergence of the modern Azerbaijani nation-state cannot be overemphasized. Until 19<sup>th</sup> century, Azerbaijan was almost and exclusively agricultural region with significant segments of population living a nomadic life-style. Trade, artisanship and craftsmanship were also a major source of income in bigger settlements. With the introduction of a law that changed the state-granted oil concessions to long term commercial leases in 1872, Baku started attracting businesspeople from whole Russia and world. The industrial modernization process, which consequently facilitated the emergence of social classes and the

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<sup>14</sup> For some of my respondents in the field, this policy represented the process of “*manqurdlaşma*,” i.e. alienation to one’s own people and values. This peculiar type of alienation is believed to continue during Soviet rule, and seen as one of the main sources of problems in nation, state and regime building.

cultivation of the nationalist agenda, has in a sense laid the ground for the modern Azerbaijani nation and state. Demographic and cultural changes were initiated by the production of oil in industrial scales in the post-1872 period, widely known as the era of “First Oil Boom.” Industrial growth was first initiated in early 1870s when Russia ended state monopoly over oil production. In 1873, the first major investment was made by Robert Nobel who bought an oil refinery in Azerbaijan. The role of Nobel Company in Azerbaijan was not only in terms of growing oil outputs, but also the connection of Azerbaijan to world capitalism through introducing new business methods and contacts with world markets (Altstadt 1992: xx). The building of the Transcaucasian railway that connected Baku to the Black Sea and Central Asia was another important step in connecting Azerbaijan to the world economy and politics. As of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Baku became one of the largest industrial centers of Russian Empire and world’s leading oil production site. Russian rule, however, did not qualify as a modernizing process, since what was happening was one pre-industrial society invading another (Swietochowski 1995: 17).

Together with Nobel Company, several other enterprises helped Azerbaijan become the number one oil supplier of the world in early 1900s. However, the opening of oil production to private investment benefited local Armenians and Russians in a highly disproportionate way compared to Azerbaijani Turks. In this respect, it is important to mention that discrimination in the oil industry played a unifying role for between the upper and lower strata of the latter. Compared to non-Muslim investors and property owners, Azerbaijani oil industrialists owned and operated mostly small-scale companies. Parallel to the inequality observed in ownership, Azerbaijani Turkish labor force employed in oil industry was disadvantaged especially against Russian and Armenian workers. Members of the latter two ethnic groups were forming the “labor aristocracy” and earned more than the unqualified Azerbaijani Turks. To put it differently, resentment caused by disadvantaged position in industrial development was playing a cohesive role for the Azerbaijani Turks. Thus, the emergence of Azerbaijani nationalism and national elite can be understood within the framework of the unequal treatment within the empire. Economic discrimination alone, however, is insufficient in explaining the development of Azerbaijani national identity. In this regard, changes in administration of the country played a facilitating role for the

formation of a national elite who would shape and pursue a nationalist agenda.

Three decades after the end of direct military rule and at the eve of industrial boom, existing administrative institutions in Azerbaijan were insufficient in coping with the scale of development. As a consequence of this transformation, two new local governing bodies were introduced under the Urban Reform of 1870, as part of the Great Reforms of Tsar Alexander II. However, the very laws that brought the new city Administration (*Uprava*) and the City Council (*Gorodskaiia Duma*) into existence limited the representation of non-Christians in these bodies, despite the fact that non-Christians formed the majority of property owners and consequently, the electorate. Against the limitations set by the law and imperial administration, Azerbaijani Turks managed to win the majority of seats in the City Council in 1908 elections and remained so until the collapse of the Empire. Azerbaijani Turks also succeeded in winning seats in the city Administration, which was responsible for the economic affairs and social services like health, education and poverty alleviation. These developments were important in that they demonstrated the willingness and ability of the Azerbaijani Turks to decide in matters that relate them. Despite the discriminations experienced in the distribution of economic resources and political representation, the administrative institutions were important means in the formation of national political elite, acquiring experience in state affairs and representing the demands of the Azerbaijani Turks.

Industrialization led by oil extraction has rendered Baku into a multi-ethnic and multi-national city feasible for the spread of revolutionary ideas and movements. As I have noted above, the entry of Russian Empire in the Southern Caucasus had differential meaning for Muslim and non-Muslim populations. Imperial policies of Russia towards the Caucasus coupled with industrialization have also contributed to the rise of nationalism and consequently inter-ethnic violence. In other words, the treatment of Muslim and non-Muslims differently has fueled ethno-religious enmities especially between Azerbaijani Turks and Armenians. For example, two religious boards were established in 1840, one for the Sunni and the other for the Shiite in order to oversee the religious activity and the practice of the Islamic law. Similar religious boards existed for Christian subjects, too. However, Islamic boards did not have the same rights compared to other boards and this differential reflected the overall

suspicion of the imperial administration towards Muslim and Turkish populations (Altstadt 1992: 19). The efforts to establish a balance between the Christian and Muslim subjects of the empire failed and resulted in increased potential for conflict between the two populations. With the development of oil extraction in the following decades, however, ethno-religious conflicts were about to persevere.

### **5.1.1 Azerbaijani Enlightenment and the Formation of the National Elite**

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Baku was one of the most vibrant centers of working class movements in Russian Empire. As a result of the discriminatory imperial policies Azerbaijani Turks were in a disadvantaged position in all aspects of social, political and economic life. Local rural communities were under pressure from the Russian population being settled by the Imperial administration. Russian peasants were being settled in the Caucasus since 1830s, in order to improve the rural economy which was devastated as a result of the conquest of the region. In the following years, the policy of migration obtained a continuous character and became part of colonial policy. In 1899, the Russian Tsar issued the “law on migration to the Transcaucasus.” Accordingly, ethnic Russian people of Orthodox Christian religion were to be settled in the Transcaucasus. Russians were provided with land at the expense of the local villagers. Only in the first five years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, approximately 48,000 hectares of land were given to Russian settlers.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes, whole Azerbaijani villages were given to settlers, without getting any land as compensation. At the end of first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, number of Azerbaijani families without land exceeded 16 thousand only in the Baku *guberniia*. Imperial policy of settlement was implemented often via force, resulting in increased resentment among the local Muslim communities. It was reported that the Russian settlers were provided with arms in case they were attacked by local Muslims. Reports prepared by various Imperial administrators, including the viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov himself, about the injustices and illegal character of many resettlements did not prevent the process. Until land reforms of 1912 and 1913, Azerbaijani peasantry continued to be dispossessed. With the new legal arrangements, peasants working on landowners’ lands became eligible to buy the land they used, but

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<sup>15</sup> XX Əsr Azərbaycan Tarixi, II Cild, p. 28.

often they were unable to pay the amounts determined by the administration. Instead, the landowners were paid with money from state treasury, but the peasants had to pay their debt to the state in 20 years. This policy put the peasantry in a significant amount of debt. As a result, processes of social stratification and political radicalization were accelerated in the Azerbaijani countryside. For the growing number of landless peasantry, oil fields of Baku provided the only choice for survival.

Despite the fact that Azerbaijani Turks represented the lowest stratum of the working classes in terms of living conditions, class solidarity across national lines was nearly absent (Altstadt 1992: 71). Examples of cooperation with Armenian and Russian workers were rare and did not have a lasting impact. The most crucial factor unifying the lower and upper classes of Azerbaijani Turks was their disadvantaged and segregated position vis-à-vis other nations in their own homeland. The formation of Azerbaijani national identity therefore was based on conditions set by their colonial status (Altstadt 1992: 71). Furthermore, like the vast majority of the members of the working classes, Azerbaijani business and intellectual elite were from the villages (Altstadt 1992: 71) and this was an important factor in unifying the upper and lower strata of the Azerbaijani society.

The “Azerbaijani enlightenment” was advancing on two lines. Altstadt states that “The establishment of a secular, ethnic identity was therefore a process of reaction to discrimination and pressure on one hand and, on the other, of bolstering awareness of the salient elements of history and culture.” (1992: 72). In other words, the construction of Azerbaijani national identity, like other national identities, rested upon the definition of a shared linguistic and cultural history while this process of nation building was heavily influenced by the colonial status of the Azerbaijani people under Russian rule. The colonial status also accounted mainly for the multi-ethnic composition of Baku, the political and economic capital of Azerbaijan. With the 1917 Russian and subsequent Bolshevik Revolutions, Baku became a center of conflict, which grew over the overlapping divisions of ethno-religious and class identities. Also an important center over which great powers competed, Baku experienced a relatively short communist rule before the national republic was established in 1918.

As one of the biggest centers of industrial labor, Baku was a vibrant city in terms of labor movements when the Russian Revolution started in February 1917.

Several leaders of the revolutionary parties, legal and illegal, were active in Baku for a long time. Baku's oil industry, which started in 1870s, has created a highly stratified society in which class and ethnic/religious distinctions largely overlapped. At the top of the class hierarchy were the owners of foreign oil companies. Next there were the Russian and Armenian investors. Few Azerbaijani oil industrialists and ship owners accompanied this group. By the time the revolution began, majority of small-scale Azerbaijani oil industrialists and other investors have left the scene in favor of larger companies. The skilled workers of Baku's industries were mainly composed of Russian and Armenians. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the Azerbaijani Muslims, who were uneducated and unskilled, and therefore working in the most undesirable jobs for the lowest salaries. However, it should be noted that "the notion of an undifferentiated mass of 'Muslim workers' is erroneous." (Altstadt 1992: 36). Muslim working class of Azerbaijan was composed of local and Iranian Azerbaijanis, Persians, Tats, Daghestanis and Volga Tatars and there were significant differences between them in terms of their origin and type of job. Altstadt also notes that local Azerbaijanis made up a smaller segment of the unskilled workforce while Iranian Azerbaijanis were the largest group (1992: 36).

The ethnically based class hierarchy was also evident in the administration of Baku. For the Imperial administration, preservation of stability in order to ensure continuous oil income came before everything. Administrative and bureaucratic posts were largely occupied by ethnic Russians and Armenians. Since 1905, there was virtually no reform to provide an institutional basis to put the demands of the Azerbaijani society into effect. Continued neglect of the local communities from welfare and representation coupled with unequal treatment of non-Muslim inhabitants of Azerbaijan added growing tension between Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. As early as 1904, city's oil workers, divided by ethnic, religious and class lines, were able to organize a strike and win significant economic concessions from the oil industrialists. However, as some of the city's left and revolutionary activists noted, the Baku proletariat was far more interested in economic gains rather than political ones. Still, numerous left and revolutionary political activists continued their work in Baku, often underground and in 1914, they were able to organize a strike in which 40,000 workers joined. The growing revolutionary politics, however, continued to reproduce



the existing ethnic and religious divisions. While the labor unions and revolutionary organizations welcomed skilled members of the workforce, i.e. the Russian and Armenian workers, in an accelerated way, Muslim Azerbaijanis mostly refrained from revolutionary politics and only reluctantly took place in protests and strikes. According to Suny, “Many Muslim workers remained tied to their villages and religious leaders. Though a small number of Muslim intellectuals preached socialism and nationalism, most Muslims in Caucasia had no interest in politics.” (2017).

The Russian Revolution in February 1917 was the result of various discontent segments of the society. In line with the broad basis of the revolution, an Executive Committee of Public Organizations (IKOO) was formed in March. The IKOO was essentially a bourgeois institution and its members composed of civil servants, lawyers and liberal intellectuals. Yet, it represented the broad social groups and parties and therefore enjoyed greater legitimacy especially compared to the city *Duma*, which was elected through undemocratic elections and was now seen as a remnant of the old regime. The IKOO’s real rival in Baku was the newly elected Baku *Soviet*, composed of revolutionaries from the Social Democrats (Bolshevik and Menshevik), the Socialist Revolutionaries and *Dashnaks*. Russian workers and soldiers together with Armenians also supported the Soviet.

In Azerbaijan the Bolshevik power was first installed after the large-scale of massacre of Baku’s Muslim community. Baku communists were working in an environment much more different than that of other industrial centers of Russia. They were aware of the ethnic conflicts as well as the working classes’ preference of economic struggle over political struggle. Despite Baku communists’ effort to prevent the revolution escalate into ethnic violence (Suny), the events of March 1918 have contributed to the perception of the Soviet rule as a foreign domination. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Baku was the most important stronghold of communists in the Transcaucasus (de Waal 2010: 62).

The processes that led to the rise and fall of the Baku Commune represent a different story compared to the other centers of the revolution, that is, Moscow and St. Petersburg. Whereas in the latter centers the Bolsheviks struggled for immediate overthrow of the provisional government with the use of force, revolutionaries in Baku followed a much more careful strategy. First of all, Baku was susceptible to inter-

ethnic violence. In a multi-ethnic industrial city where class and ethnic divisions overlapped, Baku Bolsheviks were compelled to act more carefully in order not to jeopardize the revolution. Furthermore, the revolution in Baku was opposed by foreign investors and oil industrialists. In addition, Baku was experiencing serious practical problems such as the acute food shortage that needed to be immediately attended. In contrast to Lenin's call to take over the power by making the Soviets the only legitimate body of governance, Bolsheviks in Baku struggled to come to power via peaceful methods. Despite these efforts, the Soviets came to power only when armed Armenian groups massacred Baku's Muslim inhabitants in March 1918. In other words, the Soviet power in Baku was established at the expense of deteriorated inter-ethnic relations. Still, contrary to their counterparts in other revolutionary centers of Russia, the Baku Bolsheviks maintained their peaceful strategy and did not resort to violence when they were in power. When the Russian Army withdrew from Ottoman regions, Ottoman Army marched towards Baku. Consequently, the Baku Soviet has left the city.

The First World War revealed the complex nature of local, regional and global dynamics of politics. The relationship between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia was one layer in this complexity. Briefly stated, "the differences in their economic statuses perpetuated and accentuated barriers of culture, religion and language." (Swietochowski 1985: 21). A second complexity lay in their relationship to Russian Empire as their rulers. In this regard, especially the Armenians and Azerbaijanis had rather different perspectives. A third dynamic was their divergent view of the Ottoman Empire. While Azerbaijanis saw Ottoman Turks as their natural ally, they were unwilling to fight against them. Armenians, on the other hand, were "...ready to fight, seeing the war as a chance to liberate their brethren from Ottoman rule." In Georgia, the socialist represented the most influential political group and debated supporting Germany. Southern Caucasus region as a whole represented one of the most important geographical regions in the international competition known as the "Great Game" and in addition to Germany the British Empire had a stake in gaining control here. During the course of the war, Southern Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia became a battleground between Ottoman and Russian empires. The War, on the other hand, helped the central authority in the Southern Caucasus further decrease and by the time the Russian

Revolution began, political conditions in this remote area of Russian Empire were conducive for independence. In February 1917 following the Russian Revolution an interim government was formed in the Caucasus (The Transcaucasus Commissariat). Majority of the Transcaucasian leaders, however, supported the continuation of their relation with Russia, provided that a democratic regime is established (de Waal 2010: 61). Following the overthrow of Tsar in February, the Special Transcaucasian Committee (*Osobyi Zakavkazskii Komitet, OZAKOM*),<sup>16</sup> regional administrative branch of the provisional government, assumed authority. In practice, however, *OZAKOM* had little power and a wide array of political parties and Soviets exercised power in the post-revolutionary Transcaucasus. In the region, one of the two Soviets controlled by socialists was in Baku,<sup>17</sup> and power was shared by Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, Musavatists and Dashnaksutiun, until the Soviet's shift towards Bolshevik lines.

The First World War put the Musavat Party in a difficult dilemma. Despite the ethnic and religious affinities with the Ottoman Empire, Musavat leaders were compelled to act in such a way that they did not appear as their fifth column. The fear was that an Ottoman invasion of the Transcaucasus would spark wide-spread inter-ethnic violence and it was opposed not only by non-Azerbaijanis but also by Azerbaijanis. With the October Revolution, the possibility of establishing a democratic system in the territories of the former Empire was destroyed decisively. With the Bolshevik take-over of the Baku Soviet by violent means in late March 1918, which re-affirmed the Azerbaijani perception of Bolshevik Revolution as Russian and Armenian cooperation at their expense, declaration of autonomy and later independence turned into a necessity rather than a choice for the Azerbaijani Turks.

In February-March 1906, a peace congress was organized in Tiflis in order to discuss measures for preventing another escalation of violence between Armenian and Tatar communities in the Transcaucasus region. For the Transcaucasus viceroyalty, led by Vorontsov-Dashkov, the immediate purpose of the congress was to discuss

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<sup>16</sup> In October 1917, *OZAKOM* was replaced by the Transcaucasian Commissariat (*Zakavkazskii Komissariat*) and then by the Transcaucasian Diet (*Zakavkazskii Sejm*).

<sup>17</sup> The other Soviet was in Tiflis and it was dominated by Mensheviks.

measures to restore order in the region rather than discussing the events and deciding who is guilty in the atrocities. Yet, the main thesis of the Azerbaijani representatives in the congress was that the roots of the conflict lay in the unequal treatment of Muslim Tatars as subjects of the Empire. Unequal opportunities for business people, for rural communities, for working class people and finally, for participation in local and central bodies of governance were seen as the main reasons for resentment among Azerbaijani Muslims. Demands of the Azerbaijani committee included the right to universal education and press activities in native language and more rights in political decision making processes.

The revolution of 1905 and accompanying Azerbaijani-Armenian violent conflict were important in two regards: first, it demonstrated the relationship between the decreasing central authority and outbreak of ethnic violence and secondly, the relative underdevelopment of Azerbaijani political organization. During the conflict, Armenian armed groups, especially the *Dashnaksutiun* Party, was rather effective, and in response, the Azerbaijani Turks have established the *Difai* (Defense), an illegal, armed organization. Thus, *Difai* represented the first proto-nationalist Azerbaijani organization under Russian imperial rule.

Following the 1905 conflict and 1906 peace congress, the vast majority of the upper segments of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia chose to cooperate with the newly established Constitutional Democratic Party, popularly known as the Cadets. Muslim Tatars were not interested in revolutionary politics. Their participation in workers' strikes in 1903 and 1904 was possible due to the fact that these strikes were organized exclusively on economic gains of the workers. The success of the 1904 strike is explained by the joint action of the working class members from different ethnic backgrounds in Baku, which was made possible by the confinement of demands to workers' economic rights. The Cadets were mainly composed of members of the propertied classes, and their political agenda was set by a demand for constitutional democracy. The party lacked support at the grassroots level and armed groups. The Cadets' aim was the preservation of the Empire by granting its subjects more rights, i.e. the foundation of a constitutional monarchy. At the outset, Azerbaijani propertied classes and their natural allies in political struggle, the Azerbaijani intellectuals overwhelmingly supported the Cadets. The perspective of becoming equals among the

subjects of the Empire was in line with Cadets' agenda. However, as the promises of the October Manifesto of Nikolai II became unfulfilled and the revolution intensified, the Cadets lost influence. Accordingly, "From 1905 on Azerbaijani Turks focused and acted on Azerbaijan's own political needs within the Russian Empire, separating themselves from the numerous natural allies against Russian colonialism and creating the same culturally artificial barriers as Shi'ism had." (Altstadt 1992: 71)

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Baku was an industrial, multi-ethnic city with strong connections to the global economy and politics. As a result of the discriminatory imperial policies Azerbaijani Turks were in a disadvantaged position in all aspects of social, political and economic life. Local rural communities were under pressure from the Russian population being settled by the Imperial administration. Russian peasants were being settled in the Caucasus since 1830s, in order to improve the rural economy which was devastated as a result of the conquest of the region. In the following years, the policy of migration obtained a continuous character and became part of colonial policy. In 1899, the Russian Tsar issued the "law on migration to the Transcaucasus." Accordingly, ethnic Russian people of Orthodox Christian religion were to be settled in the Transcaucasus. Russians were provided with land at the expense of the local villagers. Only in the first five years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, approximately 48,000 hectares of land were given to Russian settlers.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes, whole Azerbaijani villages were given to settlers, without getting any land as compensation. At the end of first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, number of Azerbaijani families without land exceeded 16 thousand only in the Baku *guberniia*. Imperial policy of settlement was implemented often via force, resulting in increased resentment among the local Muslim communities. It was reported that the Russian settlers were provided with arms in case they were attacked by local Muslims. Reports prepared by various Imperial administrators, including the viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov himself, about the injustices and illegal character of many resettlements did not prevent the process. Until land reforms of 1912 and 1913, Azerbaijani peasantry continued to be dispossessed. With the new legal arrangements, peasants working on landowners' lands became eligible to buy the land they used, but often they were unable to pay the amounts determined by the administration. Instead, the landowners

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<sup>18</sup> XX Əsr Azərbaycan Tarixi, II Cild, p. 28.

were paid with money from state treasury, but the peasants had to pay their debt to the state in 20 years. This policy put the peasantry in a significant amount of debt. As a result, processes of social stratification and political radicalization were accelerated in the Azerbaijani countryside. For the growing number of landless peasantry, oil fields of Baku provided the only choice for survival.

In February-March 1906, a peace congress was organized in Tiflis in order to discuss measures for preventing another escalation of violence between Armenian and Tatar communities in the Transcaucasus region. For the Transcaucasus viceroyalty, led by Vorontsov-Dashkov, the immediate purpose of the congress was to discuss measures to restore order in the region rather than discussing the events and deciding who is guilty in the atrocities. Yet, the main thesis of the Azerbaijani representatives in the congress was that the roots of the conflict lay in the unequal treatment of Muslim Tatars as subjects of the Empire. Unequal opportunities for business people, for rural communities, for working class people and finally, for participation in local and central bodies of governance were seen as the main reasons for resentment among Azerbaijani Muslims. Demands of the Azerbaijani committee included the right to universal education and press activities in native language and more rights in political decision making processes.

According to the Armenian side, the violence was a result of the inactivity of the authorities in the region. On the other hand, the widespread view among Azerbaijani Muslims was that the actual reason for Armenian superiority in the 1905 ethnic conflict was closely related to the presence of armed organization, i.e. the Dashnaksution Party, of Armenians. Alongside with efforts to call for further reforms and new legal arrangements to secure an equal place for Azerbaijani Muslims among other subjects of the Empire, especially in comparison to Christian communities of the Caucasus, the creation of armed groups began in short time. In August and September 1906, *Difai* Party<sup>19</sup> was formed in Baku and Elisavetpol.

Following the 1905 conflict and 1906 peace congress, the vast majority of the upper segments of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia chose to cooperate with the newly established Constitutional Democratic Party, popularly known as the Cadets. Muslim

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<sup>19</sup> *Difai* referred to itself as the “Qafqaz Ümumüsəlman Komitəsi” but also was known as the “Karabakh Committee.”

Tatars were not interested in revolutionary politics. Their participation in workers' strikes in 1903 and 1904 was possible due to the fact that these strikes were organized exclusively on economic gains of the workers. The success of the 1904 strike is explained by the joint action of the working class members from different ethnic backgrounds in Baku, which was made possible by the confinement of demands to workers' economic rights. ... The Cadets were mainly composed of members of the propertied classes, and their political agenda was set by a demand for constitutional democracy. The party lacked support at the grassroots level and armed groups. The Cadets' aim was the preservation of the Empire by granting its subjects more rights, i.e. the foundation of a constitutional monarchy. At the outset, Azerbaijani propertied classes and their natural allies in political struggle, the Azerbaijani intellectuals overwhelmingly supported the Cadets. The perspective of becoming equals among the subjects of the Empire was in line with Cadets' agenda. However, as the promises of the October Manifesto of Nikolai II became unfulfilled and the revolution intensified, the Cadets lost influence.

### **5.1.2 Aspects of Political Elite Formation under Imperial Domination**

The inclusion of predominantly Muslim regions into the Russian Empire initiated the emergence of new social and political dynamics both sides. Having been in contact with Muslim communities since 16<sup>th</sup> century, Imperial authorities did not regard Islam as a threat to state up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when nationalism started to gain popularity among predominantly Muslim societies. Up until then, Russian authorities mainly chose either of the two policy variants: "cooperation with religious and the legislative regulation of Muslim religious life; ... and complete non-interference in Muslim religious affairs and, in essence, disregard of the religious factor." (Campbell 2007: 342). The core of Russian imperial policy towards Islam was to preserve civil order and political stability, rather than large-scale cultural transformation of the communities in question. According to Weeks, "The fear of provoking violent resistance on the part of Muslims under Russian rule far outweighed any desire for Russification." (2011: 181). In fact, Imperial policy of nationalities is referred to as "Russification" only after 1863, and rather than "de-

nationalizing,” it aimed to ensure loyalty, avoid unrest, ensure centralization and promote Russian as the *lingua franca* of the Empire (Weeks 2011: 98).

Compared to previous foreign rulers, Russians were significantly different for the Azerbaijani Muslims and therefore perceived as a threat to the very existence of Azerbaijani cultural and religious identity (Raheb 2007: 273). ...Furthermore, the perception of Islam as a threat to political stability remained low among administrative bodies of the Russian Empire because political demands of the local elite and intelligentsia received relatively little attention among the masses.

According to Aksoy, Russian Imperial rule has facilitated the emergence of nationalism among its non-Russians through three processes (2011: 18). The first process was administrative unification, which mainly overlapped with ethno-religious and linguistic identities and therefore laid the basis for the territorial claims of future nations. Secondly, the development of commercial and industrial activities in these regions has led to intensified cultural and economic interaction as well as industrialization and urbanization. The third process, i.e. the imposition of central bureaucratic structures has forced the local elites to choose between cooptation by the central administration or assume a nationalist and revolutionary agenda, and thereby reclaim the representation of the local populations. It should be noted that the traditional elite stratum of the Azerbaijani society, composed of nobility and Islamic clergy, was being gradually replaced by a business and intellectual elite, whose origins were in village but upward mobility was made possible by the Empire’s economic and administrative reforms.

At the time of Russian conquest, Azerbaijan was a predominantly agrarian society. Trading had a smaller share among economic activities and it was mostly confined to Baku. The Russian conquest had devastating impact on agricultural production, and later, following the abolition of serfdom and land reforms of 1860s and 1870s, rural communities have experienced the increasing pressure from Imperial policy of granting land to ethnic Russians. After the industrialization and privatization of oil production, majority of Azerbaijani Turks started forming the lowest stratum of labor hierarchy. Their low socio-economic condition, in comparison to Armenian and Russian workers, was a crucial factor in the formation of their national identity.



The Russian policy towards Islam in its peripheries was largely defined by non-interference. Furthermore, Russian authorities' major concern in these regions was the preservation of order and stability, and therefore systematic interference into their customs and religious activities is avoided. Coupled with the lack of a "civilizing mission" towards these populations, the policy of non-interference resulted in ongoing and perhaps deepened religiosity in the face of foreign domination. An important consequence of high levels of adherence to religious structures of authority was the exclusion of Azerbaijani people from education, the main mechanism of upward mobility. Instead, education was provided for a small group of Azerbaijanis, who were expected to assist Russians in administrative issues of the region. During the years of "Azerbaijani Enlightenment," persistence of religious identity was seen as an important obstacle in front of the development of a national identity. The Azerbaijani intelligentsia, therefore, was unanimously anti-clerical and pro-secular. Combating religious obscurantism, in other words, was paramount to nation-building. The ideological sources of the national identity envisaged for the Azerbaijani people were diverse, but the Azerbaijani political elite and intelligentsia have focused their efforts on building a distinct formula.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, nation-building efforts were underway in other Muslim-Turkic societies. For the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, the two most important connections in this regard were the Turkish nationalists in the Ottoman Empire and Volga Tatars. Azerbaijani Turks had close ties with other Muslim and Turkic people of the Empire and joined the All-Muslim Russian Congresses in 1905 and 1906. At the same time, Turkish nationalism was becoming more assertive in Istanbul, which was an important destination and ideological center for Azerbaijani intelligentsia. Having been in close contact with two centers of Turkish nationalism, the Azerbaijani nationalism was gradually formed in the publications and writings of Azerbaijani intellectuals. While there was no consensus on the content of the national identity, the prevalent view was to embrace a distinct Azerbaijani identity –which was Turkish but Azerbaijani, Muslim but Shiite– rather than adopting the Turkish identity as it was expressed by Turkish nationalists of the Ottoman Empire.

## 5.2 The Establishment of the ADR

The dissolution of imperial administration left the Transcaucasus region with a power vacuum and led to a series of events that would result in what is defined as “separatism by default” (de Waal 2010: 60) in three countries of the region. The ongoing power vacuum transformed ethnic conflicts into civil wars, facilitated invasion of foreign armies and consequently, the Bolshevik take-over of power in the whole region. In the absence of weak political institutions and strong armed forces, all three countries sought the protection of stronger allies for security.

The experience of the Baku Commune was decisive in terms of further consolidating the Azerbaijani national-democratic elite’s view of the Bolshevik promises of right of national self-determination. Although Shaumian’s policies in the Southern Caucasus were milder in comparison to that of Lenin, practices of the Baku Bolsheviks only helped to strengthen the idea of an independent Azerbaijan. The Soviet power in Baku relied on the Russian soldiers and Dashnak armed groups in Baku. The Bolsheviks in Baku came to power only after the Muslim massacre in March 1918, alienating Azerbaijani Turks further from the revolution. The *Sovnarkom* (Soviet of People’s Commissars) established by the Bolsheviks was composed of non-Azerbaijanis, with the single exception of Neriman Nerminov, who was responsible for welfare activities. The way in which Shaumian responded to ongoing violence between Russian and Azerbaijani peasantry reminded of the Empire’s colonial practices (Altstadt 1992: 87).

The Azerbaijani Democratic Republic was established in May 28, 1918, in Elisavetpol. Earlier in March 3, the Russian Empire had left the war with the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The Ottoman Empire and the newly established Transcaucasian *Sejm* met to negotiate peace, but the Ottoman delegation’s demand was to sign the peace with an independent state, in the absence of any representative of Russian Empire. In April, the Transcaucasian Federation was founded from a practical need, and was dissolved on May 26 when Georgia withdrew from it. Next day, the Azerbaijani fraction of the former Transcaucasian *Sejm* convened in an extraordinary session and an Azerbaijani National Council was formed. On May 28 the National Council in Tiflis proclaimed the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (ADR). A charter of

independence (6 articles in total) has announced that Azerbaijan was now established as a democratic, sovereign state of law. Accordingly, in line with the democratic principle, the power belonged to the people. Citizens' political rights and rights to property were guaranteed, regardless of their sex, ethnic, religious, or class affiliations. Separation of powers was also mentioned. The same day, the first government of the ADR was also established. The National Council was mainly composed of professionals including lawyers, engineers, publicists etc.

After staying in Tiflis for 18 days, the National Council moved to Ganja. However, the Council had to work in a complex political environment here. From all of Azerbaijan, members of the propertied classes and clerics were coming to Ganja. Among them, "a reactionary segment with limited world-view" was discontent with the fact that the council was composed of individuals with democratic, revolutionary spirit.<sup>20</sup> The same individuals also demanded the unification of Azerbaijan with Turkey. Following the pressures from Nuri Pasha, the general of the Ottoman forces in the Caucasus, the National Council was dissolved on June 17. Prior to the dissolution, the socialist *Hümmet* Party has left the Council as a protest. The same day the Council was dissolved, the remaining members formed the second ADR government with the participation of *Musavat* Party, the independents and *İttihad Party*. The Caucasus Islam Army, together with Azerbaijani divisions and volunteers took Baku in September 1918. In other words, "...for the first time since 1806, the city was under Muslim rule." (Suny 1990: 325). In November 1918, the former National Council was transformed into an elected parliament. In December 3, 1918, the parliament was opened. Out of 79 seats, Musavat had 23, İttihad 11, Ahrar 9, Hummet 5, Muslim Socialist Bloc 5, independents 15, ethnic minorities 4, Russian-Slavian community 3, and Armenian fraction 4 seats.

The National Charter<sup>21</sup> declared by the ADR did not completely come into effect until the government and capital moved to Baku. The ADR programme consisted of several liberal-democratic policies. A multi-party parliament elected in December 1918 through universal suffrage and numerous political parties, charitable, student and cultural associations were among the first results of the ADR's democratic

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<sup>20</sup> Azərbaycan Tarixi, V cild, p. 335.

<sup>21</sup> For the Charter, see Swietochowski (2004)

rule. Dashnaksutiun and Hümmet, which previously cooperated with the Bolsheviks, were also allowed to operate. Culture and education was also at the top of the agenda. Baku University (later Baku State University) was established in 1919 and the study of literature and history are given a special importance. Courses were in Azerbaijani language and the University was established with the purpose of educating the new generations for state administration (Altstadt 2004: 95). Due to lack of educated Azerbaijani Turkish cadres, however, Russian continued to be used in state institutions. An army for the new state was also founded and the number of soldiers quickly reached 30,000. A military school in Ganja was providing the army with new officers with the assistance of officers of the Ottoman Army.

The Azerbaijani identity was related to, but distinct from the Turkic and Shiite identities: despite opposing views on these issues, the national identity upon which the ADR rested was separate from Turkish nationalism and Shiite religious establishment (de Waal 2010: 51). The motto of independent Azerbaijan, coined by the prominent intellectual and publicist Ali Bey Huseynzade, was to “Turkify, Islamize, Modernize,” thus reflecting the desire to progress while preserving difference. The three colors of the national flag of the republic reflected these ideals: green referred to Islam, red to Turkishness and blue to modernization.

Despite the fact that the ADR was made possible by the extraordinary international political environment, it was a direct achievement of the Azerbaijani enlightenment movement. As a secular, democratic, liberal republic, the ADR was unable to enjoy its independence fully, due to internal and external conflicts. Yet, its’ meaning in Azerbaijani nation and state building cannot be overlooked. As the first secular, democratic republic among Muslim countries, the ADR’s political programme represented a clearly progressive move. The ADR’s vulnerability to internal and external conflicts rendered its history fractured. According to Altstadt, the history of the country can be analyzed by dividing it in three: (1) the period when Baku was not part of the ADR until August 1918; (2) the period between the reincorporation of Baku and the departure of British troops in August 1919; (3) “unoccupied” independence until the Bolshevik takeover of Baku in April 1920 and the defeat of ADR forces in Ganja in the following months (1992: 89-90). In addition to these periods, the ADR rule in two years was represented by several cabinet and government

changes. Political instability was not only a result of the international political situation, but also internal problems. Although *Musavat* was the most powerful political party, governments were a series of coalitions. Facing serious challenges in finance, food and inter-ethnic tensions, *Musavat* gradually lost its influence and responding to these problems became more difficult.

From the declaration of independence of the ADR in May 1918 until the departure of Nuri Pasha's troops in the fall of the same year, the closest relationship of the republic was with the Ottoman Empire. Ethnic, linguistic and religious proximity between the two societies were strengthened by political and intellectual movements in the final decades. The military and political interests of the Ottoman also coincided with the purposes of the Azerbaijani political and intellectual elite. Yet, the relationship between the two countries during the first months of Azerbaijan's independence was not fully devoid of problems. The Friendship Treaty between two countries was primarily a result of military necessities, and despite Azerbaijani Turk's resentment, it did not recognize the independence. Cooperation with the Ottoman Empire was fruitful in the areas of military and education, but with their defeat in World War 1, further cooperation was prevented.

The British troops entered Baku on November 17, 1920, in line with the provisions of Mudros Armistice signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Entente states. The main purpose of the British forces was to supply their empire with oil. In return, they would protect Baku from Armenian aggression. Yet, the British did not recognize the independence of Azerbaijan because for them, Azerbaijan was a territory of Russian Empire. Further to the detriment of the ADR's sovereignty, during their occupation of Baku, the British have controlled the ports and organized intelligence activities. Thus, despite Major-General W.M. Thomson's principle of non-interference in political decisions during his presence in Baku (Altstadt 1992: 93), British occupation was a major compromise for the Azerbaijani independence. The main consequence of this for the *Musavat*-led government was to be criticized as being pro-British, and therefore decreased popular support.

The ADR had a multi-party political system, where civic and legal rights of every Azerbaijani citizen were guaranteed regardless of their ethnic or religious background or gender. Russian, Armenian, Georgian, Jewish, Estonian, German, and

Polish communities were able to establish their political parties and charitable organizations. Leaders of the ADR also engaged in a wide-ranging policy of cultural reform as part of the nation and state building agenda. Study of Azerbaijani language and history were given special importance and Azerbaijani Turkish became the main language for education. Baku University, established in 1919 was an exclusively Azerbaijani Turkish oriented institution of higher education and it was expected to train the future cadres of the Republic. Due to widespread use of Russian language in bureaucracy, a wholesale transition to Azerbaijani Turkish did not take place, but those who do not know the language were given two years to do so. The new republic was also able to form its national army, the members of which were trained by former officers of the Ottoman army in a newly established military school in Ganja.

### **5.3 The Soviet Era in Azerbaijan**

As of February 20, 1920, the Azerbaijani Communist [Bolshevik] Party (AC[b]P) was established. It was formed by the unification of the *Hümmet*, Baku branch of the Russian Communist [Bolshevik] Party (RK[b]P), *Adalet* Party and *Ahrar* Party of Iran, but was not an independent, national party: in terms of organization it was working as a segment of the RK[b]P and operated under its Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee. Its programme was that of the RK[b]P and implemented its regulations. On April 1, 1920, the Fifth Cabinet of Ministers of the ADR resigned and transferred all power to the AK[b]P.

The ADR officially ceased to exist on April 27, 1920 when the Azerbaijan Communist Party (Bolshevik) (AzC[b]P) sent an ultimatum to the provisional government in Baku. The previous day, Baku Bureau of the Caucasian Regional Committee (KavKraiKom) of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party (RC[b]P) and the AzC[b]P, with very few ethnic Azerbaijani Turkish membership, have appointed the Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee (AzRevKom). Only one day after the AzRevKom sent a telegram to Russia asking for assistance, the 11th Red Army entered Baku. According to Altstadt, “The official version of the ‘voluntary’ unification of Azerbaijan with Soviet Russia rests on the claim of Azerbaijani support. The Kavbuiro’s selection of the Azrevkom, like the role assigned to the AzCP in the fall

of the ADR government, reflected the need to associate Soviet power with native Communists.” (1992: 109). The composition of the AzRevKom, who were all communist Azerbaijani Turks and former Hummetists (Altstadt 1992: 109), reflects this need. Although the AzRevKom, was composed of Azerbaijani Turks, almost all of them were outside Baku by the time they were appointed by the KavKraiKom and the AzCP(b). Therefore, the AzRevKom was neither responsible for the invitation of Soviet 11<sup>th</sup> Red Army nor the violence towards and exile of prominent Azerbaijani political figures (Altstadt 1992: 109). In April 28, 1920, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee approved the following names as the members of the Azerbaijani SSR’s Soviet of People’s Commissars, which replaced the AzRevKom: Neriman Nerimanov, Chingiz İldirim, Hamid Sultanov, Ali Haydar Qarayev, Qazanfar Musabekov, Mirza Davud Hüseynov, Dadash Bünyadzade, C. Vezirov and A. Emilov.

This very first cabinet of the Azerbaijani Soviet government was subject to several changes in the following months and years. In the beginning, the Revolutionary Committee was acting as the legislative and executive organ. Revolutionary Committees (*RevKoms*) were also established in cities, towns and villages. These Committees were overseen by the Commissary of Internal Affairs. The composition of Revolutionary Committees was determined by the varying degrees of class, ethnic and ideological tendencies in different localities. On many occasions, RevKoms included individuals from parties other than the Communist Party.<sup>22</sup>

On April 29, 1920, Lenin’s telegram to Baku acknowledged and congratulated the establishment of an independent Azerbaijani SSR. The belief that the independence of the country was intact –notwithstanding the fact that there was a Soviet Socialist government in power– was important for the support of Azerbaijanis. On April 29, a representative committee of Muslim leaders announced its support for and readiness to cooperate with the Azerbaijani RevKom (A.T., Vol. 6, p. 12). Azerbaijani Social Democratic and *Ittihad* parties, too, declared their support for the Soviet government. Musavat Party was also still legal, but it was split in two. In August 1920, the left wing of the Musavat also declared its support for the Soviet government and denounced the so-called illegal party organization of Musavat. Later, when members of the Communist Party started to replace the non-communist

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<sup>22</sup> Azərbaycan Tarixi, VI cild, p. 10.

members of government and parliament, guarantees provided for the security of the latter were disregarded alongside with the guarantees for parties other than the Communist Party (A.T., Vol. 6, p. 13). Leaders of the former Democratic Republic, political parties and movements, army officers and members of the Defense Ministry were killed or exiled, allegedly by the special units of the Russian and Dashnak-led 11<sup>th</sup> Red Army, which acted independently from the AzRevKom. Rasulzade and several other leaders of the ADR escaped to other countries and continued their political struggle. Nariman Narimanov was attempting to prevent illegal arrests and imprisonment of Azerbaijanis.

Russian Revolution was the result of a widespread discontent working classes, discriminated ethnic groups, socialist and liberal intelligentsia in the Empire. Russia was a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire. For ethnic groups, the February Revolution was justified in the background of unfulfilled promises of reform for equality. In other words, the “nationalities question” was a major issue in the revolution alongside with class inequalities. The following October Revolution in its making put the principle of “national self-determination” at the top of their agenda. This way, significant segments of nationalist movements could become natural allies of the Bolsheviks. Among certain national elites, socialism and nationalism were perceived as compatible and necessary for national sovereignty. The initial years of the revolution, however, have witnessed the Sovietization of all former Imperial territories, alongside with the elimination of demands for national sovereignty. In addition, the Bolsheviks Revolution had varying degrees of support among the political elite and the populations of various nations. Especially during the first years of state building processes<sup>23</sup> in Soviet Azerbaijan were not devoid of conflicting views.

As Suny notes, political alignments in the Southern Caucasus were far more flexible than in St. Petersburg or Moscow and left ideologies, often blended with nationalism, were also popular. In addition, the efforts to secure the revolution and determine its course were at its height. The leadership of the revolution, which was far from having uniform ideas about these issues, was in conflict. The presence of

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<sup>23</sup> For a list and brief summary of Soviet and post-Soviet era studies of Azerbaijani politics in the 1920s, see Bayramova (2007: 6-18.)



divergent perspectives and tendencies among the communist leaders as well as between national leaders and communists had to be resolved. Thus, the first years of communist regime have witnessed to conflicts among the revolution's leaders and between communists and representatives of the national groups.

The process of the formation of Soviet leadership, and consequently the major political dynamics and characteristics of Soviet policies, was paralleled by the consolidation of Soviet power and state-building in the Soviet republics. An important issue for the Soviet leaders was the determination of the nationalities policy, which was a contested area due to variations between different leaders' understanding of the revolution. During the first revolutionary years and the Civil War, the Bolsheviks were able to use the "right to national self-determination" as an important leverage in convincing non-Russian nationalities to join the revolution. Furthermore, according to Bayramova, "In the first years of Soviet power and the consequent years of state-building after the civil war, a democratic atmosphere was still present among the party leadership and government." (2007: 3)<sup>24</sup>. First policies of Sovietization in Azerbaijan entailed a wide range of issues: the inclusion of Azerbaijanis into Party, Soviets, social and economic associations, i.e. the Azerbaijanification of these structures; making Azerbaijani a state language; preparation of skilled and trained native workers; issues related to rural communities, *qolchomaqlar*, women's rights, religion, land and oil. On general principles, Azerbaijani members of the Soviet government were thinking in line with other leaders. However, the shaping of actual policies in complete disregard of the national peculiarities and local conditions was a source of conflict and struggle.

The establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan, as elsewhere, was followed by its consolidation. Generally known as Sovietization, this process of power consolidation can be defined as the centrally coordinated restructuring of political institutions, coercive mechanisms, and economy on the basis of a centrally formulated and imposed ideology. It should be kept in mind that despite a common framework set by the Bolsheviks the actual process of Sovietization demonstrated variances in different countries. The level of development of a national identity, the presence or lack of prior experience of independent statehood, the level of socio-economic

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<sup>24</sup> Translations are mine.

development, differences in ethnic and demographic composition and, geographical location were important sources of this variation. These differences were important in understanding the problems Sovietization faced in various countries as well as the level and duration of physical violence as well as resistance against Sovietization.<sup>25</sup>

According to Altstadt, the Sovietization of Azerbaijan was carried out between the years 1920-1942, and this period can be analyzed in three stages (Altstadt 1992: 131-132). The first period includes the early 1920s and its major characteristic was the elimination of initial opposition to Soviet rule and Communist Party. The purges in the first period did not include too many individuals, since almost all of the national leaders have already fled the country or killed. The second period includes the second half of 1920s and early 1930s, when the purge of former political leaders, communists and others was carried out in a more “focused” fashion. The major accusation directed towards these individuals was “Sultangalievism” and “national communism.” The third and most violent period includes the years 1937-38. Known as the era of “great terror” or “repression,” this period is distinguished by the physical liquidation of Azerbaijani Old Bolsheviks, pre-revolutionary artists and writers. It can be said that the impact of this last period of Sovietization was deeper and lasting, as it “threatened to obliterate historical memory” (Altstadt 1992: 132).

Another important peculiarity of the Soviet regime in the early 1920s was the apparent conflict between the formal government, consisting of Azerbaijanis, and the representative bodies of RK[b]P and Red Army. Although the AzC[b]P was formally in power, they did not have full political control, especially in the presence of the Eleventh Red Army. The Army, and allegedly its “private units,” was carrying out a violent campaign against individuals whom they defined as “nationalist.” Several Azerbaijanis were being killed, arrested, imprisoned and exiled by the Eleventh Army. Their extensive and unaccountable use of force, often based on no legal justification, was a source of great discomfort for the Azerbaijani Turkish communist leadership. In other words, the activities of the Army were reinforcing the view of Soviet power as a foreign occupation.

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<sup>25</sup> The differences in the way in which Soviet power is established and consolidated in Soviet successor states, in turn, became important explanatory factors in the dissolution of Soviet power and subsequent processes of nation and state building.

To prevent arbitrary use of coercion, the most powerful efforts were represented by Nariman Narimanov. When in Moscow, he reportedly had a heart attack and died in 1925. His body was cremated, against Azerbaijani customs, right after his death. The burial of his ashes in Kremlin, which was a great honor by that time, did not eliminate suspicions, given his record of active criticism of “colonial” practices of Russian members of the army and administration. During the years of “Great Terror” in 1937 and 1938, Narimanov was denounced as “a deviationist, traitor, agent provocateur, deserter, anti-Communist, and bourgeois nationalist” by Mirza Davud Huseynov (Altstadt 1992: 134) and only after Stalin’s death, Narimanov was rehabilitated.

During the first years of Soviet power, there was some space for free thought, political pluralism and criticism, but tension between local communist leaders and those working to align Baku with Moscow’s policies existed from the beginning. Although the main bodies of the administration were now Azerbaijanis, their opinions and warnings were often disregarded. In fact, in the 1920s, several prominent revolutionary communists were dispatched to Baku to make sure that the Azerbaijani state followed the principles and interests of the RK[b]P. Until November 1933, First Secretaries of the AK[b]P were ethnic Russians.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the development of the Azerbaijani economy in line with the priorities of the Soviet Union was dependent on experts sent by the center. Those experts were ethnic Russians, whereas their team of experts was mainly comprised of non-Azerbaijanis (Azərbaycan Tarixi, VI. Cild, p. 29). Potential opposition to Soviet policies, which often were in disregard of the Azerbaijani communists’ perspectives, were prevented by the term “internationalism.” As early as February 1921, N. Narimanov wrote to Lenin: “I know all about the written and oral reports of remote autonomous republics about their situation and their sentiments towards You. All reports are talking about the colonial policy of Russia...” (Azərbaycan Tarixi, VI. Cild, p. 30)

From its beginning, the relationship between Russia and other republics were asymmetrical. In order to implement and oversee efforts of Sovietization, both in the

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<sup>26</sup> First Secretaries of the AK[b]P until the appointment of M.C. Bağırov were G. Kaminsky (October 1920-July 1921), S. Kirov (July 1921-January 1926), L. Mirzoyan (January 1926-August 1929), N. Gikalo (August 1929-June 1930), V. Polonsky (June 1930-November 1933) and R. Rubenov (Mkrtchyan) (January 1933-December 1933).

sphere of political institutions and economy, the center was commissioning experts. However, these experts were often members of other nationalities, often of Armenian and Russian ethnic origin, and the policies they implemented were generally at the disadvantage of Azerbaijan. The Baku Committee, for example, was heavily dominated by ethnic Armenians and this created a tension between the Baku Committee and the Revolutionary Committee and Central Committee (Bayramova 2007: 178). The ignorant and disrespectful approach of Armenian and Russian Bolsheviks towards the language, religion and customs of the Azerbaijani people was also creating discontent. On a broader level, the criticism of the Bolshevik methods in Azerbaijan was caused by the denial of local conditions and their insistence on practicing the same ways as they do in Russia. Although Narimanov reported Lenin about the discontent created by the Baku Committee and the Eleventh Red Army, there was no modification of Soviet policies in Azerbaijan. Some members of the younger generation of the AzC[b]P interpreted the failure of Narimanov's efforts as a sign to leave him isolated (Bayramova 2007: 179). With the establishment of the TSFSR on March 12, 1922, Azerbaijan formally lost its' independence and it entered under the central authority of Moscow with the proclamation of the USSR same year in December. The transfer of some parts of Zengezur to the administration of the Armenian SSR and the granting of autonomy to Qarabagh in 1923 further eroded the sovereignty of Azerbaijan. Sovietization had also crucial implications for the relationship between the state and the society. With the changes made in the structure and mechanism of instruments of control, all Soviet citizens in the labor unions, *Komsomols*, factories, farms and schools are called to mobilize in the struggle against critiques, opponents and enemies of the new regime (Altstadt 1992: 133).

In 1927, just before Stalin announced the end of the New Economic Policy (NEP) a new wave of purges began. In this period, publications of émigrés and “confessions” of former Musavatists were used to justify liquidations. The NEP, implemented in the 1920s was a transitory policy in the transition to socialist economy. Its' permission to private economic enterprise was associated with the persistence of nationalistic tendencies. With the campaign for collectivization of agriculture, the purge was broadened to the wealthy peasants, often referred to as “*kulaks*” and “*golchomaklar*,” who were expected to resist collectivization. Collectivization of

agriculture in Azerbaijan, as in other republics of the USSR, was carried out by widespread of force, alongside pro-collectivization propaganda.

### **5.3 The Great Purge in Azerbaijan**

By the second half of the 1930s, Sovietization of economy, both in economy and politics was almost complete. The old Bolsheviks like Narminaov and Azizbeyov and other high-profile politicians were already dead, and so was any possibility of active criticism or opposition to Soviet policies, as was the case in early 1920s. The purges in 1937-1938 were thus serving a much broader purpose. The purges that began in the Red Army spread to other institutions and social groups. Many individuals who have recently served in high posts of state and Party apparatuses were killed or sent to exile. The “Great Terror” targeted the remaining political figures, including former Bolsheviks and Hummetists, but probably more importantly, also destroyed the cultural and intellectual elites of Azerbaijan. An important feature distinguishing the purges in Azerbaijan from those in Russia was that almost no one was actually put on trial, presumably because of the fear that spontaneous testimonies in the courts could be politically dangerous (Altstadt 1992: 145-146).

According to Altstadt, “The destruction of the entire indigenous party-state elite and most of the intelligentsia marked the final consolidation of Soviet power in Azerbaijan.” (1992: 150). The Great Terror of 1937-1938 included all segments of society and culture, creating a deep rupture in the collective historical memory of the Azerbaijani people. An overview of Soviet and Azerbaijani literature on activities of Azerbaijani members of party and government demonstrates the difficulties of an objective evaluation. For example, after his death, Narimanov was labeled as a “bourgeois nationalist” while the struggle against “Narimanovism” became a major theme in Azerbaijani politics. Following the post-Stalin thaw in 1956, on the other hand, studies about him represented him as “the real Leninist,” “a fierce member of the struggle” and “a real internationalist.” (Bayramova 2007: 11). Following the independence in 1991, some authors labeled him as a “traitor” while others attempted to rehabilitate him as a defender of national interests. Contradicting interpretations of

Narimanov or other personalities and events during the Soviet era also rendered making an objective evaluation of these in the post-Soviet era difficult.<sup>27</sup>

### 5.3.2 Second World War and Post-War Recovery in Azerbaijan

By the end of the 1930s, Sovietization throughout the USSR was almost complete. This was reflected in a proclamation following the 1939 census that class inequalities are ended, and only two classes (workers and *kolkhozniki*, 57.7% and 42%, respectively) as well as two “friendly classes” now represented the composition of Soviet society. However, the Second World War demonstrated the discriminatory treatment of the predominantly Muslim communities of the Union. The Second World War, also known as the “Great Patriotic War” in the Soviet context, is the most glorified era of Soviet history and the war is represented as the ultimate test for the success of Soviet socialism. Despite catastrophic human and material losses, the Soviet Union was able to defeat Germany’s aggression by 1945. The war, however, was instrumental in demonstrating the strength and weaknesses of the USSR. The victory was a sign of the level of military-industrial development of the Soviet Union. In addition, the Soviet administration was able to mobilize a significant portion of Soviet population to win the war. On the other hand, the Soviet leaders were compelled to relax the limitations against national and religious sentiments in order to motivate its’ citizens. Also, the mass-deportation of several ethnic and national groups, the participation of Soviet citizens to the German army indicated the resilient nationalist tendencies.

An important sign for the continuing discriminatory policies towards Azerbaijanis was the disparity between their contribution to army and the number of decorated military personnel. According to Altstadt, “Reportedly, the proportion of Central Asian and Caucasian peoples in the armed forces was about three times higher than their proportion in the Soviet population.” (1992: 153-154). Azerbaijan’s

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<sup>27</sup> In Azerbaijan, the history of the state building is generally perceived as a continuous process beginning with the ADR, continuing with the ASSR and independent Azerbaijan. Therefore, the way in which past historical figures and events will be accommodated in the historiography and popular historical imagination are important.

contribution to Red Army was around half-a-million people, whereas only 36,000 of them received medals.<sup>28</sup>

In the post-war years, the Party focused on restoring the central power and realignment with pre-war ideological lines. With this purpose, the Soviet leadership wanted to restore its policy on national and religious identities, which were compromised during the war in order to increase willingness to fight and loyalty to the Soviet Union. One of the indicators of the hardening of the regime was the increased control of the dominant ideology over science, literature and arts. Decisions made by the CC of the CPSU through 1946 and 1948 on literary journals, theatre plays and movies included a broad programme on artistic works' compliance with "sublime ideas." (AT, Vol. 7, 132). Under the strict regulations of "socialist realism," individualism or nationalism could be used in works of art as long as they remained a formal element and not related to the problems and conflicts in the society. According to the programme, Russians' role was that of the elder brother, Russian culture was superior and Russian conquest was an absolutely positive development for the republics. In the face of such control, many Azerbaijani historians choose to study less risky subjects like archeology, prehistory and ancient history. On the other hand, the imposition of histories written in line with the ideological limitations was paralleled with demands to write an objective history of Azerbaijan. The renewal of interest in history and native language became possible following the death of Stalin.

Another important development was the re-evaluation of individuals punished in the years of repression. Rehabilitation of the victims of 1920s and 1930s was considered as "Local efforts to reassert historical identity and dignity" (Altstadt 1992: 169). Literary figures like Huseyin Javid, Yusuf Vezirov, Rukhulla Akhundov were among the most prominent of these figures. Rehabilitation also included literary works and publications. The bans on dastans like The Book of *Dede Korkut* and *Koroghlu* as well as *Tekamul*, a journal published by M. E. Rasulzade in the pre-revolutionary years, were lifted. The rehabilitation of repression victims, however, did not include those who escaped abroad (AT Vol. 7, p. 141). It should also be noted that rehabilitation of literary figures as well as literary works was an ambiguous process.

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<sup>28</sup> For comparison, Altstadt refers to much smaller Chuvash ethnic group, the members of which received 53,000 medals.

Rehabilitation was a selective process and made in accordance with official guidelines. Those figures and literary works could be mentioned again, but only in support of the official Marxist-Leninist position. Some literary works, like dastans, were regarded as mere folklore, and not related to historical and tradition.

### **5.3.3 “Thaw” in Azerbaijan and Mustafayev Era**

Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, Stalin’s successor, rapidly engaged in moving the Union away from one-man rule. In fact, implications of this policy became apparent in Azerbaijan years before the twentieth CPSU Congress in February 1956. In a joint plenum of the AzCP CC and Baku Committee in June 1953, Mir Jafar Baghirov was expelled from all his posts on the basis of major errors in administration. Shortly after, Baghirov and several members of his administration were arrested. At the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, Imam Dashdemiroghlu Mustafayev, Baghirov’s successor, accused Baghirov of being a proponent of the cult of personality and declared those persecuted during Baghirov’s rule as honorable and loyal party members. Baghirov was put on trial based on accusations of “siding with anti-Soviet elements” (Altstadt 1992: 161) and shot.

The errors of the political system are explained by deviation from Lenin’s principles as a result of Stalinist cult of personality. At the twentieth congress of the CPSU in February 1956, measures are accepted in order to develop collective leadership, intra-party democracy, and ties to the people. Same year, the CPSU CC has adopted a decision on “Cult of Personality and Elimination of Its Consequences.” (AT Vol. 7, p. 141). Despite the open criticism of Stalinism, cult of personality and its various appearances, critique of the regime and system as a whole was avoided. State control over the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the KGB were restored. In Azerbaijan, together with Baghirov, several figures who worked in these institutions were sentenced to death in 1956.

With the Sovietization in 1920s and 1930s, followed by war-time casualties, both the upper and upper-middle strata of the Azerbaijani elite were largely destroyed. There was a narrow basis from which the political leaders of the country could be recruited. Yet, the post-Stalin political atmosphere allowed the emergence of a new generation of Azerbaijani leaders, who were eager to “reassert itself in politics



and cultural matters by rehabilitating purge victims, and by using the native language to ensure its legal place.” (Altstadt 1992: 162-163). At the same time, the changing approach to the leadership in the post war was coupled with rapid industrialization. As a result of industrial growth, migration to Baku from other parts of the country intensified. This demographic trend was important in the demographic reclamation of the city, as well as the increased role of ethnic Azerbaijanis in the economic and social life.

On the twentieth congress of the AzCP, Imam Dadashoghlu Mustafayev (1910-1997) was elected as the CC first secretary. According to Altstadt, “The period after the fall of Baghirov in Azerbaijan as elsewhere in the USSR was a time of backlash against strong individual leaders and the preeminence of the KGB.” (1992: 162). This effort was also reflected in Mustafayev’s profile. As a candidate of sciences in plant genetics and selection, his work experience included the academy and administrative posts in Baku, Ganja and Karabagh.

The changing political climate of the USSR was conducive in a renewed interest in national identity and consciousness. According to Cemil Hasanli “Azerbaijani science, literature and art played an important role in turning the national idea into a leading force in the 1950s.” (2008: 8). The events of 1945 and 1946 in the Southern Azerbaijan were also important sources for the rising national consciousness. According to Hasanli, the question of Southern Azerbaijan was still lingering over Azerbaijan, making it a reference point for the development of the national identity. (p. 8-9). Throughout his term, Mustafayev has made attempts to broaden the economic sovereignty and national consciousness in Azerbaijan. Two processes, the de-Stalinization efforts and the changing demographic balances in Azerbaijan might have encouraged him to do so. In the 1950s, in order to respond to the rapid economic growth and the need for more industrial labor, travel and change of residence in the republics were made easier. In Azerbaijan, this facilitated the influx of mostly rural migrants to Baku and contributed to the demographic reclamation of the city in the following decades.

The softening of the political climate was also reflected in the heightened discussions and struggle for the status of native language in Azerbaijan. Following a publicized debate, amendments to the Republican Constitution are made to recognize

Azerbaijani Turkish as an official language. Officially formulated ideological guidelines for works of literature and art were accompanied by the proliferation of new themes and issues. Bakhtiyar Vahabzade's "Gulistan" and Resul Riza's "Qizilgul Olmayaydi" poems were exemplary in this regard. Mustafayev also led a struggle against Moscow's attempts to change education policy on language instruction. Following his opposition to a plan to make Azerbaijani language optional in Russian-language oriented institutions, Mustafayev was removed from the office based on accusation of "nationalism." Several figures actively participated in the 1950s discussions on language were honored with the medal of Hero of Socialist Labor in the late 1970s and 1980s (Hasanli 2008: 522-523).

#### **5.3.4 Azerbaijan under First Secretary Akhundov**

Upon Mustafayev's removal from office, Veli Yusif oghlu Akhundov (1916-1986) a Bakuvian medical doctor who previously served on many professional and administrative positions was elected as the new first secretary. His election signified the continuing concerns about strong personalities, but During Akhundov's term, interest for national issues continued. In 1966, Iranian-Azerbaijani poet Shehriyar's poem "Heydar babaya salam" was published in Baku. Also, Novruz became official holiday as "Spring Holiday." A small group of students of the Baku State University formed a political group around Ebulfez Elchibey. In 1962, illegal organization of "Azerbaijan Milli Qarargahi" was established. In 1964, celebrations of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Azerbaijan's "inclusion" to Russia received criticism from a number of Azerbaijani historians (AT Vol. 7, p. 147).

During Akhundov's term, Azerbaijan's mission as an example to the non-communist countries in the region was reemphasized, as the USSR sought to expand its sphere of influence in the Middle East. Furthermore, nativization process continued. In the mid-1960s, 61% of members of the AzCP were ethnic Azerbaijanis, although they were still underrepresented in comparison to their population, which was 67%. The share of intellectuals and people with higher education increased in the AzCP. The Party became more national in character, providing career paths to Azerbaijani Turks from all professions. Throughout the Soviet era, ethnic Russians were dominating the field of technical expertise, but in the 1960s, the trend started to

reverse and “The regime co-opted many Azerbaijani Turks by making career advancement depend on party membership.” (Altstadt 1992: 168). As the Party became more deeply involved in the state administration, and especially in economy, the role of ideology relatively decreased in politics. Lip service to ideology, combined with the recognition of Moscow’s hegemony was to be supplemented with the economic performance. The Second Secretary of the Communist Party continued to be an ethnic Russian and Armenians retained their positions in key offices. However, an important development in 1967 was the appointment of an Azerbaijani as the head of the national security services for the first time since the 1930s. The new chief of security services was Heydar Aliyev, who was going to play a crucial role in the future of Azerbaijan.

By the end of 1960s, achievements of socialism remained limited, despite the official proclamation of the end of socialism and the starting of the era of communist construction in 1951. Indicators of social development were low while crime and drug use, especially among youth, increased. Housing remained as an important problem while per-capita income and rates of industrial productivity in Azerbaijan were among the lowest across the Union.

Akhundov was removed from power in July 1969, based on accusations of corruption. In fact, his permissive approach towards national assertiveness was a source of concern. When Ukrainian Party boss Shelepin, who helped Akhundov advance his career, lost in his conflict with Brezhnev, Akhundov’s removal from office was inevitable.

### **5.3.5 1969-1982: The Era of First Secretary Heydar Aliyev**

In a plenum of the AzCP CC in July 1969, Heydar Aliyev was elected as the new First Secretary. Born in 1923 in Nakhchevan, Aliyev studied in the Pedagogical Technikum and Azerbaijani Industrial Institute.<sup>29</sup> When the war interrupted his education, he worked at the Commissariat of Internal Affairs and the Soviet of the Public Commissariat of the Nakhchevani ASSR. In 1945, he started working at the KGB and in the 1950s he visited Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey. In 1957,

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<sup>29</sup> Present-day Azerbaijan State Oil Academy.

Aliyev graduated from the department of history of the Azerbaijan State University. Between 1956 and 1965, Aliyev was a member of the counter-intelligence unit of the Azerbaijani KGB. In 1965, he was promoted to the rank of deputy director and in 1967, director of the Commissariat.

In addition to being an energetic and intelligent person, Heydar Aliyev's rise was closely related to his relationship with Brezhnev. Unlike his two predecessors, Aliyev demonstrated a high public-profile and the increased role of the Communist Party in state administration in the 1950s allowed him to act relatively free in rebuilding the state apparatus. As the first ethnic Azerbaijani Turkish head of the KGB, Aliyev was already highly respected when he was elected. According to Alkan, the election of Aliyev as the First Secretary was also influenced by concerns to moderate the nationalist reactions animated by the deportation of Azerbaijani Turks from Armenian territories in 1948, efforts to develop national language, history and culture and history in the 1950s and, Armenian attempts to advance their national interests at the expense of Azerbaijan in the 1960s (2010: 47-48).

The emphasis on "collective leadership" that was put forward by Khrushchev during the years of de-Stalinization was also softened with the new first secretary. Aliyev's attempts to establish a more individual style of leadership similar to that of Brezhnev could be seen in his usage of the media. Previously, *Azerbaijan Kommunisti*, the press organ of the AzCP CC, rarely included speeches of the first secretaries. Starting in 1970, Aliyev's speeches and reports found full coverage. According to Altstadt, "...his forceful presences reasserted the role of the first secretary as an individual and center of attention, a single leader shaping the affairs of the republic internally and affecting its fortunes within the union." (1992: 178). His political discourse included an emphasis of ideology and the Communist Party, increased Party control over the economy, development of the cadre policy, struggle against bribery, blackmail and patronage, and the creation of the "new Soviet person." However, the most important role played by Aliyev was the Azerbaijanification of the state apparatus.

During Aliyev's rule, the demographic transformation of Azerbaijan was visible in the structure of the AzCP, too. Number of Party members rose to 330,319 in 1979, accounting for %6 of total population of Azerbaijan, despite a declining

membership among workers and agricultural workers. 66% of AzCP members were ethnic Azerbaijanis whereas their share in total population was 74%. Russians and Armenians, despite their decreasing share in population and Party membership, were still overrepresented.

Despite the fact that he was creating his own network in the Party and State administration, purges were frequent and wide in scope during Aliyev years. Purges of Party members in the Aliyev era were justified on the basis of failures to perform their duties and more importantly, corruption. Those purged lost their Party membership and posts, and the new appointees were mostly ethnic Azerbaijanis (Altstadt 1992: 179). In the first two years of Aliyev, several ministers, Party secretaries, first secretaries of 51 *raions* were ousted and they were replaced almost exclusively by individuals connected to Aliyev through the KGB or some other channel. It is important to note that the personal network he created outlived his rule as the First Secretary. Thus, when he was disfavored by Moscow, he maintained a broad basis of support in the state apparatus. Coupled with his popularity, this was an important factor in his comeback in 1993.

Aliyev's success as First Secretary, i.e. building of popularity and freedom to build his personal network, was closely related to his positive relationship with Brezhnev. During Aliyev's rule, Brezhnev visited Azerbaijan three times, in 1970, 1978 and 1982, decorating Aliyev several times, including with a Lenin medal. As a result of his active support and open favor of Brezhnev resulted in Aliyev's Candidate Membership to the Politburo of the CPSU CC and the post of the First Deputy of the President of the USSR Soviet of Ministers at the 26<sup>th</sup> congress in 1982.

H. Aliyev was also a member of the Constitutional Committee that prepared the 1977 Constitution of the USSR and head of the Constitutional Committee that prepared the 1978 Constitution of the AzSSR. He used his position to stop Armenian demands for the re-negotiation of Nagorno Karabagh's status during the preparation of the 1977 Constitution. (A.T. VII, 176) In 1978, the new constitution of Azerbaijan was ratified. The new constitution included articles that would help the preservation of Azerbaijani language. Azerbaijani language was accepted as official language of state.

During his term as the First Secretary, Heydar Aliyev made use of his prestige for the economic development of Azerbaijan. In 14 years, GDP of Azerbaijan increased 2.5 times, industrial production 2 times, consumer goods 3 times, agricultural production 2.7 times. Housing provided for over 2 million people (A.T. VII, 177). Several new industrial complexes, including a large air-conditioner factory opened and significant increase in agricultural production, most importantly cotton and grape, was achieved. The amount of money invested in Azerbaijani economy between 1971 and 1985 was around 32 billion rubles, that is, 2.1 times more than the amount invested in the previous 50 years (A.T. VII, 181). 45% of the investment was directed to engineering, chemical and petro-chemical industries, production of construction materials and food processing. Consequently, the share of industry in national economy increased in an economy largely dependent on oil and agricultural production. The decreasing share of oil in national economy was also closely related to the decreasing oil production. Due to the new oil fields in Siberia, oil production in Azerbaijan continued dropping steadily between 1960s and second half of 1980s. The decreasing oil production was also related with the low technologies used.

This decrease was partly compensated by the increasing gas production in Azerbaijan. Industrialization throughout 1970s also helped to bridge the gap of socio-economic development between the Apsheron region and the rest of the country. In the 1970s, Baku and Sumgayit were producing approximately 70% of all industrial goods. By 1985, the ratio decreased to 50% (A.T. VII, 184). In the same period, more than 140,000 new workers were added to the industrial workforce, mostly by migration from countryside to the cities.

Due to the growth in economy, per capita income in Azerbaijan increased from 62% in 1970 to 80% in 1980 of all-union average. Economic growth and increased welfare was paralleled by the population growth. Azerbaijani population grew from 3,697,717 people in 1959 (67% of total population) to 6,028,253 people in 1979 (78% of total population). By 1979, the population of Baku reached 1.5 million, and although there is lack of official data, majority of its residents were now probably Azerbaijani Turks. The increased share of Azerbaijani Turks in the population was driven by high rates of birth and the emigration of ethnic Russians and other nationalities. Share of Russian citizens in population decreased from 13.6% in 1959

to 7.9% in 1979 while in the same period of time Armenians decreased from 12% to 7,9%. It is therefore possible to say that the demographic reclamation of the republic went hand in hand with the increased role of Azerbaijani Turks in politics and economy. Although economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s contributed to increased living standards, the results achieved were not lasting. With the growth of shadow economy, declining technology and infrastructure, economy started to deteriorate in the late 1970s. In the second half of the 1980s, social-economic indicators of Azerbaijan were again among the lowest in the Union.

Another important process during Heydar Aliyev's rule was the renewed interest in literature, language and history of Azerbaijan. Although all publications were obliged to conform to the ideological framework of the Soviet regime, some of them were getting increasingly assertive in sensitive issues regarding identity and history. In the 1970s, the number of students sent to other major centers for higher education was increased with the initiative of Heydar Aliyev. Furthermore, in 1971, a military middle-school was opened and Azerbaijanis graduating the school continued military education in various military schools across the Union. This was an important step for the Azerbaijani people who were largely denied of high posts in the Soviet army. Also, the naming of administrative regions demonstrated the elevated importance attributed to national consciousness. At a time when the mentioning of Ganja was still forbidden, a new raion was named as "New Ganja." New Baku raions of Nizami and Nesimi were also created during Heydar Aliyev's term. In 1974, weekly hours for the history of Azerbaijan courses were increased. Throughout 1970, the process of registration of historical and civilizational heritage in the republic was intensified. Between 1976 and 1988, the publication of "Azerbaijan Soviet Encyclopedia" was completed. The publication of the Encyclopedia was failed several times before Heydar Aliyev. He also successfully managed to transfer the grave of Huseyin Javid, an Azerbaijani poet and dramatist accused of "pan-Turkism" and killed during 1930s repressions, from Siberia to Nakhchevan. Again in 1970s, some journals of literature and history started to publicize issues that were not openly addressed before. Although the language used in these debates was constructed in a specific way to avoid official persecution, they played an important role in the formation of new thoughts about history, identity and the role of the intelligentsia. As individuals

accustomed to the verbal guidelines in a repressive political context, texts with ambiguous meanings and vague symbolism provided apparent “code words” for the Azerbaijani Turks (Altstadt 1992: 188). The process of renewed interest in culture and identity has continued in an intensified way in literary journals like *Azerbaijan*,<sup>30</sup> *Gobustan* (edited by Anar Rzayev) and *Edebiyyat ve Injesanat* the 1980s. Before the end of the decade, these publications would increase in number and become the platforms for a broader set of demands.

The political career of Heydar Aliyev, the person who achieved the highest post as an Azerbaijani, declined after the election of Michael Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the CPSU CC. To respond to the increasing economic and political problems across the Union, Gorbachev has initiated the policies of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. Seeing the entrenched personal networks as a major cause of political and economic stagnation, Gorbachev started to dismiss Brezhnev protégés. Heydar Aliyev, losing his post but neither the popularity nor political basis, was retired and settled in his native Nakhchevan. He was to remain there until circumstances made his re-emergence in Azerbaijani politics as a savior.

The era of Heydar Aliyev in Soviet Azerbaijan corresponds to a period in the USSR in which the relationship between the center and the periphery changed in such a way to influence the dynamics and characteristics of the political elite in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In order to solve problems in the administration and economy, Brezhnev adopted the policy of strong national republican leaders in the periphery, where Soviet communism was unable to penetrate the society at the desired levels. In a sense, Russian Imperial policy towards Azerbaijan, i.e. the avoidance of too much interference and a comprehensive policy of socio-cultural transformation, the centrality of maintaining of order and stability for the sake of economic revenues, was repeated during Brezhnev years. Thus, Brezhnev’s expectation from his protégés in the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia was to demonstrate absolute loyalty, keep the order and dispatch the goods to the Union. Republican leaders, on the other hand, had more freedom in running the affairs in their native countries (Cornell 2011: 43). As a

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<sup>30</sup> Publication of the Azerbaijani Writers’ Association.



result, Heydar Aliyev's policies did have important consequences for the politics, economy, culture and society.

Alongside the rest of the Soviet Union, standards of living increased substantially in Azerbaijan in the 1960s and 1970s, thereby producing a social stratum which might correspond to the middle-classes in capitalist economies. In agriculture, Heydar Aliyev not only succeeded in increasing the production, but also implementing a qualitative transformation. Parallel to the growth of the infamous "Second Economy" or the "Gray Market" in the USSR, many Azerbaijani farmers abandoned collective farming and started cultivating fruits and flowers.

Heydar Aliyev's rule was also characterized by the softening of ideological pressures on literature and academic activities, thereby helping for a new generation of Azerbaijani intelligentsia to form (Cornell 2011: 44). The intensified interest in issues of national history, identity and language during 1960s and 1970s can therefore be credited to Aliyev: "Because Aliyev cannot be regarded as uninformed, lax, or obtuse, it can be supposed that he permitted, perhaps encouraged, this upsurge of national self-investigation, this exploration of historic identity, and this expression of national pride." (Altstadt 1992: 191). Another important feature of Brezhnev era Soviet social and political life, i.e. the growth of the "dissidents" was also observed in Azerbaijan. Although the importance of the dissidents might have been exaggerated by the Western scholarship during the 1960s and 1970s, they represented an important dynamic in the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism. Heydar Aliyev's permissive stance towards issues of national identity was also reflected in his relation with Azerbaijan's dissidents, among whom Ebulfez Elchibey was going to play a very special role in the near future.

Finally, Heydar Aliyev's practices in establishing his personal network in Party and state administration were reminiscent of 1920s policy of *korenizatsiia*. According to Swietochowski, Aliyev was crucial in "consolidating the native *nomenklatura* and upgrading it through an infusion of the element of technocracy." (1995: 183). In other words, the reduction of the role of non-ethnic Azerbaijanis in the Party and state was an important achievement for the Azerbaijanification of the republic. This process, on the other hand, was achieved in the form of increased nepotism. Those who filled the important posts were predominantly friends and

colleagues whom he had a connection through his native region of Nakhchevan or the KGB, where he spent approximately two decades of his career. It seems more plausible to believe that nepotism in that period can be understood in the context of high-risk political environment, where securing one's safety was possible only through creating a network of trusted and predictable individuals. It should also be noted that Heydar Aliyev was able to implement his policies due to his loyalty to Moscow and frequent emphasis on his belief in main pillars of the Soviet ideology. During his term, official publications as well as speeches he made were fully in line with the ideology of the center. Consequently, it is possible to say that Heydar Aliyev's legacy is represented in dual terms. In the official realm, loyalty to Party and ideology was promoted while in the unofficial realm, a peculiar process of nativization, expressed in the form of increased awareness of national identity and interests, was gaining momentum. In only few years following the fall of Heydar Aliyev from the center's grace, the belief that problems can be solved as long as Azerbaijan gets along well with Moscow was going to be tested.

### **5.3.6 The Collapse of the USSR and the Emergence of the New Political Elite**

In the mid-1980s, political, economic and social life in the USSR was getting increasingly problematic. An important dynamic in the deterioration was related to the increased domination of the Party in all aspects of life. With the increased and unchecked control of Party elite, social, political and economic institutions became dysfunctional. Popular support for the ideological justification of the political system was eroding as the difference between discourse and reality increased. A series of international factors, too, were contributing to the deepening of the political and economic crisis in the USSR. With the election of Gorbachev as the new first secretary of the CPSU CC in 1985, a broad set of measures to change the situation were taken. The reforms were initiated after the 1987 January Plenum of the CC, where the reformists led by Gorbachev adopted the policy of "openness and democracy" (AT, Vol. 7: 231), generally known as *glasnost*. The policy of *perestroika* adopted in 1988 broadly aimed to restructure the political and economic structures so that the dominance of Party in these spheres was reduced. Contrary to its purpose, however,

perestroika accelerated the dissolution of the Soviet regime. Most importantly, the conservative Party elite remained in place. In the 1989 elections, one third of the newly elected People's Deputies of the USSR, and all deputies from the AzSSR were members of the Party *nomenklatura* (AT, Vol. 7: 232). Furthermore, in Azerbaijan, the official approach to perestroika was cautious and mainly confined to the restructuring of economic administration rather than politics (Altstadt 1992: 193). Due to the resistance from the *nomenklatura*, perestroika was rendered ineffective, and the economy worsened. The tension between the center and conservative Party elite led to the politicization of society and the strengthening of centrifugal forces. The center's ineffective handling of these new dynamics further exacerbated the situation.

Gorbachev's reform programs were justified by the belief that the chronic problems in politics and economy were a result of consolidated local elite networks. Brezhnev era policy of granting relative autonomy in local affairs and provide a stable environment for cadres to drive economic growth had resulted in such networks. In Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev was the symbol of Brezhnev era and his resistance to Gorbachev reforms was anticipated. The year 1987 was a turning point in Azerbaijan's venture into open discussion of problems and policies, as well as the year of Aliyev's fall from grace and disappearance from public view. Following a publicized campaign of criticism of his policies in the 1970s, Heydar Aliyev was removed from his post in October 1987. His resignation coincided with Armenia's open demand for the annexation of the NKAO (Altstadt 1992: 194).<sup>31</sup> Same month, first demonstration of the Armenian "Karabagh Committee" took place in Erevan.

As early as 1984, thousands of hectares of land were transferred to Armenia in line with a protocol signed by the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet in 1938, as a result of Moscow's pressures. Despite the fact that the Azerbaijani legislation ratified this decision in May 1969, the protocol was not implemented due to Heydar Aliyev's efforts. In the mid-1980s, several books were published in Armenia to support their

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<sup>31</sup> Although relating Heydar Aliyev's fall from grace might not be related to Armenian efforts, the coincidence of his removal from office with increased Armenian activism against Azerbaijan is crucial. This overlapping might have been crucial for the perception of Gorbachev's policies in Azerbaijan, as well as Heydar Aliyev's image as the nation's protector.

claims on Azerbaijani territories.<sup>32</sup> In the background of open threat towards Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Azerbaijani political leadership remained passive. In 1988, the forceful migration of Azerbaijani Turks living in Armenia started. First wave of migrants arrived in Azerbaijan in January 1988. On February 20, the Soviet of the NKAO accepted a decision to unify with the Armenian SSR but the reactions of Moscow and Baku were weak. On February 28, Sumgayit events broke out and trials were moved to the RSFSR, in clear violation of Azerbaijan's legal rights. Azerbaijani victims of Armenian violence, however, were not treated the same way.

In late May, first secretaries of both republics were removed by Moscow. On July 15 in clear violation of the sovereignty of the AzSSR, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR accepted the decision of the Soviet of the NKAO. Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet responded with a resolution stating that such a transfer is unacceptable on the basis of "Leninist principles" and the "preservation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity." Baku accepted a Moscow resolution in March 24 that socio-economic development of the NKAO should be fostered (Altstadt 1992: 197). Baku's official approach to the Karabagh problems was to blame a group of "extremist minority" and avoid confronting Armenia and Armenians as a whole and reference to republican and Union laws was Baku's preferred line of defense. Therefore, Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet accepted a resolution, referring to Article 78 of the USSR Constitution and Article 70 of the Azerbaijani constitution, that territorial changes cannot be made without the consent of the republics in question (Altstadt 1992: 197-198). On July 12, predominantly Armenian NKAO Soviet unilaterally declared its secession from the AzSSR.

On January 12, 1989, Moscow established direct control over NKAO without consulting the AzCP. Moscow appointed a special commission headed by Arkadii N. Volskii to observe conditions and strengthen and develop the autonomy of NKAO. Volskii commission and declaration of martial law in Stepanakert and Agdam meant the de-facto removal of NKAO from Azerbaijan rule. In the meantime, international coverage of events in Karabagh were predominantly pro-Armenian. The situation

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<sup>32</sup> The most prominent of these writers were Paruyr Qazaryan, Zori Balayan, S. Xanzadian, B. Ulubabyan and S. Kaputikyan.

started to evolve into a humanitarian crisis in the fall of 1988, when refugees from Armenia and NKAO reached 75,000. On November 12, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet issued its decision to retain NKAO in Azerbaijan.

On January 12, 1989, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet accepted the law on implementing a special administration in NKAO and appointed Volkov as the head of the special commission. Volkov's policy of mutual compromise between Armenia and Azerbaijani in the context of Karabagh problem further exacerbated the relations. The special administration, unable to achieve any positive results, was abolished in November same year. Due to the continued ineffectiveness of Moscow and Baku, Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR accepted the decision to unify with the NKAO on January 9, 1990 and elections for the people's deputies are held in NKAO. As the tension increased, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR declared state of emergency in the NKAO and neighboring raions. Between January and July, several military operations were conducted by the Soviet central authorities, but violence continued to escalate. The Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijani SSR accepted the declaration on the restoration of independence on August 30, 1991 and the Constitutional Act same year on October 18, the conflict evolved into a new phase.

Gorbachev's reform policies decreased the powers of the Communist Party, but failed to establish a new mechanism for the state administration. In Azerbaijan, the ruling communist elite were unable to unify and give direction to the rising discontent of the masses and parts of the elite. More importantly, the intellectual and artistic elite, who were at the same time respected opinion-leaders of the society, was discontent with the way the Baku government was responding to the problems. These figures, which matured during the debates on social problems and national identity in the past decade, were gradually evolving into a "counter elite," representing the will and demands of the public. With the declining prestige and legitimacy of the government therefore led to the intensification of the national movement. Demonstrations started in early 1988, but they were disorganized events formed around demands for justice, respect for law and especially national sovereignty. New social and political organizations like *Yurd*, *Chenlibel*, *Mustaqiller*, *Qala*, *Ashiq Alasqar* and *Ozan* associations, *Varliq* committee, initiative group of the *Azerbaijan Xalq Cebhesi*, *Baki Genc Alimler Klubu* and *Baki Incesenet Merkezi* were established

in 1987 and 1988. Furthermore, several new publications were providing a platform for the expression of opinions about several issues that could be dealt with only in a limited manner in the previous decade. Publications of late 1980s included *Azerbaijan*, *Odlar Yurdu*, *Azadliq*, *Yeni Fikir*, *Vatan sesi*, *Respublika*, *Ayrilik*, *Seher*, *Ayna*, *Dalga*, *Adalet*, *Ilham*, *Novruz* newspapers and *Genclik*, *Xazar*, *Aciq Soz* journals among others.

At the outset, the national movement lacked a unifying leadership. Discontent about the Karabagh problem was thus expressed through telegrams, letters and petitions sent to the AzCP CC. First mass demonstration was organized in February 19, 1988, with the initiative of the *Yurd* association, where the public demanded the governments in Moscow and Baku respond to Armenian aggressions. Azerbaijani government was permissive towards the demonstrations. On May 21, 1988, Moscow dismissed Baghirov and appointed Abdurrahman Halil Oghlu Vezirov as the new first secretary of the AzCP CC. Baghirov's successor Vazirov was a diplomat and neither did he have a power basis in Azerbaijan nor was he able to prevent the Supreme Soviet to follow its own course of action.

In November 15, new demonstrations began as the public was informed that the Topkhana woods were in danger due to Armenian plans to build a factory here. The slogans and demands of the demonstrators became more radical. The demonstrators came to the square with the flag of the Azerbaijani SSR, but on November 19, they replaced it with the flag of the ADR. There were no representatives from the Party or state apparatus, and Nemat Penakhov, Bakhtiyar Vahabzade and Sabir Rustemkhanli were the most frequently speakers in the square. The square became the center of a mass movement with a broad set of agenda formed around grievances under the Soviet system. During the speeches, Azerbaijani government's failure to respond to problems and Moscow's biased handling of the issues were frequently criticized. On December 4, the protesters were arrested but strikes were organized in Baku and other cities in the following days. Nemat Penakhov was also arrested and imprisoned, and was released in the summer of 1989. The Karabagh struggle that initiated mass protests and formation of new civic associations continued within the framework of a broader movement for economic, political, and cultural

autonomy (Altstadt 1992: 204). The need for a more organized political struggle was reflected in the creation of the Azerbaijani Popular Front (AXC) next year.

An important outcome of glasnost and perestroika was their unexpected impact on the centrifugal forces throughout the Union. Formation of civic associations with a broad variety of agendas was made possible with the changing political environment. In Azerbaijan, first associations were concerned with cultural issues and refugee relief, i.e. *Gaighy* and *The People's Aid Committee to Karabagh*. Upon the release of leaders of the Azadliq Square protests in the spring and summer of 1989, several political groups came together to form the APF. In fact, already in 1988, the efforts to establish a popular front in Azerbaijan have started in the form of an initiative group. The experiences of popular fronts in the Baltic republics were closely followed by the future leaders of the front. As a result of the negotiations between the initiative group of the AXC and the Varliq<sup>33</sup> group, the Temporary Initiative Center of the AXC was formed in March and the AXC was established in July 16, 1989. Ebulfesz Elchibey was elected as the president of the Front. Upon establishment, the APF immediately started to organize several individual and general strikes in order to press for its demands. In the demonstrations organized by the Front, a series of demands were voiced: an extraordinary meeting of the AzSSR Supreme Soviet, the discussion of the abolition of the Special Administration in the NKAO with the participation of the AXC board of directors, sovereignty, economic independence, new laws about civic rights, abolition of the extraordinary situation in Baku and other cities, official recognition of the AXC and so forth. Vezirov first rejected these demands but after the AXC responded with new strikes and demonstrations, talks between the AXC and the AzCP CC started. In addition to open discussion of AXC's demands, important legal changes are made with regard to sovereignty. Accordingly, Azerbaijani laws are recognized as preeminent to Union laws and regulations regarding the withdrawal from the Soviet Union were added to the Constitution (AT Vol: 7: 251). On October 5, the AzSSR Soviet of Ministers officially recognized the AXC. By that time, the Front became a vast organization with approximately 300,000 members and its prestige was confirmed with the recent gains. Therefore, the AXC was anticipated to win the

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<sup>33</sup> *Varliq* was an environmental group demanding the protection of the Topkhana natural reserve.

upcoming elections in March 1990, but its increasing nationalist discourse alarmed the communist establishment in Baku and Moscow. Furthermore, internal disputes between the “radicals” and “liberals” became apparent during the AXC Congress in late October. In early December, the radicals became predominant in the Front’s leadership. Throughout the country, signs of “dual-power” were increasing as the AXC started forming structures that functioned as state institutions (AT, Vol. 7: 253). The problem of Iranian border was growing and in December 31, 1989, the border posts between Soviet Azerbaijan and Iran were demolished by protesters. In January 11, 1990, the AXC assumed power in Lenkeran when they overthrew government institutions here. All these events were indicators of Moscow’s loss of authority in Azerbaijan. Whereas the liberals in the AXC gained the upper hand in the Administrative Board in the January 6-7 conference, the radicals were determining the course of events and in January 12, they established a “Council of National Defense” (Milli Mudafie Shurasi, MMSH) with the purpose of self-defense especially against Armenian aggression. When two Azerbaijanis were killed by Armenians in Baku in January 13, violence broke out in Baku, but neither the local forces of law enforcement nor the armed forces of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs took any action to prevent the killing of Armenians (AT, Vol. 7: 255). By the time the MMSH prevented further violence and restored order in Baku, the AzCP and Moscow was discussing the use of force in Azerbaijan. The Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet accepted the decision to declare state of emergency in Baku on January 20, 1990. Soviet troops and tanks started entering the city before midnight and according to official reports, 131 people lost their lives when the army forces exercised disproportional and indiscriminate force until the next morning. On January 21, only one-third of the People’s Deputies gathered in the extraordinary meeting initiated by the call of Bakhtiyar Vahabzade, Anar and Elchin. Majority of the deputies were absent, and many of them declared the meeting as “illegal” (AT, Vol. 7: 259). Next day, Heydar Aliyev spoke in a protest organized in front of the house of permanent representation of Azerbaijan in Moscow, and harshly criticized the leadership in Moscow and Baku. On January 22, those who were killed during the Soviet intervention were buried in the “Daghustu park” which was then renamed as the “Shehidler Khiyabani,” i.e. “The Alley of Martyrs.” Vezirov secretly fled to Moscow and on January 24, Moscow



appointed Ayaz Mutalibov as the new first secretary of the AzCP CC. The AXC MMSH was disbanded and several leaders of the Front were arrested, but the legitimacy of the Communist Party in the public opinion was totally destroyed, together with the hopes for perestroika. Another important consequence of the “Bloody January” was that the hopes for achieving the sovereignty of Azerbaijan within the political-legal structures of the USSR were abandoned altogether. The disintegration of the Union and the declaration of independence thus became paramount.

After the January events, the relations between the ruling elite and the Popular Front gained a more cooperative character. On May 17, the AXC and the government agreed upon the creation of an Advisory Board (*Meşveret Şurası*). Next day the board accepted the decision to create a presidential post and elected Ayaz Mutalibov as the first president. In return, the government made a series of concessions, including the declaration of May 28 as the day of “National Revival.” In July, Heydar Aliyev managed to return to Baku from Moscow, and in two days, he traveled to his native Nakhchevan Republic. On September 30, elections for the Soviet of the People’s Deputies are held in the Azerbaijani SSR and Nakhchevani MSSR. More than twenty organizations of the democratic forces joined together to form the “Democratic Bloc” (DemBlok) to compete in the elections. In the unfair and unfree elections, the DemBlok could win only thirty seats in the new Soviet of People’s Deputies whereas the communists won the vast majority. Yet, further attempts at restoring Azerbaijani independence are made on February 5, 1991. The name of the state was changed as “The Azerbaijani Republic” and the flag of the ADR was adopted as the new state flag.

Azerbaijani political leadership was still hoping that acting together with Moscow was a viable option<sup>34</sup> and despite the opposition of the AXC, a referendum on the future of the USSR was held on March 17, 1991. According the results of the

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<sup>34</sup> Azerbaijani communist leadership also believed that taking part in the referendum which were boycotted by Armenia could help gaining the favor of Moscow in the solution of the Karabagh problem.

referendum 93.3% of the votes were in favor of the preservation of the Union.<sup>35</sup> However, this result was going to be void in less than six months.

The August 19 coup organized by the conservative communists was interpreted positively by the Azerbaijani communist leadership. On August 21, in a televised address, Ayaz Mutalibov declared his support for the State Committee of State of Emergency, created by the coup leaders, but as the failure of the coup became apparent, Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijani Republic adopted the “Declaration of Independence” on August 30. On September 14, AzCP abolished itself. A “National Council” with 50 members replaced the Supreme Soviet and the Democratic Bloc was given half of the seats. On December 8, the USSR ceased to exist as a legal entity, when Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus created the Commonwealth of Independent States. Within same month, on December 29, Azerbaijan became an independent state following the referendum for the public approval of the Constitutional Act on the Independence of Azerbaijan Republic.

#### **5.4 The Popular Front Elite in Power**

Upon the declaration of independence, Karabagh problem remained as the biggest issue facing the independent Azerbaijan. While territorial losses continued, efforts to build a national army failed (lack of consensus about the institutional structure of national defense plus emergence of armed groups loyal to political groups as well as individuals, i.e. warlords). Khojali massacre, February 25-26. (Pro- Heydar Aliyev historiography explains the massacres not only by Armenian violence but also the incompetence of the Mutalibov government and politicians who “wanted to accumulate political power and benefit from the escalation of the political situation in the republic” AT Vol. 7, pp. 299-300. Apart from being not testable, this claim reflects the pro-Aliyev actors’ perception of the APF and its political successors). In early March, protests demanding the resignation of Ayaz Mutalibov were organized, and the president was forced to resign on March 6, 1992. Yaqub Mammadov, who was elected as the speaker of the parliament, became the acting president. The cabinet was

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<sup>35</sup> Nakhchevan MSSR did not participate in the referendum as well as Armenian SSR.

dissolved, and Hasan Hasanov, the prime minister, was assigned with the duty of forming a new cabinet. Following Hasanov's talks with the AXC, a coalition government with three ministers from the latter was formed and the Supreme Soviet decided to hold new presidential elections in June 7. In March 17, in an attempt to ensure the support of the army, Yaqub Mammadov appointed Rahim Qaziyev as the Minister of Defense. In April 30, Qaziyev dissolved the volunteer corps in Shusha and Lachin loyal to the AXC. In early May, the volunteer armed units announced their unification under Suret Huseynov's leadership. Shusha was lost on May 8. Next day, Elchibey demanded ceasing of mass protests by various political groups. As Cornell puts it, "The fragile relationship between the old and new elites broke at its first test." (2011: 64). The acting president Mamedov and Qaziyev, minister of Defense appointed by the AXC, mutually blamed each other in the loss of Shusha. Mutallibov, who was preparing for a come-back after his resignation, decided that it was a time to act.

After Shusha, the last Azerbaijani-held town in Karabagh, was lost, various armed groups loyal to different groups struggling for power came to Baku (Ayaz Mutallibov, Rahim Qaziyev, AXC). On May 14, following the threats from pro-Mutallibov armed groups, some members of the Supreme Soviet announced his return to the presidency. Mutallibov immediately declared state of emergency, issued a decree on limiting political freedoms and abolished the decision to hold presidential elections. The AXC leadership declared that it will not recognize the anti-constitutional acts of Mutallibov. Next day, supporters of the AXC and armed groups stormed the parliament, and Mutallibov was forced to escape to Russia. On May 18, the Supreme Soviet declared decisions accepted on May 14 are illegal. President of the Supreme Soviet Yaqub Mammadov resigned from his post. He was replaced by Isa Qambar, the new acting president until the next presidential elections. The Supreme Soviet was renamed as the "National Assembly" (*Milli Majlis*). In the new coalition government, communists and members of the AXC were included. Same day, Armenian forces took Lachin, thereby forming a corridor between Armenia and Karabagh.

Presidential elections were held on June 7 as planned and Ebulfez Elchibey was elected as the new president of the country. The AXC candidate won less than

60% of the votes and the results represented a clear move from authoritarian regime, where candidates were elected with almost unanimity of the electorate. Azerbaijan was experiencing a proliferation of political parties and civic associations (AT Vol. 7: 308), reminiscing the ADR era.

The Popular Front power was established in a highly volatile political and economic environment. The tasks imposed by the process of “multiple transition” represented a serious challenge for the new government, which enjoyed the support of masses but lacked an elite-segment broad enough to respond to these challenges. State institutions inherited from the Soviet era were still intact and the re-building of these institutions, including state organs related to executive, legislative and judicial bodies was needed to establish a new democratic polity. Simultaneously, the new government was challenged by the tasks of reforming the economy which suffered from the collapse of the Soviet Union. The formation of a new national army was an imminent task due to continuing Armenian aggression towards territories under Azerbaijan jurisdiction. Although Azerbaijan was independent for nearly half year, Mutalibov government did virtually nothing to address these problems and the AXC government had to initiate these reforms from scratch. The outline of the APF’s reform agenda was presented in two different drafts published Azadliq newspaper in January 1992. Although the two versions reflected the divisions between the liberals and nationalists within the AXC, their emphasis was on an independent, secular and democratic republic respectful for rule of law. The program ratified on January 26 was a unified version of the two drafts and reflected the main principles of the ADR and its political representative Musavat (Cornell 2011: 61).

The political system was inherited from the Soviet era, where the Communist Party represented the actual ruling elite whereas the state structures were subordinate to the Party in actually running the state affairs. When the Communist Party was abolished, the Front assumed the political power, but the elite in state institutions were almost intact. The preparation of a new constitution to replace the Soviet era constitution of 1978 and elections for a new parliament was crucial for the reforms to be successful, but both issues had to be postponed because of the armed conflict and internal unrests such as the emergence of warlords. In effect, the AXC was “unable to free itself from the formal as well as informal power brokers, or to take the initiative

and lay down new rules of the game.” (Cornell 2011: 67). However, the AXC government was able to achieve significant successes in terms of state and nation building in its short life span.

The main policies of the AXC government demonstrated its’ commitment to establish a democratic regime. Under the AXC government, a multi-party system proliferated alongside with a highly free environment for the press and media. New laws to facilitate the shift to market economy were accepted. In 1992, *manat* became the new national currency, banking laws are enacted and a national bank was established. To strengthen international recognition and legitimacy, Azerbaijan became member of several international organizations. In the sphere of culture and identity, several reforms were introduced to reverse the policies implemented under Russian and Soviet rules. The Cyrillic alphabet was replaced with a distinct Azerbaijani Latin alphabet. The AXC also enacted legal changes to make Azerbaijani Turkish the only valid language of state, and promoted a campaign for the de-Russification of family names.

The propagation of openly pro-Turkey political perspectives by some of the Front leaders was also paralleled by the increasing internal stability of Azerbaijan. While the replacement of the Cyrillic alphabet by Latin alphabet was received positively by the general public, the decision to rename the language as Turkish was not. In fact, the creation of a distinct Azerbaijani identity started during the country’s struggle for independence under Russian Empire but was later co-opted by the Soviet rule in late 1930s. During the course of several decades, Azerbaijani identity was internalized by many, and a sharp turn towards reclaiming the national identity and language as Turkish was met by a resistance from many groups in the society. The radical discourse and practices of the AXC provided a pretext for ethnic upheaval, which were also supported by neighboring states. By 1992, separatist tendencies among some members of the ethnic Talysh and Lezgi citizens became apparent (AT Vol. 7: 317-318). In the north, the Lezgins supported by Russia resisted being drafted by the Azerbaijani army in the fight against Armenians while in the South, with the support of Iran, the Talysh attempted to establish a Talysh-Mugam republic under the leadership of Talysh army officer Alikram Humbetov. The separatist movements in question emerged with the support of foreign states and led by a small group of leaders,

and there is insufficient proof of a broad based popular movement for independence. Still, one may assume that the ethnic minorities were suffering from the same political and economic instability in the country in addition to their disapproval of ethnic nationalism propagated by important figures in the government, e.g. Rahim Qaziyev (Cornell 2011: 75).

Furthermore, the transition from a centrally planned economy to market economy required careful planning and implementation but lack of effective mechanisms of governmental control over the state and business affairs led to widespread corruption. The catastrophic impact of the collapse of Soviet system on economy was coupled with a growing black market that made use of war-time shortages and inflation reached astronomic levels.

The multiplicity of challenges facing the new government in Baku could not be overcome without a carefully calculated and implemented foreign policy. The apparent pro-Turkish, anti-Russian and anti-Iranian practices and declarations indicated an ideologically-determined foreign policy, rather than a realist and pragmatist approach. While it is true that the AXC's policies and discourse was perceived negatively especially by Russia and Iran, the real cause of the failure of the foreign policy however was more related to the lack of experienced cadres than the content of the foreign policy itself (Cornell 2011: 70). Relations with the Western countries were also in a highly unfavorable condition, especially in comparison to the AXC's commitment to a Western style, liberal democratic political system based on market economy. Relations with the European states could be established rather late, while in the US, the Armenian lobby was able to achieve a crucial success against Azerbaijan. Article 907 of the Freedom Support Act passed in October 1992 prevented any US assistance to Azerbaijan on the grounds that Azerbaijan was the aggressor in the Karabagh conflict. Furthermore, Azerbaijan was also losing the media war. In Russia, the US and major European countries, the media and the coverage of news of the conflict were undeniably pro-Armenian.

For the AXC government, oil could have provided a genuine leverage in strengthening international recognition and legitimacy. An agreement with the Western companies to produce and market oil was also compatible with the government's willingness to build a liberal-democratic regime and limit Russia's

hegemony in the region. Furthermore, an oil deal would also mean a new financial resource to fund the war and assist the failing economy. However, as Cornell states, “Oil was the only foreign policy tool Azerbaijan had, but Baku had been unable to use it.” (2011: 76).

In addition to most crucial problem, i.e. the Karabagh war, the AXC was unable to exercise its authority fully. AXC’s lack of sufficient number of people who possessed sufficient experience of state and bureaucracy was a significant setback. After they came to power, majority of high-ranking members of the state apparatus remained in their seats. Despite the fact that the election of Elchibey as president was a clear success for AXC, the functioning of the government was limited by the parliament elected before the independence and included several former communists. On February 27 1993, Elchibey was complaining that “the heads of the executive power and law enforcement agencies are reducing the authority of the state” (AT Vol. 7: 311). Although the AXC government wanted to hold new parliamentary elections and engage in the preparation of a new constitution to strengthen its power, the elections could take place only in 1995. Similar to other revolutionary governments, the AXC was mostly prioritizing loyalty over merit. Those who joined the Front after May 1992 were mainly excluded from administrative posts, and those appointed by the AXC had little or no experience of the state and bureaucratic apparatus. The Front’s loose organizational structure, which played an important role in its high popularity as a movement, was creating problems once they were in power. Discord between law enforcement organs and loss of control over the armed forces were increasing. In an attempt to neutralize the Minister of Defense Rahim Qaziyev, who was believed to maintain close ties with Moscow, the AXC government promoted Suret Huseyinov as the “authorized representative of the President” in Mountainous Karabagh and the war zones.

In the first months of AXC government, Azerbaijani armed groups were able to achieve successful results in the front. However, in the last months of 1992 and first months of 1993, territorial losses continued, mainly by the defeat of army forces under the control of Rahim Qaziyev. Once again, Karabagh problem and the negative situation in the war became a major determinant of the decreasing popularity of government. The AXC was able to achieve military gains in the first months. The

introduction of a Ministry of Defense as a coordinating mechanism between armed groups and initiatives to create a national army helped Azerbaijan regain some territories. However, the groups that formed the army were practically under the control of different groups and individuals. In December 1992, forces under the command of Suret Huseyinov retreated from the front line and gathered in Ganja in late January 1993. Their retreat facilitated further Armenian advances, and the government dismissed both the minister of defense Qaziyev and Huseyinov, but both of them disobeyed. In the following months, Armenian forces captured more Azerbaijani territories while the authority of the AXC eroded as it failed to effectively control armed groups acting independently in the country. In early June, Huseyinov mobilized his forces towards Baku and on June 14, unable to stop the army commander by use of force, the AXC government agreed to accept his demands. Accordingly, Isa Qambar, chair of the parliament, prime minister and three power-ministers resigned. Amidst external and internal threats towards territorial integrity, Azerbaijan was drawn into a power vacuum. With the call of Heydar Aliyev, a referendum on Elchibey's presidency was held on August 30, 1993, and the latter's presidency was terminated by a popular vote of no-confidence. In the presidential elections of October 3, 1993, Heydar Aliyev won 98.8 of the votes and became the new president of the Azerbaijani Republic.

In a comparison of the ADR and Popular Front government, Cornell suggests that both experiences represented an intelligentsia-led movement and therefore suffered from similar advantages and disadvantages. To begin with, the both periods were "characterized by well-meant reforms that never had a chance to be thoroughly implemented" (2011: 67) because of internal and external sources of instability. While an intelligentsia in power meant long-lasting consequences for national identity and statehood, the lack of intelligentsia's experience in state affairs coupled with internal and external challenges were the determinants of the demise of both (2011: 60).

The meaning of the dissolution of the USSR and the declaration of independence of the Soviet successor states did not have a unilateral meaning for all republics. Due to a series of factors, including geographical location, the process of incorporation to the Soviet Union, prior experience of independence and statehood, the relationship between communist rulers and opposition actors, and the presence of



a popular and political movement aiming for independence, the process of transition from communism and initial years of independence were experienced differently in the successor states. Whereas the Baltic republics were better equipped for independence, Central Asian republics were “catapulted” into it. In this regard, Azerbaijan can be regarded as an in-between category. The presence of an assertive and articulate national-democratic opposition was the most important factor differentiating Azerbaijan from Central Asian republics. Heydar Aliyev’s return to the leadership of Azerbaijan as a result of the events that overthrew the AXC government cannot be compared to the phenomenon of continued power of former Communist Party First Secretaries as it happened in Central Asian republics. In 1993, Heydar Aliyev inherited a republic, however dysfunctional, devoted to pluralism and openness. In other words, Aliyev’s return was not equal to the return of communist-era principles of policy. The political environment within which he had to work was therefore defined by the national-democratic dynamics set in motion by the AXC and the “remaining autocratic tendencies of the ruling class” (Cornell 2011: 80).

Another importance of the era of the APF government is that it provides to put Azerbaijani authoritarian consolidation in a reverse perspective. In other words, the failure to democratize via a popular, nationalist-democratic government might shed light on how authoritarian rule was maintained and strengthened. The elite and cadres of the APF government possessed popular support, but they were in deep antagonism with the existing establishment, majority of whom were reluctant to abandon networks, policies and practices of the Soviet era. Their interest was vested on preserving the existing networks. Despite very important achievements in terms of de-Sovietization, nation and state building, the cadres of the APF were inexperienced in state affairs. Furthermore, their radical agenda received little support from the former members of the CP and Aliyev network. The legislative body and the constitution could not be changed because of the war on Karabagh. The ascent of the APF has also cost them to lose important components of the broader movement, namely the social democratic groups. Loss of important allies, war, economic crisis and lack of support from existing state cadres coupled with the inability to change constitution and parliament thus resulted in the eventual failure of the APF government. Elchibey, the leader of the APF government was not a man of politics or network, but a man of

cause. Furthermore, he was very reluctant to use mass media as an integral instrument to develop a public image and create public support for his policies. To put it briefly, the APF was able to come to power, but failed to change the political system. In comparison to Baltic countries or other Southern Caucasian republics, the movement that led to independence had weaker contacts with the state and CP cadres. A leader who mastered this system, or in fact built it, was therefore able to return to power relatively easily.

### **5.5 The Return of Heydar Aliyev**

Although Heydar Aliyev was forced to abandon his career in politics in 1987 as a result of Gorbachev's reform initiatives, he did not remain inactive. Following the events of Black January in 1990, he organized a demonstration in Moscow. Due to a new legislative arrangement made as part of Gorbachev reforms, he was unable to compete in the presidential elections since the law prevented individuals older than 70 years of age from candidacy. Thus, he was unable to run in the presidential elections of 1991 and 1992 despite his continuing popularity in Azerbaijan.

During Mutallibov's presidency, he briefly visited Baku before returning to Nakhchevan, where his basis of political influence was highest. Here he was elected as the speaker of the Supreme Soviet of the Nakhchevani Autonomous Republic. As the Speaker of the Nakhchevan Autonomous Republic, Aliyev was also the ex officio second deputy speaker of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijani Republic. This was an important facilitating factor in his return to Baku following the overthrow of the Popular Front government (Cornell 2011: 66). As the political turmoil ensued in Azerbaijan proper, he focused mainly on solving the problems in Nakhchevan through diplomacy. The autonomous republic was suffering heavily from the conflict with Armenia. Due to Armenian blockade, Nakhchevan was unable to receive fuel and electricity. Its' border villages were frequently attacked by Armenian groups. In March 1992, upon Heydar Aliyev's visit, significant assistance was provided by Turkey (AT, Vol. 7: 309). Later in August, he also visited Iran to establish transportation facilities and electricity transfer. Because of the internal and external problems faced by Baku, the central authority over Nakhchevan was virtually non-existent and the autonomous republic was handling its' problems independently under

the leadership of Heydar Aliyev. His accomplishments have helped him secure political support in his home region and demonstrate a resolute leader in an era of turmoil in Azerbaijan. His image as a potential contender for power in Azerbaijan was strengthened when he hosted the celebrations for the anniversary of the ADR in Nakhchevan in May 1992, with the presence of Suleyman Demirel, the president of the Turkish Republic and an old friend of Aliyev (Cornell 2011: 66). Due to his accomplishments, his basis of support was increasing in Nakhchevan, but while the AXC was in power, he refrained from actively opposing its' policies. Nevertheless, AXC power was not established in Nakhchevan, and in October, armed groups loyal to the Front attempted to take control of the republic's administration but failed. AXC government's attempts to abolish the status of Nakhchevan as an autonomous republic were also resisted by Heydar Aliyev's diplomatic moves. In the summer of 1993, however, the political circumstances were changed and Baku was compelled to invite Heydar Aliyev to solve the crisis, which was evolving into a government coup and civil war.

On June 9, Heydar Aliyev arrived at Baku on an aircraft provided by Turkish state, and was appointed as the Speaker of the Parliament. On June 18, as Surat Huseynov and his forces were near Baku, Elchibey escaped to his hometown in Nakhchevan, but did not resign from presidency, although on June 24 the national assembly stripped him of several presidential powers. Haydar Aliyev was able to make a deal with Surat Huseyinov and the latter became the prime minister. He was also given the control of the two power ministries, i.e. the ministry of defense and the interior. This way, Aliyev achieved some level of political stability in which he could further build Azerbaijani stateness together with his personal authority. Aliyev's rule, however, was challenged from various sources of instability: lack of control over state institutions; the lack of monopoly over use of power, i.e. the warlords whose loyalty to state was highly questionable; a collapsed economy in which inflation and war-time exploiters; and finally, the war over Karabagh. The key to address these issues successfully, however, was the rebuilding of a personal network, which would secure Aliyev's position and ensure that his policies are not challenged at the implementation stage.

Just like his appointment as the First Secretary in 1969, building a personal network of trusted cadres was necessary in 1993 in order to overcome the complex set of challenges. During the Soviet era, Heydar Aliyev had reshaped the cadres in state and bureaucratic institutions by appointing mostly acquaintances from the KGB or Nakhchevan. This approach was not intended to end corruption or remedy structural problems of economic and political apparatus, but to “make the system work” and ensure the basic requirements of stability and fulfillment of economic targets. According to Cornell, the purpose of Aliyev was to make “control” a key element of structure of power in the absence of ideological loyalty or the rule of law, so that informal practices would not have a destructive impact upon state building (Cornell 2011: 83). Within a structure reminiscent of feudal political systems, some of the powers were delegated to the lower-level administrators in return for loyalty. Corruption, as long as it was kept under control, was a key factor in the functioning of such a system. However, to avoid the fate of the AXC government, removing potential contenders for power and restore the state monopoly on use of power was also a crucial task in the first years of his power.

Heydar Aliyev’s rise to power was not through the support of armed groups, nor did he have any such instrument available to him. However, his knowledge and experience was essential in the removal of rival or potentially threatening leaders of armed groups. First, in 1994, Heydar Aliyev urged the people in the Talysh region to rise-up against Alikram Humbetov, who declared an independent state here but in fact lacked popular support. Humbetov was sentenced to death in 1996, but pardoned in 2004. The next stage of challenge erupted right after Heydar Aliyev signed a production sharing agreement with a consortium of Western oil companies. Popularly known as the “contract of the century,” the deal was 8 billion USD worth, and was valid for 30 years. Next day, Humbetov and Gaziyeu escaped from prison, and some high-ranking politicians were assassinated. Following the arrest of three OMON members, Rovshan Javadov, a deputy Minister of Interior, revolted. While negotiations continued with Javadov, who retreated to the OMON base, Suret Huseyinov started to capture strategic points around Ganja. On a live televised address, Heydar Aliyev called the people protect the country’s independence against “foreign forces.” Although Javadov softened his stance and declared his loyalty to

Heydar Aliyev and Azerbaijani state once the scope of popular support for Aliyev was seen, Huseyinov was accused in plotting a coup and escaped to Moscow. Javadov, who retained his post, has made a second attempt in March 1995, while Heydar Aliyev was abroad. In a coup attempt in which former Popular Front supporters and some Turkish citizens were involved, Javadov was killed and the last of the coup attempts against Heydar Aliyev was defeated. After a long time, the state regained its monopoly on use of force and stability in Azerbaijan was largely restored.

On the problem of Karabagh, the joining of Azerbaijan into the CIS in late 1993 was a turning point. Afterwards, Azerbaijan was provided with Russian arms and regained some of its invaded territories, but soon the military situation turned into a stalemate. On May 16, 1994, a ceasefire agreement was signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia, despite occasional violation of the terms of the agreement. For Azerbaijan, the cost of the conflict was heavy: political control of Mountainous Karabagh, together with five surrounding Azerbaijani regions was lost, while more than a million ethnic Azerbaijani Turks were forced to leave their homes and seek shelter elsewhere in Azerbaijan. Yet, the cease fire further helped Azerbaijan stabilize and focus on the affairs of state and economy. Since then diplomacy became the major mechanism for the search of a solution although mutual violations of the cease fire occurs on the borderline on an irregular basis and scope. Nevertheless, military action remained always as an option as expressed in various declarations of Ilham Aliyev, especially after Azerbaijani army significantly strengthened in the late 2000s.

After achieving stability through eliminating the contenders for power and the “freezing” of the Karabagh problem, Heydar Aliyev engaged in the tasks of a new constitution and parliament. Four years after independence, Azerbaijan was still ruled by the 1978 Constitution of Azerbaijan SSR and a parliament elected in 1990. On November 12, 1995, Azerbaijanis accepted the new legislations, the final draft of which was made public only six days before the referendum, thereby effectively bypassing the need to discuss the text in detail. The new constitution was characterized by broad powers given to the presidency, although it also recognized a separation of powers by including an independent judiciary and legislative body, i.e. the Milli Majlis. Elections based on a new electoral law accepted earlier in August, are held on the same day with the constitutional referendum. Accordingly, 100 of 125 seats in the

parliament were to be elected on a single-member constituency whereas the remaining seats were spared for party lists. The elections were “neither free nor fair” first and foremost due to the prevention of opposition parties and majority of candidates of single-member constituencies from running in the elections. Opposition parties including the AXCP, Musavat and the AMIP won few seats, but later they were able to gain more seats through by-elections. Heydar Aliyev’s efforts to build a strong presidential regime and a popular desire for order and stability notwithstanding, the opposition parties were unable to regain popular support or achieve a significant electoral success in the relatively free political environment. In 1998 presidential elections, Heydar Aliyev was re-elected with 77.6% of the votes. During his rule, Aliyev was also able to construct an image of a democratic, benevolent leader who saved his nation from destruction. In his rhetoric and “official history,” the political opposition, mainly represented by the AXCP and Musavat were associated with chaos and instability. Throughout 1990s and early 2000s, authoritarianism gradually strengthened whereas opposition, media and civic rights and liberties retreated. The initial enthusiasm and expectations for a liberal democratic order were gradually abandoned.

In Azerbaijan, as in other semi-authoritarian regimes, succession was seen as a key moment for the future trajectory of the regime. In a political system where a strong leader ensures balance between different groups and individuals sharing the political and economic power, the periods of presidential succession opens up space for uncertainty and renegotiations among the elite. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the ruling elite comprised of the “old guards” who aimed at the preservation of the existing order and a younger group who demanded reform. It was this latter group, which was affiliated with Ilham Aliyev, son of the president. Heydar Aliyev’s deteriorating health since 1999 were accompanied by speculations about the next president. Since the Azerbaijani ruling elite was some sort of coalition, Ilham Aliyev, who kept a low profile during his father’s presidency, was not the apparent candidate. Shortly before the presidential elections on October 15, 2003, Ilham Aliyev withdrew his candidacy in favor of his son and Ilham Aliyev became the new president with 75.38% of the votes whereas Musavat leader Isa Qambar received 15.09% of the elections, which were neither free nor fair. The opposition did not recognize the results

but the protests evolved into violent clashes between the supporters of opposition and law enforcement forces. The protests were ended with a crackdown of the opposition, and Isa Qambar was put under house arrest.

In Azerbaijan SSR, the path leading to independence was closely intertwined with the question of national sovereignty. The overlapping of Gorbachev reforms with the rising Armenian claims and aggression towards Karabagh, as well as Moscow's biased handling of the problem were decisive in the emergence of the national movement in Azerbaijan in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, Party and state apparatuses in Azerbaijan chose to remain within the legal framework of the Soviet Union and kept their distance to popular demands rising in the society. The incapacity of the Baku government coupled with Moscow's approach facilitated the emergence of a movement independent from the state. According to Altstadt, this was the "politicization of a long process – clarifying cultural and social issues that had been reflected in the Azerbaijani Turkish publications in previous decades" (Altstadt 1992: 204). The new leaders of the AXC were educated and articulate, matured in the debates in history, literature, arts, etc. in the previous decade. This was also a new generation. Azerbaijan lost its cultural and political intelligentsia in 1930s. But those who took to the streets and became the leaders of the APF were people born after the Second World War and their political socialization was different from those in the 1930s and 1940s.

The AXC was a mass organization with a broad membership and included non-elite among its members. The Front was definitely nationalist in character, although it included leaders and members from a broad array of political perspectives. Elchibey was defining the APF as a national democratic movement that could not come into being without the elite and masses. Individuals and organizations were brought together not by a common objective political purpose, but rather to make the rulers respond to the will and demands of the society. Organizationally, APF was a confederative structure and its decisions were not binding for lower levels of organization. This loose structure allowed the immense growth of membership and influence over a brief period of time, but also jeopardized the unity of members, especially when important choices were to be made. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the escalation of Karabagh war represented therefore a serious challenge for the Front.

## **5.6 Ilham Aliyev's Succession to Presidency**

The political landscape of Azerbaijan as it was studied in this dissertation was shaped largely during the presidency of Ilham Aliyev. It should be noted that the political processes from 2003 onwards are not inseparable from the previous practices of closing the political sphere. The consolidation of Ilham Aliyev's power was achieved through the elimination of potential rivals within the ruling elite as well as further limiting the borders within which political opposition was able to operate. These processes were accompanied by a gradually shrinking space for civil society organizations and critical media, achieved by legal arrangements and their strong enforcement. Imprisonment, intimidation and harassment of journalists and activists have become common events in the final one and a half decade.

Ilham Aliyev, whose willingness to come to power and ability to unify the ruling elite around himself was questioned, has transformed Azerbaijan from a partly-democratic country into a hegemonic-authoritarian state. It is also worth noticing that Azerbaijan has experienced a significant level of economic development in his era, thanks to significantly increased oil and gas revenues. Important steps are taken in the sphere of state building, while effective power remained personal. Positions of state administration, as they were before Ilham Aliyev, continue to be closely tied to persons, thereby raising questions about the quality of institutions built. In terms of international relations, Azerbaijan retained and improved its policy of balanced foreign policy, thus trying to limit the impact of international actors on domestic policy. Under the leadership of Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan has also taken steps to improve its international image. Being himself the head of the Olympic Committee of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev demonstrated his awareness of the importance of international events in promoted his country. Various high-level international cultural and sports events held in Azerbaijan, on the other hand, had a two-fold impact. First, they have both helped to make the country internationally more recognizable and reinforced the country's willingness to embrace global values. Second, the events have driven discussions and awareness about the human rights and nation-building problems in Azerbaijan.

The developments in the post-2003 period in Azerbaijan therefore can be defined as the emergence of a closed political system. Potential for political change



either through intra-elite or inter-elite competition is almost eliminated in present day Azerbaijan. Whereas the ruling elite became more fully consolidated and resembled more like a pyramidal structure in comparison to pre-2003 period, the probability of the ruling elite to produce a rival for leadership is severely limited. In terms of formal opposition parties, on the other hand, the situation has worsened. Boycotting the elections since 2005, the opposition parties lost a handful of seats they had in an already symbolic and powerless parliament. Although parties do still exist, they are allowed to remain within a narrowly defined area, and their access to the general public is highly limited. The elimination of almost all legally guaranteed avenues for the expression of popular demands and discontent, in my opinion, is a significant loss for any political system. Although few in number, spontaneous local popular demonstrations directed towards local state officials indicate how the lack of rule of law and formal mechanisms to voice complaints and demands can lead to unpredictable events.

Finally, in terms of the subject of this research, I can say that the process of political elite formation suffers serious setbacks in Azerbaijan. In the post-2003 period, the tightening of the ruling elite and practical powerlessness of the opposition has resulted in the concentration of political power in fewer hands. In countries where political power is used to increase economic power, motives for reform decline. Many of the proponents of the main course of political processes in Azerbaijan with whom I interviewed during my fieldwork contended that the process of state building is a more pressing issue for Azerbaijan than democratization. Developing the state, in other words, precede concerns for the development of society. Stability is another keyword in the popular and elite cognitive framework in explaining the support for a strong political leadership. The continuation of the invasion of Qarabagh and adjacent territories are thus used in justifying the stability achieved by the emphasis on stateness. It is still premature to conclude whether the trade-off between state-building and democratization is justified, most importantly due to the personal character of leadership and opaque, closed process of elite recruitment in Azerbaijan.

Following independence in 1991, presidential succession was a major question in former Soviet states, including Azerbaijan. Especially in Central Asia and Southern Caucasus, relative stability in early 1990s was restored mostly by the re-appearance

of Soviet era strong-men as presidents of independent republics (Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, Saparmurat Niyazov in Turkmenistan, Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan, Shevardnadze in Georgia, and Heydar Aliyev in Azerbaijan). In these countries, and in Kyrgyzstan where the president was not a former Communist Party First Secretary, preservation of stability in the initial years of independence was dependent on balancing the interests of powerful businesspeople, regional networks and other potential contenders of power. The unity of the ruling elite as a coalition of these elements depends on careful distribution of resources, including knowledge. This is a delicate process and therefore political systems in these countries had a built-in tendency to produce potential rivals from within the ruling elite. Periods of presidential succession, therefore, were signified as the most critical moments for possible political change.

In Azerbaijan, too, presidential succession became a pressing issue in the late 1990s as the 1923-born Heydar Aliyev's health started to deteriorate. As the son of the president, Ilham Aliyev was born in Baku in 1961, lived and studied in Moscow throughout his father's office in Politburo. He obtained a PhD from Moscow State Institute of International Relations and also taught here for five years. After the disintegration of the USSR, he became a businessman, before he became the vice president of SOCAR. In 1995, he was elected to the parliament, and headed the Olympic Committee of Azerbaijan. This last office increased the publicity of the future president who previously kept a lower profile in public (Cornell 2011: 101-102). From 1999 on positions he was appointed and elected indicated that he was a strong candidate to succeed his father. In 1999 he became the deputy chairman and in 2001 the chairman of the ruling YAP. In 2000 parliamentary elections, his campaign posters carrying the slogan "*YAP halqdan Ilham alur*" ("YAP is inspired by the people"; Ilham, in Azerbaijani language means inspiration) reinforced his image as a potential successor. From 2001 to 2003 he traveled abroad for official meetings as the head of Azerbaijani delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe while he supported the image of a leading politician abroad as well.

Despite his political career, it was not certain up until few months before the presidential election whether Ilham Aliyev was the designated successor (Cornell 2011: 102). Despite the fact that Heydar Aliyev had managed to eliminate threats to

his power and consolidated his rule in mid 1990s, there were still potential contenders for power, especially from within the ruling coalition. This coalition, which united under the YAP and around Heydar Aliyev, possessed members with significant financial and political resources to compete for presidency. This group was roughly divided as the “old guards” which included former Communist Party officials and a younger generation of post-Soviet ruling elite. Prior to his election, and in his initial years as president, popular and elite perceptions of Ilham Aliyev associated him with the second group, who were believed to be more reform oriented as opposed to the former group. In other words, his candidacy was not welcome by all members of the ruling elite and even if he were elected, it was unclear whether he would receive the support of all of them. Furthermore, it was not clear whether Ilham Aliyev was personally motivated to succeed his father (Cornell 2011: 102-103; Ottaway 2003: 70).

An important step in managing the succession process was the constitutional amendments made in 2002. Apparently designed to improve the operation of the political system and electoral process in line with the democratic principles, the government worked together with the OSCE and Council of Europe. In practice, however, some of the 39 amendments made served to facilitate a smoother transition of power to Ilham Aliyev without destabilizing the political power structure. One of the amendments is the election of all parliamentary deputies through a single-member majority system. This amendment, according to Alkan, made the election of local elites who are in close relationship with the government and local bureaucrats who are appointed to their posts easier (Alkan 2010: 181-182). Conversely, the abolition of party lists and system of proportional representation made the election of opposition candidates more difficult. Another amendment is the decreasing of the requirement to collect absolute majority instead of two-third of the popular votes in presidential elections. Against the risk of receiving less than 67% of votes and make a second round necessary, this amendment made the election of the president during the first round easier. A third important amendment includes the replacement of the speaker of parliament with prime minister, in case the presidential office is vacant. In line with this amendment, Heydar Aliyev appointed his son prime minister on August 4, two days before his departure to the U.S. for medical treatment. A fourth amendment

included the entitlement of the chief public prosecutor with the right to introduce a bill, in addition to other members of the high judiciary, who are appointed by the president. As a clear indicator of the increased influence of the presidential post on law-making, this amendment has helped the declining power of the parliament. The constitutional amendments were complemented by a series of new legal arrangements which limited press freedom. With a presidential decree published in September, press organs are held responsible for consulting the State Security Commission in case they doubt the news they publish can jeopardize national security. Publication of any such news would make the publisher legally responsible, thus increasing motives for self-censorship. Furthermore, a commission which holds the right to authorize the licenses of national and local broadcasting companies was set up. These new legal and institutional arrangements few months prior to elections attracted criticism of opposition who argued that these arrangements are new instruments for increased pressure on media. Another legal arrangement that strengthened the government's position in elections was the new electoral law. According to the new law, the composition of the Central Election Committee (CEC) was changed. Following the new legal arrangements, the ruling party, parties and independent deputies who support YAP guaranteed 10 of 15 seats in the committee. Whereas the opposition was able to get 5 of the seats, almost all CEC decisions were ratified with the approval of 10 members. Also, the candidates are required to collect 45,000 signatures and a payment of \$33,000 in order to apply for candidacy.

In relation to the problem of presidential succession, a more crucial issue was the candidacy. On the basis of legal requirements, 20 candidates applied for the presidential elections. One potential candidate was Rasul Quliyev, former speaker of the National Assembly between 1993 and 1996, who was a political refugee in the US. Quliyev was a member of Heydar Aliyev's Nakhchevani network, and his candidacy could possibly unite those within the ruling elite and bureaucracy, who might have doubted Ilham Aliyev's ability to preserve the unity his father achieved among the ruling elite. In other words, in case of Quliyev's candidacy, the ruling elite might have risked its unity (Alkan 2010: 185-186). The position of the political opposition in Azerbaijan, on the other hand, failed to reach an agreement on a single candidate. While the talks between Musavat and Etibar Memmedov's Milli Istiqlal Party under

the moderation of Ali Kerimli failed, the opposition's chance to agree on one candidate also ended. Days before the election, Musavat Party declared that they agreed to cooperate with Quliyev and in case Isa Qambar wins, the former was to be appointed as the prime minister. Previously, Quliyev's candidacy for presidency was cancelled due to his US citizenship, and it can be said that Musavat Party thus attempted to attract some of the ruling elite's and the US' support (Alkan 2010: 188). Ali Kerimli's AXCP, on the other hand, declared their support for Etibar Memmedov. Another candidate, whose application was rejected, was Ayaz Mutalibov, who lived in Moscow. Ali Kerimli has withdrawn his candidacy to endorse Etibar Memmedov. Finally, with the withdrawal of Yunus Oghuz, the candidate of Milli Vahdet Party, the ruling elite entered the elections with one candidate whereas the opposition was highly fractured with seven different candidates.

Reports of international institutions observing the election process uniformly stress the undemocratic conditions under which the pre-election period was defined.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the election process and afterwards was far from meeting democratic standards. The Central Electoral Committee invalidated the votes in 694 polling stations, or 20% of all votes, without providing an explanation for the invalidation decision. According to official results, Ilham Aliyev won a landslide victory. Due to serious practices of electoral fraud, opposition parties and supporters took to the streets on election night, which was followed by violent interference by law enforcement forces and crackdown of opposition parties. Over 600 opposition party members, including their chairpersons and officials were arrested and imprisoned. According to official results, Ilham Aliyev, son of Heydar Aliyev and head of *Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası* won 76.84% whereas his closest rival Isa Qambar, head of Musavat Party won 13.97%.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Azerbaijan: Presidential Elections 2003," Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper, October 13, 2003. URL: <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/azerbaijan/azerbaijan-elections2003.pdf>, accessed 30.11.2011, OSCE, "Republic of Azerbaijan, Presidential Election 15 October 2003," OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report, URL: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/13467?download=true>, accessed 30.11.2011.

<sup>37</sup> Number of votes and percentages are taken from <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/13467?download=true>, accessed 28.11.2011. The website of Azerbaijani Central Committee of Elections provides information about 2008, 2013 and 2015 presidential elections.

The results of 2003 elections indicated the difficulty of democratic change in Azerbaijan. While both OSCE/ODIHR<sup>38</sup> and the US government<sup>39</sup> evaluated the elections as a “missed opportunity” for democratization, they both indicated their support and willingness to continue cooperation with the political authorities in Azerbaijan. The OSCE/ODIHR further stressed that “Progress toward democratic elections in Azerbaijan will now depend first and foremost on the political will of the authorities.” (2003: 2). The elections, with the events before, during and after, have demonstrated a general overview of Azerbaijani political sphere: a unified ruling elite, a fractured opposition, government’s relatively high capacity to use violence and the loyalty of law enforcement units. The inability of the opposition to unite behind one candidate and depict a strong image, both at home and abroad, was a crucial factor facilitating the unity of the ruling elite and the law enforcement forces, as well as lack of international support.

### **5.6.1 Authoritarian Consolidation under Ilham Aliyev**

Following the transfer of power to Ilham Aliyev through presidential succession, two trends have characterized the Azerbaijani politics in the post-2003 period. On the one hand, opposition parties’ organizational weakness and their ability to mobilize masses has declined significantly, On the other hand, rivalries among the ruling elite have become more visible (Alkan 2010: 194). Especially after 2005 parliamentary elections, Ilham Aliyev and his supporters have gradually eliminated potential contenders for power and changed the structure of the ruling elite itself. 2005 parliamentary elections are held in a political atmosphere that was highly influenced by the recent developments in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. Following electoral processes, mass protests in these countries have facilitated governmental changes. Widely known as the “Color Revolutions,” these sets of events started with elections. Mass protests led by opposition politicians and defecting members of ruling elite

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Presidential Election in Azerbaijan,” Press Statement by Adam Ereli, Deputy Spokesman, Washington DC, October 21, 2003. URL: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/25502.htm>, accessed 29.11.2011.

followed. Attempts of use of violence and crackdown are failed in these cases as segments of law enforcement forces also defected to protesters. Thus, the possibility of a similar process was expected for Azerbaijan.

During the pre-election period, both domestic and international actors' emphasis on ensuring a free and fair election was significant. On two separate presidential decrees, İlham Aliyev stressed that illegal activities to influence election results were going to be punished<sup>40</sup> and the Azerbaijani CEC was going to be sensitive about irregularities in the elections process.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the CEC approved all candidacies from the Azadlıq Bloc and 69 of 72 candidates from the *Yeni Siyasət* Bloc, thereby effectively abandoning the use of registration process as a mechanism of elimination of candidacies. It is important that the CEC has also approved the applications of Ayaz Mutalibov and Rasul Quliyev, whose candidacies in 2003 presidential elections were denied. However, the legal arrangements on elections that favored candidates from YAP and independent candidates supporting YAP remained intact. On October 17, Quliyev attempted to return to Baku, but his return was effectively prevented by Azerbaijani authorities. Same day army units were deployed to major airports and city squares, and Ramil Usubov, Minister of Internal Affairs announced that a coup attempt against the government is underway. Several high ranking politicians and bureaucrats were arrested, including the Minister of Economic Development Farhad Aliyev, Minister of Health Ali İnsanov, director of Azpetrol and Farhad Aliyev's brother Rafiq Aliyev, and former Minister of Finance Fikret Yusufov, deputy and president of Azerkimya Company Fikret Sadiqov, Presidential Secretary responsible for Financial Affairs Akif Muradverdiyev. It is argued that Ali İnsanov, who owned several companies, was in disagreement with Kemaleddin Haydarov, Minister of Customs, due to high tariffs. Furthermore, Ali İnsanov is also argued to be in conflict with Ramiz Mehdiyev, and being in touch with Ail Kerimli and Rasul

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<sup>40</sup> "Azərbaycan Respublikasında seçki praktikasının təkmilləşdirilməsinə dair" Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin Sərəncamı (11 may 2005-ci il, № 806) // Azərbaycan. - 2005.-12 may. - S.1. For the full text of the decree: URL: <http://www.msk.gov.az/az/serencamlar/428/>, accessed 15.12.2011.

<sup>41</sup> "Azərbaycan Respublikasının Milli Məclisinə seçkilərin hazırlanması və keçirilməsi ilə bağlı təxirəsalınmaz tədbirlər haqqında" Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin Sərəncamı (25 oktyabr 2005-ci il, № 1062) // Azərbaycan. - 2005.-26 oktyabr. - N248. - S.1. - [AZ-Q] For the full text of the decree: URL: <http://www.msk.gov.az/az/serencamlar/427/>, accessed 17.12.2011.

Quliyev in order to establish a new opposition. As a prominent member of the “old guard”, the sacking of Insanov and others implicitly verify the tension between the older members of former *nomenklatura* and Ilham Aliyev. With the sackings, the doubts about Ilham Aliyev’s ability to maintain the unity and stability of the ruling elite were removed. Those sacked, on the other hand, were replaced with more loyal individuals belonging to Yeraz and Nakhchevani networks. In other words, with the elimination of a potential threat to his rule, Ilham Aliyev has managed to respond effectively to the question whether he was capable of protecting the unity and loyalty within the ruling elite after his father Heydar Aliyev’s passing.

The parliamentary elections took place in November, but the CEC has invalidated the results in 10 electoral districts, including the district in which Ali Kerimli was a candidate. After the elections in these districts in May 2006, YAP won 61 seats in the parliament and independent candidates won 46 seats. According to the results, pro-government parties won 10 seats and opposition parties won 8 seats. It should also be noted that the voter turnout in elections was rather low (42% in November 2005 and 36.5% in May 2006). Following the elections, opposition parties decided to boycott the parliamentary sessions. Probably the most important result of the 2005 elections was the failed expectations for a political change similar to those in Ukraine and Georgia. According to Alkan, these expectations only belonged to certain international actors and opposition parties, whereas Azerbaijani public opinion did not attribute such a meaning to it (Alkan 2010: 202). Implicitly demonstrated by the failed expectations is the effective neutralization of the Azerbaijani opposition in the presence of the electorate. In other words, solutions to major problems like poverty and territorial unity were expected from the existing ruling elite, rather than from opposition parties. Furthermore, political elite in opposition lacked the organic connections their counterparts in Georgia and Ukraine enjoyed. These connections, it was argued, were a crucial factor in creating divisions among the ruling elite in these countries. A third problem, it can be argued, is the incompatibility of the political dynamics and reflexes of the opposition parties with the expectations of major international actors who support democratic regime changes (Alkan 2010: 202). With both pro-Russian and pro-Western potential rivals effectively exiled, and a domestic opposition unable to act in unity, can be seen as further causes of the failure of the



expectations of some sort of Color Revolution in Azerbaijan. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, the ruling party won 56 seats. 43 seats were won by independent candidates, vast majority of whom supported the government. The 15 remaining seats were divided between ten parties.

It can be said that after 2005, Ilham Aliyev was able to form a parliament under his control and consolidate his power vis-à-vis the ruling elite by eliminating potential opposition and rivals within it. After this year, the political landscape of Azerbaijan has changed in such a way so that he could implement his decisions and policies relatively easily. Also, beginning with 2007, the BTC started to bring oil revenues that are comparable to the First Oil Boom in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. From this year on, Azerbaijani socio-economic transformation accelerated. With the new financial resources, arranging the intra-elite relations as well as increasing the socio-economic status of the population was possible. Using oil money, Ilham Aliyev initiated major projects for the alleviation of poverty and increase employment. Under these circumstances, Azerbaijan held the next presidential elections in 2008.

The presidential elections in 2008 were indicative of the further declining influence of the opposition. Prior to election, opposition parties received no seat in the CEC. Consequently, Azadliq Bloc, AHCP and the Liberal Party announced that they will boycott the elections. More importantly, opposition parties engaged a campaign of mutual defamation. New legal arrangements on election procedures also attracted criticism of opposition. Accordingly, the period of election campaigns is limited to 25 days from two months. Similarly, the period for propaganda through press and media organs was reduced to 28 days from two months. Consequently, Isa Qambar from Musavat Party and Eldar Namazov, the leader of Yeni Siyaset Bloc, also declared that they will boycott the elections. Thus, the elections are held without any opposition candidates. Until then, the opposition was able to play some role during the electoral process. Starting with 2008, elections caused minimum excitement in the public opinion in Azerbaijan, thereby rendering the elections into symbolic events. In 2008 presidential elections Ilham Aliyev won 89% of votes against 6 other moderate candidates. The boycott also helped the reinforcement of a free and fair electoral process. In the absence of opposition, fewer irregularities and frauds were detected in 2008. Opposition parties' application to organize a meeting in order to protest the

results was denied by authorities. According to some authors, the de facto elimination of political opposition parties that are in a conflicting relation with the government can facilitate the formation of a moderate opposition and pragmatic politics during electoral periods. According to Ismailzade, for example, this process can provide a positive impetus for democratization in Azerbaijan (2008).

The final step in consolidation of Ilham Aliyev's rule was taken with the 2009 referendum for constitutional amendments. The most important amendment was in the 101<sup>st</sup> article of the constitution, which limited the maximum number of terms in presidential office to two. Another amendment was to authorize the president with the right to postpone presidential and parliamentary elections, in case military operations during war necessitate. With the abolition of term limits, the opportunity for life-long presidency for Ilham Aliyev was given. Furthermore, the right to postpone elections is also open to abuse, since Azerbaijan is still *de jure* in war with Armenia. Furthermore, with another amendment, a new crime of "demonstration of disrespect towards state officials" was defined. Interestingly, unlike the 2008 presidential elections, the process of referendum in 2009 has helped to vitalize the political sphere in Azerbaijan. Six opposition parties and ten associations have initiated a campaign against the constitutional amendments. However, the government responded to the campaign by arresting several people, majority of them heads of local branches of opposition parties. Consequently, the amendments were accepted in the referendum held on March 14, 2009. The CEC announced the voter turnout rate as 71% and "yes" votes as 87.7%, while opposition parties and independent election observers reported much lower turnout rate.

In 2010, Azerbaijan held 4<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections after independence. According to OSCE, "the 7 November parliamentary elections in the Republic of Azerbaijan were characterized by a peaceful atmosphere and all opposition parties participated in the political process, the conduct of these elections overall was not sufficient to constitute meaningful progress in the democratic development of the country." (OSCE 2010: 1). Similar to previous elections, problems related to the implementation of the right of assembly and expression seriously compromised the election's democratic purposes. The process of registration of candidates by the CEC, the institutional design of which helps the ruling party dominate it, again constituted an elimination mechanism prior to elections. Over half of the candidacies by the opposition

parties were denied by the CEC. Where the candidacies were denied on the basis of relatively minor and technical issues, the candidates are not given the opportunity to correct the application errors. On the contrary, nearly all the candidates of the ruling party were registered. It is also reported that intimidation and threats played an important role in withdrawing some of the candidates (OSCE 2010: 2). Overall, the political environment was restrictive; media coverage was biased and unbalanced. As an indicator of a hegemonic party rule, disparity in access to resources and misuse of administrative resources as well as interferences by local authorities strongly favored candidates from the ruling party. In a way comparable to 2005 parliamentary and 2008 presidential elections, amendments were made to the Election Code shortly before the elections. The amendments shortened the election period and the official campaign period, limited candidates' opportunity to campaign whereas the elimination of institutional and legal limits against free and fair electoral process, like the instrumental role played by the CEC to sustain the hegemonic party system, were omitted.

The period of campaigning was rather calm and generated little public interest and vitalization of political debates. During the election day, voter turnout was below 49.56% and international observers recorded serious irregularities and illegal activities on several polling stations, including ballot stuffing and carousel voting (OSCE 2010: 2). The results of the election produced a parliament with only one opposition politician, whereas the ruling YAP increased its number of seats to 69, while independent candidates won 46 seats. The only candidate with openly critical opinions of the government is Iqbal Aghazade from the Umid Party. According to the results, the leaders of two major opposition parties, Isa Qambar from Musavat and Ali Kerimli from Halq Cebhesi parties, have lost in their electoral districts.

In 2013, Ilham Aliyev was nominated for the presidential elections for the third time. In accordance with the constitutional amendment in 2009, term limits were abolished for presidential post. Ten candidates in total were registered for the elections and four others were denied on the basis of failure in fulfilling legal obligations for candidacy. New criteria regarding candidacy required candidates hold a university degree and residency in the Republic of Azerbaijan in the last ten years. According to international observers, the registration, campaigning, election and vote tabulation processes were flawed in a similar way to the previous elections. Same problems also applied for media and freedom of assembly and speech. According to the results, voter

turnout was 71.63% and Ilham Aliyev won the elections with 84.54% of votes while his closest opponent Cemil Hasanli won 5.53% of the votes. 2015 parliamentary elections, as well as 2018 early presidential elections also witnessed the repetition of similar results and reflected problems of not only free and fair elections, but also declining civil society, media, human and civic rights. In 2016, a new administrative position of “vice presidency” was created by a constitutional referendum, and in 2017 Ilham Aliyev appointed her wife, Mihriban Aliyeva to this post. In accordance with the new legislation, vice president is the first in line in case the president is incapacitated or died. Receiving from some parts of the public opinion and international community, this move can be considered as the consolidation of “sultanistic authoritarianism” and the tightening of the hierarchy among the ruling elite.

The declining political sphere in Azerbaijan is also reflected in the civil society and media. According to Freedom House, civil society sphere in Azerbaijan has devolved from partly free to not-free between the years 2008 and 2017.<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that the relative importance of civil society in Azerbaijan has increased in the 2000s as the limits of formal political opposition parties shrunk. Some of my interviewers contended that civil society has become a more viable option to voice discontent against the government, especially after 2003 and 2005 elections. Harassment, intimidation, physical violence and imprisoning of civil society activists on trump-up charges have become widespread practices in Ilham Aliyev’s Azerbaijan. Although some of the imprisoned representatives of civil society were occasionally freed by presidential decrees, often through pressures by international organizations, there remain a significant number of civic activists in prisons. Furthermore, with legislative arrangements, the organizational and financial liberties of civil society organizations were severely limited. More importantly, many Western non-governmental organizations are prevented to support and cooperate with Azerbaijani associations with legal changes. The overall situation of civil society also applies to media. Although Azerbaijan has a wide range of independent media organizations, the legal and extra-legal pressures on critical media outlets are notwithstanding. Again, instrumental use of legal arrangements to delimit the journalistic activities of critical

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<sup>42</sup> Civil society score increased to 7.00 from 5.25, where 7 represents the worst situation.

journalists is accompanied by intimidation, harassment and physical violence. The killing of Elmar Huseynov, a prominent outspoken journalist in 2005 signified a turning point for an already declining sphere for media. Investigative journalists who focus on corruption and illegal wealth of politicians and bureaucrats are indiscriminately targeted by legal and extra-legal mechanisms. Alongside national media organizations, international outlets are also under pressure. In 2014, Azerbaijani website of RFE/RL was banned in Azerbaijan, on the grounds that the works of the organization is related to foreign intelligence activities. Again in 2014, the bank accounts of two international organizations, IREX and NDI were frozen, their offices raided and their activities in Azerbaijan banned.

During Ilham Aliyev's presidency, the status of the Qarabagh conflict remained unchanged. Occasionally, minor clashes on the frontline evolved into larger exchanges of fire, such as in 2012 and 2014. Small-scale gains of land on behalf of Azerbaijan were received rather positively by the public opinion. Furthermore, armament and modernization of the Azerbaijani army accelerated especially after the country started receiving larger amounts of oil and gas sales. The increased self-esteem of Azerbaijani army was demonstrated in army parades organized every year since 2008.

Under Ilham Aliyev's presidency, Azerbaijani economy enjoyed high oil and gas revenues due to high prices. Accounting for nearly 90% of all exports, significant amounts of the revenues from oil and gas were transferred to the state budget. Under Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijani government has invested heavily in infrastructure and large-scale construction projects that are reminiscent of oil-rich gulf emirates. Furthermore, Azerbaijan has almost eradicated poverty, which was a significant social problem up until mid-2000s. However, measures for the diversification of economy and increased employment are still inadequate. As a country highly dependent on oil prices, Azerbaijani government announced the devaluation of Manat in early 2015, following the sharp decline in oil prices in mid-2014. Having reached astronomical rates of GDP growth in late 2000s, Azerbaijani economy still suffers from low oil prices, while the issue of transparency in the allocation of oil and gas revenues still remains.

Another important series of events in Ilham Aliyev's Azerbaijan is the country's increased involvement in organizing international cultural and sports events. Upon winning the European song contest "Eurovision" in 2011, Azerbaijan hosted the contest in 2012. While the contest contributed significantly for the promotion of Azerbaijan in the international arena and especially reinforced its Western identity, it has also created a space for public discussions about the question of national identity and human rights violations. Forced evictions of Baku residents in certain districts because of the ongoing urban renewal projects, imprisoned journalists and the disadvantaged status of sexual minority groups were among the major problems that gained national and international visibility during the event. Other major cultural and sports events hosted in Baku were Islamic Cultural Capital in 2009, European Games in 2015, Formula One races in 2016, 2017 and 2018 and Islamic Solidarity Games in 2017. The organization of such events can be seen as indicators of the international political orientations of the Azerbaijani government (Shiriyev 2015). These events, considered together with the large-scale urban development projects using oil and gas revenues, also indicate the establishment of the city as a new "growth machine." (Valiyev 2014). In other words, grandeur construction projects, which are used to build a new identity for Baku, also help the establishment of a new political economy in Azerbaijan. Using these projects, the ruling elite in Azerbaijan not only consolidates further, but also does this in a new framework that facilitates its' connections with the global partners. Finally, these events have attracted public criticism due to their high financial costs.

Presidential succession in Azerbaijan has been an important turning point for the Azerbaijani politics. To begin with, defining the Azerbaijani political sphere as the reflection of the government vs. opposition has become more difficult after 2003 elections. The amendments made in the 1995 constitution and legal framework for media, civil society and electoral processes have become effective tools for limiting opposition activities. As observed in 2003 and 2005, the extent to which the government was able to use violence was wide. As a result of these processes, the governing elite have become the only actor in the Azerbaijani politics, which has been steadily closing.

Azerbaijani political elite are composed of smaller networks or patronage groups. These networks include families, who share the political and economic power in the country. Although Azerbaijan is ruled by a president with highly extensive rights, the exercise of these rights are limited by the need to preserve the balance of interests between these powerful networks. With the resources available to each, leading members of the ruling coalition are not mere protégés of the president. The process of presidential succession in 2003, and the sackings of 2005 demonstrate the relative power of these groups and individuals.

Ilham Aliyev's succession to his father Ilham Aliyev possessed neither the charisma of his father, nor the competence of informal networks that were necessary to preserve order and stability of the ruling elite. Whereas the elite preference of stability over competition over presidency brought Ilham Aliyev success in elections, genuine control of the political system required taking initiative. In terms of political program and discourse, Ilham Aliyev was not able to diverge from the framework drawn by his father. By referring to his father and using the abundant financial resources made possible by oil contracts, Ilham Aliyev managed to construct a public image as the natural successor of his policies. However, he was more cautious in redesigning the ruling elite so that he could be certain of their loyalty. He began with changes in the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Communications and Information Technologies. Respectively, Elmar Mamedyarov and Ali Abbasov became the new ministers, replacing the old ones who were affiliated with the Old Guard.

As I mentioned above, the 2005 sacking of important members of the ruling elite demonstrates crucial aspects of the Ilham Aliyev's process of power consolidation. On the other hand, the failed expectations for a Color Revolution, too, provide important clues for understanding the Azerbaijani political sphere. According to Radnitz, the failure of a colored revolution in Azerbaijan was primarily due to the fact that threat to regime does not come from outside but from within. Furthermore, there are three other important traits of Azerbaijani politics. First of all, political and economic powers are heavily concentrated in the same individuals, thereby facilitating the orchestration of political and economic interests between members of the ruling elite. Secondly, oil revenues helped to decrease poverty and increased welfare, thereby increasing the legitimacy of the government. Thirdly, due to a series of reasons I tried

to explain before, Azerbaijani political opposition does not enjoy the support of international, i.e. Western actors. Political stability in Azerbaijan, as it is for the majority of public, has become a crucial asset for major powers. Radnitz also contends that a regime-breakdown could be possible only if there were internal conflicts among the ruling elite.

To conclude, it should be kept in mind that Ilham Aliyev's succession to presidency was received with mixed expectations. First, it was unclear whether he could be able to keep the coalition of ruling elite together, as his father did. His political experience was incomparable to that of his father, who matured in the KGB, served Azerbaijan as the First Secretary for 23 years and then as a member of the Soviet Politburo. Second, he was seen as the natural leader of a group of ruling elite who demanded reforms in the political system. This group was identified in opposition to an older generation of politicians, widely known as the Old Guard. However, expectations for instability among the ruling elite as well as liberalization in the political regime were not met. Under Ilham Aliyev, civil society and press faced more severe restrictions whereas opposition parties were further marginalized through authoritarian methods.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

Azerbaijani history reveals several characteristics of the formation of the political elite. These characteristics still resonate in the popular and elite discourses about the identity of the Azerbaijani nation, its state and regime. Religious, ethnic and cultural traits of Azerbaijani Turks span over a long history, but it would not be an exaggeration to say that these traits were constantly reshaped and transformed by the Russian Imperial and later by the Soviet rules.

After Azerbaijani territories were conquered by the Russian Empire, it has remained under direct military rule until 1840s. After the Empire managed to suppress armed resistances in the Caucasus and more importantly became aware of the danger of not including the newly conquered lands into the central administrative system, as the Polish uprising in 1831 has shown, this policy has changed. For Azerbaijan, the most important result of the introduction of central administrative mechanisms was the creation of territorial and administrative unity of Azerbaijan.



A further turning point was the reforms initiated in the 1860s and 1870s, in response to the need to modernize. For Azerbaijan, the primary result of these reforms was the changing land laws, which allowed industrialization and privatization of oil production. Russian reforms of 1860s and 1870s provided an environment for class and elite formation, in the modern sense of the word. Few former villagers became oil barons; majority became the proletariat. What united both groups were their disadvantaged status in comparison to Armenian and Russians.

Among the people of Southern Caucasus, Azerbaijanis were the least developed nation up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Muslim Tatars' resistance to the new Christian rulers was minimal compared to Armenians and Georgians, provided that their religious life and traditions were not disturbed (de Waal 2010: 51). Yet, the social and political development initiated by the "Oil Boom" has created an Azerbaijani bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, whose political agenda would compensate the backwardness in nation and state building in an unprecedented way. According to Swietochowski, "In 1905, Azerbaijan was still a merely geographical name for a stretch of land inhabited by people whose group identity consisted of being Muslims. The period between this date and the fall of the independent republic in 1920 witnessed the rise of, for the Muslims, a novel type of community, the nation." (1980: 34).

A new Azerbaijani bourgeoisie was thus created, and Baku became a multi-ethnic industrial center. In addition to investors and industrialists from all over the world, members of several ethnic groups of the Empire started populating Azerbaijan. In this period, Azerbaijan became connected to the world economic system, but also faced challenges from the influx of foreign groups. The process of industrialization and growth has influenced different ethnic groups asymmetrically, both in economy and administration: whereas Russians and Armenians were significantly advantaged as administrators, businesspeople and labor aristocracy, Azerbaijanis were largely excluded in processes of political representation and distribution of wealth. Majority of the Azerbaijani Turkish masses, who were working as the lowest stratum in the oil industry, were living in highly harsh conditions. In addition, as a result of administrators' ignorance of Muslim populations of the Empire, they were largely left outside basic education. Therefore, the newly-forming Azerbaijani intelligentsia and economic elite first engaged in activities of education and charity.

The purpose of the activities of the “Azerbaijani Enlightenment” was thus concentrated to transform the Azerbaijanis into equals among the Empire’s subjects. Compared to other nations of the Southern Caucasus, namely the Armenians and Georgians, national consciousness of Azerbaijanis emerged relatively late, but after 1905, they have compensated for this.

The revolution in 1905 was the result of the Empire’s inefficacy in responding to sharpening class and ethnic antagonisms. The failure to reform and democratize has led to a large scale uprising, and the emperor was forced to allow for parliamentary representation. Despite the fact that the Empire resorted to coercive mechanisms not long after 1905, the presence of a representative body was effective in transforming Azerbaijanis, alongside with other ethnic groups in the empire, into political entities. Azerbaijani Turks formed political parties or joined other existing political parties within the wide spectrum of political ideologies. Yet, their political demands did not include separatism until the First World War. Furthermore, at the societal level, susceptibility to political struggle was low, and except for a series of strikes aiming to ensure economic gains for the oil workers, Azerbaijani Turks were relatively less interested in organizing around political institutions. With the war, the authority of the center of the empire weakened, and the imminent danger of ethnic violence has helped the emergence of independent statehood.

When the Russian Revolution took place in 1917, the power vacuum in the Caucasus became apparent. As in 1905, the revolution was the result of increased class and ethnic discriminations, but before 1917 ended, Bolsheviks assumed power in Russia. Lenin’s strategy was to seize power as soon as possible, but in a complex environment such as Azerbaijan, this strategy was not implemented. In Baku, the power of the RC[b]P rested primarily on Russian soldiers and armed Dashnak groups, and despite Shaumian’s strategy of avoiding the transformation of revolution into ethnic violence, the Baku Commune could be established only after the massacre of Muslim population of the city in late March, 1918. The major result of the Baku commune for the Azerbaijani Turks was that it revealed the inevitability to establish an independent state. The Commune lasted only until July, when a joint army of Ottoman and Azerbaijani soldiers marched towards Baku, and the city became the capital of the first liberal-democratic nation-state in the Muslim world.

The ADR, despite several questions regarding its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, has engaged in an ambitious programme. Universal suffrage, wide political and civic liberties were accompanied by reforms aiming at nation and state building. Although the ADR formally ended in 1920, it has established the basis upon which the Azerbaijani nation and state was later defined.

Sovietization, that is, the establishment of political, economic and institutional basis of the communist regime destroyed the independence of Azerbaijani state. In this period, the nationalities policy of the Soviet power became the most crucial component defining the relationship between Moscow and Baku. As the core of the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union, the first “affirmative action empire,” *korenizatsiia* stipulated the active promotion of members of the titular national group into positions in the Party, state and bureaucracy. Although this policy also included the close and strict surveillance of everyone in these positions (so that they comply with the center’s principles and directives), it has also stimulated the process of nation-building, especially when the relationship between the center and peripheries transformed, as it was the case in the post-Stalin decades. The legacy of Soviet nationalities policy, however, could have been more straightforward, provided that members of the national elite were not eliminated through frequent purges and especially repressions of the 1930s.

After consolidating Soviet power through the efforts of the first generation of revolutionary elite, whose experience of pre-Soviet political life were seen as a threat, the communist regime engaged in systematic elimination of these very individuals. The policy of exiling or sentencing to death the politicians, bureaucrats, writers, artists as well as other prominent members started in the second half of 1920s, but reached its peak in 1938, just before the break of the Second World War.

During the war and the following years of post-war restoration, Azerbaijani politics was more or less stable. A notable change occurred followed the Khrushchev’s so-called “secret speech” at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, where he criticized the Stalin regime. A brief period of awakening in the national consciousness of Azerbaijan followed. History is a vast resource upon which nations and ethnic groups construct their culture and identity. In creating a sense of unity and belongingness, necessary for nation-states, shared historical experiences and claims to

common ancestry plays an important role. On the other hand, the history of a nation or ethnic group is always an unfinished project and is always shaped by challenges posed by political challenges. Through a selective combination of available resources (written, oral and material resources) and interpretations, histories are always subject to modification to meet these challenges. This also applies to the Azerbaijani Turks, for whom the question of identity and culture was and is being influenced by large-scale socio-political transformations including violent ethnic and territorial conflicts.

An overview of Azerbaijani history reveals that the sense of historical continuity was fractured several times by ethnic, religious and administrative changes. Change of alphabet further deepened this fracture. In a geo-political environment like the Caucasus, there exist several ethnic, linguistic and religious lines –far from overlapping with the international legal boundaries– to delineate the boundaries of group identity. For Azerbaijani political and cultural elite, the task of defining a national identity is a delicate issue constrained often by conflicting historical experiences. In other words, strong Turkic, Iranian, Russian and Islamic elements in the culture and identity, coupled with the geo-political tensions in the Caucasus region, render the task of establishing a coherent national identity more difficult.

It should also be noted that various influences shaping the Azerbaijani national identity, outlined above in a chronological style, cannot be confined to finite historical periods. In the above sections, Islamization, Turkification, Iranianization, Russification and modernization are presented as the main characteristics of more or less certain periods. In fact, Islam, relations with other Turkic societies and Iranian Azerbaijanis, Russian cultural and political influence as well as modernization are all ongoing processes. Following the dissolution of the communist regime, official limitations to religious freedoms ceased to exist. Turkey has become a close ally and strategic partner, in addition to being a source of “soft power.” Russia is still the main regional power in relation to Azerbaijan’s foreign policy, whereas Russian language and culture, although in a diminishing scale, continue to be relevant in terms of Azerbaijani society. Efforts to secure the position in the world economy and politics contribute to the modernization of the society. These factors are relevant to the political elite in the sense that the elite are required to continuously reinterpret them if

they are expected to do politics, i.e. the creation, accumulation and use of political power.

Azerbaijani political elite formation can be understood by changing sources of influence: Russian Imperial administration, modernization under Russian Empire, industrialization and urbanization under Russian Empire, 1905-1920: the eve of Revolutions (1908 Ottoman Empire, 1908 Iran, 1917 Russian Empire), Soviet nationalities policy (“affirmative action empire”), 1930s repressions, post-Stalin thaw, Brezhnev era/Heydar Aliyev era, glasnost and perestroika. There was no single “Soviet era” but many eras with different policies and practices (De Waal). Azerbaijani political elite formation is inseparable from the formation of the nation and its identity: under Russian Empire and Soviet Union. In a sense, Azerbaijani national identity has been forged under Soviet Socialist regime. This process has enabling as well as limiting results that are more visible in the post-independence era. (Azerbaijani political elite still has to deal with the results and ambiguous outcomes of Soviet nationalities policies).

The complexities of the formation of the modern national political elite are matched by the complexities of the country’s history. Despite the fact that Azerbaijan as a sovereign state did not emerge prior to 1918, Azerbaijani Turks’ history provides sufficient evidence pointing to a common shared past, which is the major source of nationhood. Linguistic, religious and cultural unity of Azerbaijani Turks was achieved by the processes of Islamization, Turkification and Iranianization. The primary obstacle preventing the Azerbaijani Turks to form territorial unity was related to its geographical location. Neighboring three regional superpowers, Iran, Ottoman Empire and Russia, Azerbaijan was frequently destabilized by the conflicts between the three. Thus, the territorial and administrative unification could be achieved only when Russian Empire conquered the territories we know today as the modern Azerbaijani state.

Russian conquest was characterized by two simultaneous processes. On the one hand, a unified system of law and administration coupled with centuries-long absent stability to Azerbaijan has laid the basis for the Azerbaijani nation and state building. On the other hand, Azerbaijani national identity was heavily influenced by the Imperial, and later colonial policies. Resentment towards the foreign rulers was

present from the outset, but an Azerbaijani national enlightenment did not take root until the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Reforms of the Russian Empire in the middle of the second half of the century enabled the Azerbaijanis to produce its own national bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. Imperial policies together with colonial practices were influencing all segments of Azerbaijani Turks: discriminatory treatment of the peasantry, workers, professionals and businesspeople, has played a unifying role for the society. Even as the class conflicts intensified, Azerbaijani Turks continued to interpret their denial of access to economic welfare and political rights in terms of ethnic grounds. Political ideologies like liberalism and socialism appealed to some members of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, but the vast majority of the population remained disinterested in politics and responded mainly to opportunities of economic gains or threat of ethnic violence. The upper strata of the Azerbaijani society, on the other hand, were evolving into national political elite in the last couple decades of the Empire.

Another important point with regard to the stability of authoritarian rule includes defining the continuities and changes in the characteristics of authoritarian leadership. In other words, the maintenance and consolidation of authoritarian rule under Heydar and Ilham Aliyev includes similarities and differences. When Heydar Aliyev came to power, he was a veteran politician with a vast network of supporters in state and bureaucracy created thanks to the selective freedom of Brezhnev period. Through his skillful use of mass media and public relations, his charismatic style of leadership was also respected among the population. His removal from office as part of Gorbachev's new policies also reinforced his anti-Moscow image. When Ilham Aliyev came to power, several questions were raised: would he be able to maintain the networks built by his father? Would he be able to use the same instruments to keep the governing elite united? Despite the fact that he was lacking the charisma and experience of his father, Ilham Aliyev was able to maintain the political system largely intact, and counter any threats to his rule from within or outside the government. It can be said that his successful continuation of the kompromat mechanism, that is, by keeping the flow of information inside the pyramid of ruling elite in this monopoly, he was able to consolidate his rule. Throughout his rule, however, two seemingly contradicting tendencies were observed. First, the pyramidal structure of the ruling

elite became narrower, and secondly, democracy entered the discourse of the government. In other words, while authoritarianism consolidated, the discourse developed in the opposite direction. Under Ilham Aliyev, the top of the ruling elite became restricted to members of two families. Also while consolidating his rule, Ilham Aliyev targeted two groups from the ruling elite. The first group includes high-level politicians who were allegedly conspiring for a government change. The second group includes mid-level government representatives, especially the head of local executive bodies. The occasional sacking of these individuals, majority of whom were highly disliked by local populations because of their arbitrary practices and lavish life-styles, contributed to Ilham Aliyev's image as a benevolent leader. This way, many of the criticisms against administration were diverted from Aliyev towards local heads of executives and other government representatives. As a result, through years, Ilham Aliyev was able to establish the image of the successful heir of his father.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF POLITICAL ELITE IN AZERBAIJAN AND ITS PERCEPTIONS OF TRANSFORMATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION**

This chapter of the dissertation is comprised of a thematic presentation and discussion of key findings of the field work. My purpose here is to relate perceptions and explanations of authoritarianization to those of political elite in Azerbaijani society via different aspects, or themes that came to the fore during my fieldwork. The first of such aspect includes the lack or presence of a critical perception of political elite, as formulated in normative or objective criteria regarding the elite status. Secondly, I am focusing on how Azerbaijan became a society without politics, or politics became an exclusively elite affair. This section includes discussions on four topics. These are, first, what is generally referred as the “mentality” issue, or the broader set of norms and values guiding perceptions of political life, second, the perceptions of political elite within the broader political development of the country, third, the nature of formal political competition, that is, the role and meaning attributed to electoral process, and finally, the relationship between the political elite and vast hydro-carbon revenues the country possesses.

#### **6.1 Defining the Political Elite: Popular Perceptions vs. Normative Criteria**

Although individuals to occupy formal positions of power are either elected or appointed in modern political systems, they are not exempt from normative judgements based on different values and norms of the electorate. The less negative judgements about individuals in positions of power, the more we can talk about the legitimacy of power. Thus, the question of political elite can reflect the existing



divisions about the core values and norms the political power represents. In Azerbaijan, the APF's efforts to push for a more radical and the Aliyevs' selectively implemented post-Soviet transformation can be translated as the framework to understand such divisions. The mass and leadership characteristics of the national-democratic movement as well as the Aliyev governments are inextricably linked to perceptions of political elite. These characteristics, in turn, are related to the perceptions of continuity and change in the nature of political regime.

For the opponents of the current government, the educational and intellectual credentials of the ADR governing elite and current governing elite provide a basis for comparison. For example, Zerdusht Alizade argues that "The Azerbaijani parliament established in 1918 included nineteen academic professors, each of whom is worth to be written a book about." ADR as a major reference point in evaluating the political elite in Azerbaijan was a part of the nineteenth century enlightenment ideals. These ideals encompassed the creation of a nation-state, under the leadership of national bourgeoisies. In societies where the size or power of the propertied class was limited, members of the intelligentsia and bureaucracy assumed a revolutionary role. Colonial condition in Azerbaijan has also helped the development of the national identity. Furthermore, Azerbaijan has developed a strong democratic, secular, nationalist movement of enlightenment, whose representatives considered nation building as a solution to backwardness and oppression. Members of Azerbaijani enlightenment were able to develop their agenda in a world where democratic nation-state building was a powerful world-scale current. Being themselves the products of Western-style education and ideologies, Azerbaijani political elite in the early twentieth century were strong advocates of universal human and political rights, thus occupying a progressive role in the country's history. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, on the other hand, the ideals of enlightenment are highly questioned. In addition, nationalisms often take the form of anti-democratic movements, as one can observe in the global increase of far-right political parties and movements. In my opinion, comparing the ADR elite and post-Soviet elite is a valuable asset for Azerbaijani people as long as this comparison takes into account that much of the enlightenment ideals were severely questioned, if not totally dismissed, with the end of the Soviet Union and communist political systems. The possibility of the repetition of what

happened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century is low, that is, the rise of a democratic nationalism which embraced the ideals of enlightenment and development. Therefore, the circumstances that helped the emergence of a peculiar historical type of political elite cannot re-emerge.

Throughout the field research, I observed that there is a consensus to define the political elite on the basis of an idealized, normative understanding. The elite status of a specific figure or group of people in politics is either justified or rejected depends on a set of positive normative attributes associated with an imagined ideal type of elite. This tendency, is a defining feature of proponents of the whole political spectrum. According to this view, a person can be defined as a member of the political elite if s/he can be seen among the morally and intellectually most superior members of the society. A second approach I came often across for the definition of political elite during my fieldwork was a realist one, which takes objective political power as the most important measure. For example, according to Aliaga Memmedli, “The leaders of opposition cannot be considered as members of the political elite. They have no impact on society; they are not representatives of society.”<sup>43</sup>

Definition of political elite also includes popular normative perspectives about the appearance of a politician. An example to such normative judgments is told by Hatice Ismailova: “During a parliamentary election campaign, Hikmet Hajizade was visiting Sheki, wearing slippers. Locals’ perception of his wearing slippers was considered as disrespect for those coming to listen to him.” At the same time, however, popular codes about appearance are also not devoid of exceptions. Ismailova continued that: “Vezirov used to appear in public without a tie, but his choice was received by the public with sympathy.”<sup>44</sup>

Both supporters and opponents of the government tend to underestimate the legitimacy of the political elite status on the basis of personal qualities. The values and norms associated with the perceptions of political elite are not seen separate from the social and cultural capital of current or former representatives of government. In this regard, the low social and cultural qualities of the political elite is mutually expressed.

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Aliaga Memmedli, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Hatice Ismailova, “Public Relations” presentation at the Azad Fikir Universiteti, Dec. 17, 2009.

Although criticisms are mutual, proponents of the government, especially the younger generation is more prone to admit certain administrative problems under Ilham Aliyev's rule. However, their criticism of individuals in political authority positions is selective. Such criticisms exclude the highest levels of political authority, and relate administrative problems to the general lack of cadres with required qualifications and integrity. Focusing criticism on incompetent or ill-willed advisors, bureaucrats and especially local heads of the executive offices and building some sort of presidential-exceptionalism therefore, go hand in hand. Furthermore, one of the major criticisms directed towards the APF government in the early 1990s<sup>45</sup> was its cadre policy. Accordingly, APF is criticized for appointing inexperienced cadres to important offices.

The roots of the idealist approach to political elite can also be seen in the major informal group that was influential in Azerbaijani politics. Throughout Soviet era, Bakuvians, or *Bakintsi* in local usage, i.e. the representatives of a unique urban, cosmopolitan identity defined by universalistic values, were the main social group among which the majority of the political elite were recruited. Baku was a small town at the beginning of Russian conquest and even in the present, the city has very few numbers of deeply rooted inhabitants. *Bakintsi*, therefore, were formed under the distinct political, economic and cultural atmosphere of the city. In other words, *Bakintsi* are made of a mixture of all people living in Baku.<sup>46</sup> With the massive influx of Azerbaijani Turks from urban regions of the country especially after independence, however, the balance of power in elite recruitment was disrupted at the expense of the Bakuvians (Sayfutdinova, 2009). Several interviewees also contended that the level of change in the cultural and world-view profile of the political elite was limited during Heydar Aliyev's presidency, in comparison to the presidency of his son, Ilham Aliyev. Thanks to his long tenure as the First Secretary of the AzCP, Heydar Aliyev possessed a network of trusted cadres for higher posts and he utilized this network in state and

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<sup>45</sup> The APF until the events of 20 January 1990 was a more diverse structure composed of various political groups. After the events, majority of groups outside nationalist tendencies, they argue, have left the APF and this caused a severe setback for the later APF government as well as Azerbaijani democratization. Several interviewees thus defined 20 January as a turning point in Azerbaijani politics, in which a broad-based consensus for democratic transition could be achieved. Instead, the APF attempted to democratize Azerbaijan on a comparatively narrower ideological basis.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Rasim Aghayev.

bureaucracy. After the presidential succession, it can be said that the natural process of generational transformation coupled with Ilham Aliyev's attempts to consolidate his rule. Among other measures, these attempts included the removal of certain individuals from high-ranking offices, occasionally in the form of purges. The replacement of old cadres with a younger cohort, often lacking in cultural capital that was a defining feature of Bakuvian and other Soviet-era elite, facilitates to direct public criticism of policies and practices that adversely affect society and people away from the president towards a vague category of advisors and politicians surrounding the president. This discourse finds proponents among some supporters of the political leadership, as well as those who advocate a milder treatment of the Soviet past and not abandon its cultural heritage, i.e. the high cultural standards defining the cosmopolitan identity of Baku. To put it differently, the demographic transformation of Baku, expressed in terms of social and cultural capital, play an important role in the perceptions of political elite and their policies. For many Azerbaijanis I have contacted, the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism not only positive outcomes such as independence and sovereignty, but also a decline in the human capital of the country. Soviet-era political elite, however associated with subordination to Russia, is admitted to represent higher educational and professional credentials as well as better social and cultural capital in comparison to the members of current political elite.

According to one interpretation, the overall decline in the perceived social and cultural capital of politicians is also believed to be related to the Soviet past of Azerbaijan, which is argued to have negative impacts on the so-called "mentality" of the nation. According to Rasim Aghayev, the problem can be dated back to 1960s, when the concept "dual life" started to define Azerbaijani social and political life.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the post-war generation, whose political socialization occurred under the circumstances of "thaw" and increased living standards, corresponds to a new separation of public and private lives. Conformism to official formal ideological standards of value expression and behavior in public, while practicing the opposite in private life is the main definition of "dual life." According to Aghayev, this phenomenon was highly related to the "social decay" in Soviet societies especially in

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Rasim Aghayev.

its final years. The declining image of political elite and the elite in general, in post-Soviet Azerbaijan is also closely associated by the demographic change in the country and especially in Baku. During Russian Imperial era and even for the first years of Soviet Union, Azerbaijan was considered as the borderland of the empire. The image of the borderland reflected the uncivilized, dangerous and undeveloped nature of the country. Baku occupied a significant place in this image, as it was not considered as part of Azerbaijan. As Baku was seen as a separate entity by the rulers in Moscow, be it the Tsar or Stalin, the relationship between Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan has always been “uneasy” (Sayfutdinova, 2007). Thanks to the rapid industrial development and growth based on oil industry, Muslim Baku, a small merchant town in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was transformed into a multicultural, industrial city by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in which Muslim population became a minority group. From the first oil boom beginning in the 1870s to the outbreak of the First World War, Baku developed a distinct cosmopolitan identity. This unique identity, embraced by its residents, was able to survive and strengthen in a modified way that was compatible with the new ideological framework throughout the Soviet era.

To conclude, distinctions such as position of authority, possession of actual power, government elite and opposition elite were central themes of discussion regarding the objective and subjective evaluation of specific groups and individuals as members of political elite. In a way, my own research has in a way become an area of contestation or a field of struggle between different perspectives about the past, present and future of the country. Interventions and contributions by my interlocutors on the definition of political elite can be viewed on two axes: one definition based on a realist evaluation of political power based on actual capacity to exercise authority, and another definition based on an ideal type of elite based on personal qualities understood as individuals’ world-view, life-style and personal qualifications associated with elite status. These objective and subjective evaluations are mutually made by proponents and opponents of the government, as well as those assuming a broader critical perspective of political elite within the distinct framework of political history of Azerbaijan. In turn, these judgements are used as a basis for criticism of the legitimacy of one segment or whole category of political elite. These objective and subjective definitions therefore should be understood in the context of nation, state

and identity building processes. Demographic transformation of Azerbaijan, accompanied by challenges posed by deindustrialization, decreased quality and equal opportunity for quality education, changing mechanisms of upward mobilization and elite recruitment are reflected in understandings of political elite in Azerbaijan. Also, there exists a quasi-consensus on regarding the question of political elite as a serious problem of cadre policy.

## **6.2 Perceptions of Politics: The Making of the Elite-Mass Disconnection**

In the light of the field findings, I am arguing that the non-elite are extremely excluded from the political realm in Azerbaijan and this exclusion provides a basis for the transformation of the political elite into one small and highly unified group enjoying the privileges of decision making almost unchecked and unbalanced. The way Azerbaijanis –elite and non-elite alike– perceive politics, state and society are therefore believed to be highly relevant in understanding the process whereby a consolidated authoritarian regime is built. Political elite always enjoy a certain level of independence from the electorate when making political decisions, but the level and nature of this independence is crucial. In other words, in Azerbaijan, politics became the exclusive sphere of a small ruling elite.

In this section, I am trying to make an overview the way Azerbaijanis make sense of the political system, including the elite, the society itself and the political elite. In other words, it is important to know how Azerbaijanis attempt to problematize the question of political system and political elite. A number of variables help determine to contextualize the problems of political system in a historical-cognitive map, whereby the past, present and future of the country become an area of political contestation. To put more precisely, the field research revealed different approaches and explanations towards components of political life. How each aspect is evaluated in terms of the formation and maintenance of the hybrid or authoritarian rule is presented below. I contend that if we are to determine the political regime type as well as it's aspects that fit easily or difficult into an existing model, this is necessary. For these purposes, I will present and discuss some of my findings under four sub-sections. The first sub-section will elaborate how the problems of political regime are attributed to the collective codes determining the broader concept of state-society relations.

Based on the long-term historical experiences which are believed to influence the conception of state-society relations, it is argued that the political problems are formulated as a problem of “mentality.”

### **6.2.1 The Question of “Mentality” and Politics**

One recurrent issue in understanding the major characteristics of the political system and its relation to the political elite is the problem of continuity and change. In the literature on Soviet societies, the question whether the communist rule has created a new mode of thinking in terms of state-society relations both among the rulers and ruled. In the case of Azerbaijan, exposure to foreign rule, approximately one century under Russian Empire and seventy-one years under Soviet regime, is a central theme in explaining the problems of democratization. The fact that Russian and Communist Party domination also corresponded to the social, economic and political modernization, the institutional formations imposed by foreign rule in these spheres are perceived as critical determinants of the present understandings of state and society one the one hand and, the masses and the elite on the other. I argue that the term “mentality” needs to be understood as a deeply embedded set of norms and values guiding political behavior rather than a primordial quality. One of my interlocutors put his hesitation as follows:

“I personally do not like the mentality explanation, but it is relevant in some respects: Russian and Soviet dominance matters. Free thought is problematic... Moses made his tribe wander in the desert for forty years straight, only in order to change their mentality.”<sup>48</sup>

Thus, I contend that despite recalling a reductionist and essentialist understanding, the “mentality problem” needs to be discussed. The term “mentality” is frequently used with a negative connotation, referring to submission to authority, disinterest in political and public life, distrust to political institutions and more importantly, a lack of confidence in achieving change for the benefit of all. Because foreign rule has been associated not only with political control but also the ever-present possibility of use of force,

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Rasim Aghayev.

compliance with the wills of the rulers is believed to become a widespread social norm. Comparisons made with other countries that have been under Russian Imperial and/or Soviet rule imply that such conformity is not inevitable, but needs to be understood within the more distant past of Azerbaijan. Secondly, the general disinterest in political life among ordinary Azerbaijanis is also explained by such “mentality.” Having been exposed to political systems where the rulers are elected not by the general public and political decisions made without public discussion, the masses assume politics not to be their business, it is argued. The idea that access to positions of authority and political decision making operates to a large extent independently from the popular will is widespread, and hence, resulting in public disinterest and distrust to political institutions. This way of thinking, therefore, is believed to hinder the development of the belief towards the capacity of contributing to the decision making process for a better society for all. Below, I try to explain how this general way of perception between state and society is explained by my respondents.

The term “mentality” is often used by proponents of a democratic regime in Azerbaijan. On the one hand, it can be argued that the term has become some sort of scapegoat in explaining the failure of democratic opposition. While being a commonly used term used in understanding the lack of popular as well as elite support for democratic reforms, its widespread usage itself in the Azerbaijani context might have some explanatory power. Mentality, in Azerbaijan, is often used in a negative context and refers to the perceived patterns of political behavior that became an integral part of thinking. Furthermore, this term helps to homogenize a long history –i.e. pre-Russian, Russian, pre-Soviet and finally Soviet years– in an attempt to formulate objective obstacles for democracy. In this form, mentality is understood as a product of centuries-long political experience that has mainly worked to erode individual and societal attributes that are believed to be productive for a liberal democratic system. The failure of limited experiences of democratic polity, that is, the ADR and the era of Popular Front government, are explained as a result of this historically-embedded pattern of value expression.



The formation of an Azerbaijani “mentality” is often dated back to 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Emir Pehlivan and Eldar Aslanov expressed, Azerbaijan and Baku was a borderland for the Empire. Criminals and other unwanted people were concentrated in Azerbaijan, thus making immoral behavior and corruption spread here. Russian and Soviet dominations are frequently stressed as the major dynamic preventing the development of a “national mentality.” This post-colonial reflex in explaining the source of problems in nation and state building is not limited to political elite. Subordination to foreign rule for a long time, some interviewees contended, has had a negative impact upon the population’s self-image: “The self-esteem and self-respect of our society is low. There are several idioms and sayings that associate our values and behavior with negative traits.”<sup>49</sup>

One of the issues defined as problematic in Azerbaijani society is the apparent lack of people’s interest in taking part in formal politics. Ideally, formal political and civil society organizations are mechanisms of defending and furthering the rights and interests of individuals and social groups. In Azerbaijan, however, this purpose is fulfilled by other informal means. According to Erkin Qadirli, “The society is not willing to get together for political purposes because people can get their job done in other ways.” He also adds that “For the people, politics is something to watch, entertain. Taking part in it is unthinkable, and they think this situation is unchangeable.” This problem is valid for whole political spectrum and the refrain of large segments of population is also the source of the static nature of Azerbaijani politics: “Why is there no renewal, no change both in government and opposition? People do not want change because they fear it. Because they know if there is going to be a change, they will not be a part of it. People are unable to imagine change, be it a good or bad change.” This political apathy is reflected in justifications of continued authoritarian policies and practices: “Not only the government but also many citizens say that we are not ready for democracy.”<sup>50</sup> For the Azerbaijani people, the most important point of reference in near history is the dissolution of the USSR and collapse of communism. The experiences of the collapse and its aftermath, in other words,

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Eldar Aslanov, Dec. 23, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Erkin Qadirli, Public presentation at AFU, Dec. 2, 2010, Thursday.

years of sudden and large-scale change refer to traumatic experiences in the political, economic and social life. Despite admitting the widespread discontent against the Soviet rule as a simple justification for independence, the experiences characterizing the Soviet collapse and following years until the consolidation of a new rule under Heydar Aliyev help equating radical political change with social, political and economic disorder. In turn, associating the era of Popular Front government with the same problems has been a key component of Aliyev governments' discourse against the parties embracing the Popular Front movement and government. It should also be noted that Soviet rule, no matter how much political liberties were restricted, still stands for stability and order for those who are old enough to remember the Soviet era. The governments of Heydar and Ilham Aliyev heavily invested in developing this contrast between the two periods. The stability and order associated not only with the presidency of Heydar Aliyev, but also with the years of his service as First Secretary of the AzCP is compared and contrasted with the final years of Soviet rule and first years of independence. Therefore, equating democratic change in particular and broader systemic change in general with disorder and instability was possible for the broader segments of Azerbaijani society. As a result, calls for a more democratic rule and systemic change helped to resonate with the risks and uncertainties in the popular imagination, regardless of the level of their criticism towards the existing political order. According to some of my interviewees, the formation of this attitude towards political change was facilitated by the political reflexes –or lack thereof– created during the Russian Imperial and Soviet rules. Thus, what is usually described as the “mentality problem” by local as well as foreign commentators is in fact the totality of the common public understanding towards state-society relations.

The continuous and gradual shrinking of the social basis of opposition cannot be understood within the context of “ghettoization” (Bedford & Vinatier, 2017) of opposition, i.e. the serious limitations on opposition's ability to interact with the rest of the society. The opposition is allowed to exist but forced to stay within the limits drawn by the current political power. Apart from inhibiting the development of a pluralist political society, “ghettoization” creates certain deformations in members of the opposition. Back in 2010, Erkin Qadirli noted that “What we are getting is more isolation. If you know that you will get no response, no feedback to your messages,

then you withdraw from interacting. It is a dangerous thing to have a smaller circle.” In turn, politics as a whole becomes obsolete: “The society fails to develop a political aspect, discussions take the form of *qiybet* and the perception of processes and facts take the form of *kismet*.”<sup>51</sup>

I should note that the widespread usage of the term “mentality” is not received uniformly across the popular and elite segments of the society. Regardless of political affiliation, there are objections to what I would call “the abuse” of the term. According to this line of thinking, an overemphasis on negative qualities of patterns of value expression and behavior is simply counterproductive, if one really demands the society transform in a democratic way. This view relies on the argument that stressing the negative traits of the society in a homogenizing way inhibits the development of individual and national self-esteem, which in turn is seen as a prerequisite for individuals to overcome political apathy and cynicism.

The devolution of political sphere into a static structure in Azerbaijan has produced a society without politics. Based on my interviews I can say that the criticism of the lack of a developed political culture applies both to governing political elite and the opposition in Azerbaijan. Thus, politics signify a degenerate sphere both in popular and elite perceptions. Furthermore, the phrase “I do not get involved in politics.” has become a catch-phrase to signify the large number of average citizens who consider any expression about social problems of political choices as dangerous. In democratic polities, the major avenue of popular involvement in politics is via elections. In competitive electoral systems, where elections cease to represent a moment for change, the electorate loses interest in expressing discontent and criticism, although elections are regularly held.

### **6.2.2 Perceptions of Political Elite**

In the Azerbaijani context, any discussion of political elite cannot be made without referring to the question of its formation. In other words, how the group of individuals we label as the elite for analytical purposes attain their status needs to be

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<sup>51</sup> Erkin Qadirli, Public presentation at AFU, Dec. 2, 2010, Thursday.

answered. I contend that the political elite is composed of individuals ascending inside power structures using their relationships and networks. This practice includes a crucial dimension, namely communication, that is the use of symbols for increasing rewards and avoiding punishments in line with the unwritten rules of conduct. Different political systems and sets of historical references produce different rule of conduct. To put it differently, the hegemonic definition of the priorities in a political society provides a framework for attaining elite positions.

Regardless of political affiliation or views, the framing of the questions of political system are made in reference to the challenges of nation-state building. Furthermore, the question of formation is inextricably linked to the creation of a “national elite” as a result of the post-colonial situation of Azerbaijan. However, critics of the Aliyev governments tended to frame the question of political elite mostly in democracy and nation building, whereas proponents tended to adopt a view that placed state and institution building at the center. In terms of defining the historical periods crucial for the formation of a national political elite, my interviewees were in disagreement except for the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and post-Stalin thaw in 1950s. While the rise of the APF in Azerbaijani politics in late 1980s and early 1990s is considered by some of my interviewees as another period of national political elite formation, some others chose to define that era as a missed opportunity in this regard.<sup>52</sup> While the Popular Front movement was divided and lost much of its strength because of this, the success of Heydar Aliyev was to achieve some form of coalition to achieve political order and stability.

An interesting and crucial feature of the Azerbaijani political system is its success in maintaining the political order and continuity. By the time this study was originally conducted, Aliyevs have been ruling Azerbaijan for seventeen years and one decade afterwards, the political regime appears to be unchallenged and stable as it was never in the past. Therefore, the mechanisms whereby political elite is kept united and potential rivals within the ruling coalition eliminated becomes an important

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<sup>52</sup> According to proponents of this idea, the APF should have remained as a broad coalition of various political groups. This way, in their thinking, Azerbaijan could have managed a smoother transition to independence and more stable democracy. Furthermore, the groups with nationalist tendencies in the APF are accused of abusing the popular discontent for Qarabagh’s occupation for the purpose of overthrowing government and seizing political power.

question to answer. Loyalty, according to Rasim Aghayev, is the most important asset for members of the ruling elite: “If your loyalty is assured, you are allowed to do anything. Those ministers were sacked in 2005 because their loyalty was in question, not because of their illegal activities.” Accordingly, those who were targeted by the occasional purges are the members of the ruling coalition who allegedly attempted to use their independent financial resources, some electoral basis and international linkages for political ambitions secretly. According to Rasim Aghayev, the ruling elite were acting uniformly in the 2003 and 2005 elections and because of that there was no possibility of a Color Revolution in those years.<sup>53</sup>

### **6.2.3 The Nature of Political Competition**

In democratic political systems, elections fulfill the peaceful replacement of governments offering different political programs addressing economic, social and cultural agenda of the country. Political parties and politicians develop these programs broadly on a basis of ideology, the understanding of how society operates. Presence of different perspectives about the workings of the society is a natural and desired phenomenon in democracies. Societies consist of different segments, divided by economic and cultural differences, and thus their understanding of society and its interests may thus vary. The lack of a vibrant system of political parties in Azerbaijan, therefore, can be seen as a reflection of the lack of different ideologies. One of the striking features of the ruling political party in Azerbaijan, which is in power since 1993, is the difficulty in describing its ideological position on challenges facing the country. According to Erkin Qadirli: “There is no ideology defining the boundaries of the system, so the system does not promote loyalty to anything. Ideological boundaries are necessary, but not enough alone. A legal framework and a constitution are needed to define how the system operates. Otherwise, people in advantaged positions in society will maintain the status quo.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Rasim Aghayev.

<sup>54</sup> Erkin Qadirli, public presentation at AFU, Dec. 2, 2010.

According to the members of the opposition, the Azerbaijani government continues to preserve the image of a democratic polity. As Hikmet Hajizade expresses, “the Azerbaijani government cannot declare outright dictatorship, because this would be very costly whereas a semi-authoritarian system is more profitable.”<sup>55</sup> He also argues that the presence of a small group of people who he defines as the “intellectuals, who resist the pressures and temptations” is an achievement in itself. Formal opposition parties, youth associations and members of academia, he suggests, should be seen as a source of optimism, which is much needed to struggle for democracy in Azerbaijan.

Government representatives, as in many competitive authoritarian settings, use election results as a source of legitimacy for their rule. The presence of opposition parties which continuously fail in electoral processes provide a basis upon which members and supporters of government depict their success as a proof of the opposition’s failure. After 2005, opposition parties chose to boycott the elections arguing that elections are not free and fair. In a 2008 roundtable, Musavat member Nasib Nasibzade said “It is quite obvious that we will not have democratic elections. A boycott will at least demonstrate our discontent.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, opposition parties’ decision to join the elections was also influenced by the international factors. According to Farhad Aghaliyev, “In 2005, joining the elections was a natural decision because Color Revolutions were at their height. The people were hopeful. The situation today, however, is totally different.”

The prevention of free and fair elections is an important factor inhibiting the development of the ideas of accountability. Regarding municipal elections, Abil Bayramov stresses that: “The electorate has low expectations from municipalities. They do not vote. How can they be interested in elections? The precondition is free and fair elections. Once people see that they can choose their representatives, they can voice their expectations.” He further adds that “The government argues that the people are not ready for self/local governance. In fact, political will is lacking to introduce

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<sup>55</sup> Hikmet Hajizade, public roundtable “Upcoming elections, media and the West,” June 27, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Nasib Nasibli, public roundtable “Upcoming elections, media and the West,” June 27, 2008.

local governance. Their argument is without basis.”<sup>57</sup> The shrinking of politics as a sphere for the pursuit of rights and interests can lead to preference of non-democratic avenues for expressions of resentment. According to Rasim Aghayev, “Compared to Armenia and Georgia, Azerbaijan is in worst place. Azerbaijan is following the path of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan had a political opposition, but Karimov destroyed it. Political sphere cannot be without opposition. If it is eliminated, the vacuum will be filled by political Islam.”<sup>58</sup>

The sphere of political competition has also another dimension, namely the role of social classes as a basis for political choices. However, social classes do not constitute an objective reality, but their political activity takes place via ideologies. By ideologies, I refer to sets of interpretations used in ascribing meaning to the social and political world. Thus, political activities, or refraining from it, is a product of beliefs regarding what is good or beneficial for the individual and society. Ideally, political parties communicate to the electorate with the purpose of influencing their choices, and elections represent the failure or success of that communication.

The founding ideology of the Soviet Union was the building of communism, which refers to, among other things, the creation of classless society. In capitalist societies, society is stratified in a number of ways, among which economic stratification, that is the economic classes, is considered to be of primary importance. One of the definitions in capitalist democracies is that politics is the sphere in which representatives of economic classes compete for their interests, while remaining within the boundaries outlined by law. Socialism in the USSR, on the other hand, was based on what was called “the proletarian dictatorship,” in which only one party working on behalf and for the interests of the working class. Socialist economic and political system, it was argued, was going to eliminate the material basis for the classes and thus communism was going to be constructed. Giving a more detailed account of Soviet political and economic system in the context of classes is neither possible in this work, nor is it necessary. What is relevant here is that the political system operated towards homogenizing the society into ideologically similar individuals. As a result,

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Abil Bayramov, Dec. 22, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Rasim Aghayev, 2008.

society and politics was shaped differently in comparison to liberal democracies. Although there were social groups and segments defined by their social roles, such as workers, peasants, intellectuals and so on, “In the USSR, every social class was losing their peculiar characteristics. When the Union dissolved, no class actors emerged.”<sup>59</sup>

In explanations of the class dynamics of the political realm, the term “middle class” has an important place in Azerbaijan. However, definitions of the middle class, thus what to expect from them, is subject to different interpretations. A crucial line of separation is between economic and political definitions of the middle class. Nazim Imanov, for example, defines the middle class on the basis of income, pointing out to the growing and diversifying consumption, especially observed as house and car sales. Based on this criterion, he argues that there is a growing middle class in Azerbaijan. Zerdusht Alizade, on the other hand, insists that middle class is distinguished by a natural tendency to support liberal political values. However, this criterion, as he contends, indicates a rather weak middle class in the country.

### **6.3 Informal Networks: Clan Politics in Azerbaijan**

In Azerbaijan regional affiliations as well as family and kin relations are important for elite recruitment, although the former is not as strong as a factor as some would assume. Although regionalism has a long history in the Azerbaijani context, its meaning as we know today was believed to have emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, when Azerbaijanis became the majority ethnic group in the country’s representative bodies. This period also corresponds to a new era in which the relationship between the center and the periphery republics in the USSR was redefined. According to this redefinition, the leaders of the national republics were relatively free in their handling of the internal affairs as long as political and economic demands of the center are met. The creation, or the gaining prominence of regional networks, is believed to be based on two motives: first, to create a safer environment which is politically insecure for Party and state officials and second, to make the political and economic apparatus work smoother so that these organs function better. The adverse effects of regionalism

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<sup>59</sup> Zerdusht Alizade, public roundtable “Solidarity,” FAR Centre, Dec. 19, 2009.



and paternalism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere are extensively studied, and therefore will not be discussed here. Although regional affiliations are still partly helpful in elite and public interpretations of politics, regionalism in Azerbaijan is strongly weakened as a political dynamic. Instead, the ruling elite in post-independence Azerbaijan are believed to be united by joint political and economic interests.

According to Emir Pehlivan,<sup>60</sup> the sense of belongingness among the population to their respective regions of origin is weaker than assumed. He contends that although in certain periods of time individuals from specific regions might be recruited to the political elite more than others, this does not mean that those regions are allocated more resources. In other words, the relative concentration of individuals originating from the same region within the political elite does not necessarily bring that region, or other people living or originating from that region for that matter, an advantage in distribution of power and wealth. For the average Azerbaijani citizen, who lives in poverty in every region, contends Pehlivan, “the issue is to make a living, not regions.” Thus, ordinary people as well as people in positions of power value loyalty over common geographical background, in order to maximize their life-chances.

The emergence of regionalism as a framework for understanding Soviet and post-Soviet political life is often dated back to 1960s, when center-periphery relationships in the Soviet Union were modified. Under Heydar Aliyev, regionalism and anti-corruption campaigns were used in combination to transform the composition of the political elite. Under the leadership of the new First Secretary, Nakhchevanis started to gain influence, although the Bakintsi retained much of their power and were able to continue recruiting from their own ranks.<sup>61</sup> For much of the last two decades of the Soviet Union, the Bakintsi and Nakhchevanis were the two most influential groups in Azerbaijani politics. The dismissal of Heydar Aliyev from Politburo membership did not lead to a decreased role of Nakhchevanis. This was an important factor in Heydar Aliyev’s return as President of Azerbaijan. A second moment, on the other hand, was “20 January,” immediately after which majority of the elite members

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Emir Pehlivan, Nov. 29, 2010

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Rasim Aghayev.

of Azerbaijani society have fled abroad, as Rasim Aghayev contends. He further argues that with the escape of them, the concept “regionalism” gained a new meaning, in which networks affiliated with other regions started to gain power in political sphere.

Regional affiliation, not as a primordial type of group identity but as a marker of cultural orientation also plays a role in Azerbaijani politics. According to one interviewee<sup>62</sup> Russian speaking population predominantly supported the presidency of Ilham Aliyev as a reaction against the increasing domination of people affiliated with Nakhchevani and Yeraz. However, as Anar Valiev suggests, the influence of people associated with rural cultural traits have increased at the expense of the Yeraz during Ilham Aliyev’s presidency. Aliaga Memmedli also confirmed that the influence of the Yeraz elite has been steadily declining while Baku-based Pashayev family’s political and economic power increased.<sup>63</sup>

In the Azerbaijani political system where governmental and administrative posts are not impersonal, relationships among the political elite rely on loyalty and trust. Therefore, “regionalism has achieved a unique position in power politics, because the foundation for trust within elite circles has traditionally been based largely on regional identities” (Cornell 2011: 167). Although political alignments and rivalries cannot be reduced to regional affiliations, the relationships between elite groups provide important insights for understanding the political dynamics in Azerbaijan.

Clans in Azerbaijani politics can be traced back to the “Era of Khanates,” i.e. the period between the end of the Safavid dynasty in 1747 and the gradual invasion of Azerbaijani territories by Russian Empire in early 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the weakening central power of Iran, formerly united by the Safavid Empire, khanates of Baku, Quba, Shaki, Shamakhi, Karabagh, Nakhchevan and Erevan became independent in this period.<sup>64</sup> The populations of these khanates were heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, religion and sect. Furthermore, the population was divided as sedentary and nomadic. The khanates, which lacked political and economic unity, were often in violent conflict

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<sup>62</sup> Name not mentioned upon request of interviewee.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Aliaga Memmedli, 2007.

<sup>64</sup> The most powerful khanate, the Shirvanshah was destroyed by the Safavids.

against each other for domination. The long and violent conflicts between khanates is seen as an important factor strengthening regionally-based solidarity and therefore acting as a centrifugal force against the building of an Azerbaijani national identity (Cornell 2011: 167). After two major wars between the Russian and Iranian armies between 1804-1813 and 1826-1828, the khanates of Azerbaijan became part of the Russian Empire. Until 1840s, Azerbaijan remained under direct military of Russia and khanates were reorganized as provinces, each governed by an army officer. The new administrative territorial changes in 1840s introduced the establishment of guberniias, which ignored the historical background or demographic composition of the region (Altstadt 1992: 12). Furthermore, with minor exceptions, Russian rule in Azerbaijan from early 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1918 was explicitly anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish. Especially when compared to non-Muslim communities of Southern Caucasus, Azerbaijani Turks were denied of administrative affairs. The Islamic clergy, who exercised a significant authority over the Muslim population and therefore formed a part of the elite in the country, were brought under state control whereas their Christian counterparts in Armenia and Georgia enjoyed greater freedom. Only between 1896 and 1904, more Azerbaijanis were recruited for civil service to balance the predominance of Armenians. Those who were able to enter civil service were often the children of wealthy, landowning former feudal lords, and they could do so mostly by attending schools and universities of Russia (Cornell 2011: 9). Considering the limited modernizing transformative impact of Russian rule over and the precarious existence of the vast majority of Azerbaijani Turkish population, one might assume that regional affiliations remained largely intact. Especially during Baku's industrialization during the First Oil Boom in 19<sup>th</sup> century, large numbers of people migrated from rural regions to the capital in an attempt to make a living. The weakness of mechanisms of social and cultural integration, like civil society organizations and education, was probably paralleled by the continued importance of kinship and regional affiliations in developing strategies of survival.

Similar and in relation to national identity, the Soviet era has had a mixed impact on clan networks. Due to the fact that Soviet Republics were predominantly characterized by rural economy and feudal relations, especially in Soviet Central Asia

and Southern Caucasus, the modernization project in these regions also targeted pre-modern forms of personal and communal identification. ...

During the 1950s and 1960s, Baku, the political, cultural and economic capital of Azerbaijan experienced an important demographic transformation that changed the ethnic composition of the city in favor of Azerbaijani Turks. With increased opportunities for education and work, migration from rural regions thus laid the basis for a cultural, economic and political transformation in near future. In other words, together with large numbers of Azerbaijani Turks came their cultural practices and social networks. The demographic reclaiming of Baku was therefore completed with the cultural, economic and political reclamation. The diaspora communities from the west of Azerbaijan, namely the Nakhchevani, Yeraz and Graz were the most successful groups to establish networks for economic and political power (Cornell 2011: 168). Their success, which also helped their continued influence in the post-independence era, can be explained by their strong group-closure developed as a result of living in ethnically alien and even hostile environments (ibid).

Heydar Aliyev's appointment to the First Secretary of the AzCP was a turning point for the Nakhchevani clan in gaining an advantageous position in national politics. With Brezhnev's policy of stability of cadres and allowing strong-men rule the republics with relative autonomy from Moscow in return of economic performance and political loyalty, Aliyev was able to appoint many of his fellow Nakhchevanis to positions in governmental and academic hierarchy. This practice cannot be explained by purely primordial reflexes, but also as a reflection of the increased need for loyalty and trust in an otherwise risky and uncertain political environment. More importantly, the political base Heydar Aliyev created in government, academies and bureaucracy during Brezhnev era was an important factor in his continued popularity in Azerbaijan after his fall from Moscow's grace and his comeback as president in 1993. In addition to the Nakhchevani network, he also managed to secure the support of Yeraz elite in consolidating his power in the 1990s.

In addressing to the issue of clans in Azerbaijani politics, it is important to note that regional affiliation, like elsewhere, is not the sole determinant of political alignment. For example, many leaders of the APF Former members and representatives of the APF were also from Nakhchevan or Yeraz regions, but their

political disposition was distinctively different from the members of the same clan occupying important positions within government and administration. Furthermore, former members and representatives of the APF promote the view that the Front actively sought to limit regionalism's role in politics, although they are keen to admit that certain negative features of regionalism existed within the organization.<sup>65</sup> Like Heydar Aliyev, the APF leader Ebulfelz Elchibey himself was from Nakhchevan, but his political past and identity was apparently not in accordance with being from the Nakhchevani clan per se. Isa Qambar and Ali Kerimli, on the other hand, are originally from Karabakh. Musa Qambar's declared opposition to regionalism, however, is accompanied by an opposition to Nakhchevani clan (Cornell 2011: 170). Etibar Memedov, the former leader of the Azerbaijani National Independence Party, on the other hand, is Yerazi and a significant proportion of his supporters are from the same region (Cornell 2011: 169).

In present day Azerbaijan, five major informal networks associated with geographical and administrative regions are generally assumed to be influential in political life. These networks are popularly known as the Nakhchevan, Yeraz, Graz, Karabakh, Baku-Shirvan and Ganja clans. Except for the Baku-Shirvan and Ganja clans, all others represent Azerbaijani diaspora and enclave communities (Cornell 2011: 168), originating from the western regions of Azerbaijan. Aside from politically influential groups there is the Talysh, originating from the south-eastern parts of Azerbaijan and the Lezgin clans. These groups, having failed to transform into a political actor, occupy important positions in the religious and military hierarchy, respectively. An evaluation of the clans in Azerbaijani society and politics requires the recognition of their differences in terms of the nature and strength of group identity, level of organization, and geographical distribution (Alkan 2010: 207). It is believed that the conflict with Armenia was influential in the growth and strengthening of Western clans politically and economically.

The Nakhchevani clan's most prominent members are Ramiz Mehdiyev (Head of the Presidential Apparatus), Rasul Quliyev (former Speaker of the Parliament), Namik Abbasov (Minister of National Security and former Chief of the Azerbaijani

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<sup>65</sup> Interviews with former members and representatives of the PFA.

KGB) and Ali Nagiyev (Minister of Social Welfare and Labor). Among them, Ramiz Mehdiyev acts as a power broker and fulfills the task of balancing the interests of clan members. Since he was appointed to his current post in 1995, Ramiz Mehdiyev was Heydar Aliyev's confidant and it is assumed that he possesses important confidential information about members of the ruling elite. Members of the next powerful clan, Yeraz, include Ali Insanov (Minister of Health), Murtuz Aleskerov (Speaker of Parliament). It should be also noted that some ministries are represented by members of other clans. For example, Minister of Defense Ramil Usubov is originally from Karabagh, but his connection to Heydar Aliyev is believed to date back to 1980s when the former served in Nakhchevan (Cornell 2011: 169).

In Central Asian post-Soviet republics, where clan politics also exist, presidents are often depicted as merely actors balancing the interests of different groups. The failure to maintain balance, as happened in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and 2010 results in violent conflict and overthrow of presidents. On the contrary, in Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev was able to secure his position from such threat of clans by successfully making use of clan rivalries and "promoting and punishing each side at different times and thus preventing the rise and consolidation of each clan" (Cornell 2011: 169). This process became apparent when Heydar Aliyev was able to eliminate potential threats to his rule and consolidated his power in the second half of the 1990s. However, the struggle for power between and among the clans was an important feature of Azerbaijani politics between late 1990s and mid-2000s. Despite being unable to determine the political power in the country, the Nakhchevani and Yeraz clans' rivalry became more overt once threats from outside were eliminated in Heydar Aliyev's final years. In 1998 presidential elections, where Etibar Memedov, the leader of the Azerbaijan National Independence Party and a member of the Yeraz clan, competed against Heydar Aliyev and the Yeraz clan is believed to covertly support Memedov because of their competition with the Nakhchevan clan (Cornell 2011: 169-170). In addition to inter-clan rivalries, it is also possible to mention examples of intra-clan competition for power. For example, Rasul Guliyev, the leader of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party is also from Nakhchevan and although being in exile in the U.S., he is believed to have some political basis among Nakhchevanis in government. Ayaz Mutalibov, the first president of independent Azerbaijan, on the other hand, represents

the Bakuvian elite, who lost their dominant position in the country to Nakhchevani and Yerazi clans in the post-Soviet era. Mutalibov, who is an exile in Moscow, therefore enjoyed the support of the Bakintsi. Their support for Mutalibov is generally believed to be an expression of their resentment against the dominance of clans representing the rural populations.

I contend that any social and political analysis based on regional affiliations in Azerbaijan should be aware of their flexible nature. Such identities are never the sole determinant of political alignment or behavior, and as anthropology firmly states, they are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed depending on specific circumstances. According to Cornell, “Though regionalism is entrenched, it should not be regarded as an all-purpose explanation for the country’s politics.” (2011: 170). Indeed, throughout my fieldwork, I was warned several times by my interviewees that clan politics does not constitute the only essence of Azerbaijani political life. Repeatedly, I was told that an interest-based perspective has more explanatory power. In other words, clan structures and relations are highly malleable against concrete relations of financial or political calculations. Therefore, it should be noted that in the period more than a quarter century following independence, clan structures, their mechanisms of operation and nature has changed considerably. Whereas in the 1990s loyalty and trust was –at the expense of other achievements– necessary for the survival of Azerbaijani state, these two qualities serve to maintain stability and continuity of authoritarian rule. Among other things, expectations from Ilham Aliyev’s succession to presidency included the removal of clan elements from politics. Indeed, the first years of Ilham Aliyev, corresponding to the wave of Color Revolutions in Eurasia, demonstrated that the power struggle between clans could have been to the detriment of the new president. The political period, in which 2003 presidential and 2005 parliamentary elections represent the breaking points, point to the declining ability of the traditional opposition parties against the increased visibility of inter-elite struggles as the defining feature of Azerbaijani power politics. Some dimensions of the inter-elite conflict are believed to be motivated by inter-clan rivalries and the conflicts influenced clans in the ruling coalition differently. The “failed revolution” of 2005 demonstrated that power politics has become increasingly confined to the dynamics and actors within the ruling elite, rather than being a struggle by political parties within

the formal institutional framework. The actors and conflicts, in turn, are defined by regionally-based networks of patronage. Consequently, Heydar Aliyev's strategy of using the Nakhchevani and Yeraz clans as a system of checks and balances in a country where institutional power is weak (Cornell 2011: 169) has changed. Imprisonment of Ali Insanov and prevention of Murtuz Alaskarov from becoming the speaker of the parliament again, the balance of power has changed in favor of the Nakhchevani clan. Secondly, there were doubts among the populace and elite alike, that Ilham Aliyev was incapable of maintaining the ruling coalition by continuing the balance between competing clans. On the contrary, he managed to keep the ruling elite under control at the expense of weakening the Yeraz clan's power and relying more on the Nakhchevan clan, as I mentioned above. Finally, another set of expectations concerning Ilham Aliyev included a renewal and reform in the political power system through the removal of "Old Guards," i.e. the members of the former Soviet *nomenklatura* who possessed important positions in government, from power politics. Nevertheless, in addition to the presidency, the transfer of political power to Ilham Aliyev was carried out successfully. While he was able to eliminate potential contenders for power within the ruling elite, including former political figures like Ayaz Mutalibov and Rasul Quliyev, the Old Guard remained largely intact. With the prevention of a Color Revolution in 2005 and in its aftermath, any future attempt to challenge the political power in Azerbaijan by linking actors inside and outside of the country became highly unlikely (Alkan 2010: 198).

Another crucial development concerning the transformation of clan structures and operation in Azerbaijan is the growing importance of establishing pacts through family ties. Some of my interviewees likened the structure of political and economic power as well as prestige comprising of several circles at the center of which the president himself is located: "Imagine circles within circles, at the center of which there is Ilham Aliyev. The second circle contains probably 8-10 families and their connections with the president are strong. The third circle contains maybe 30-40 families, and their relationship with the presidential family is relatively weaker. The circles' size grows in each step and their connection to the president gets weaker. Those in the outer circles try to get closer to the center by arranging marriages for their



offspring.”<sup>66</sup> It is also possible to argue Ilham Aliyev himself has consolidated and increased his power in a similar fashion. His wife Mehriban Aliyeva is from the Bakuvian Pashayevs and the family has a considerable financial and political power. Mehriban Aliyeva, who until 2018 was active especially for charity and PR activities for the Azerbaijani state and government, was appointed as the newly created post of Vice President by Ilham Aliyev. This appointment was met with harsh criticism from within and outside Azerbaijan, as a further sign of Sultanistic practices.

Building of patronage networks and making use of informal relations are nothing unique to undemocratic political systems whereas the latter is an indispensable part of political life by sustaining the formal mechanisms, or institutional organization of power. The problem, however, arises when informal mechanisms replace formal mechanisms and employed in order to obtain unjust gains for a group of people. In other words, the degree and purpose of informality are crucial variables in determining its impact in politics. It is possible and necessary to acknowledge that in post-Soviet states, political systems possess different degrees and meanings of informality. Although explanations about the prevalence of informal relations based on kinship and common regional affinity in post-Soviet societies start with pre-Soviet social and political structures, it is crucial to distinguish the peculiar impact of Soviet and post-Soviet experiences in transforming informality into a modern phenomenon.

In Azerbaijan, both at the popular and elite levels, regionalism and clan networking is steadily declining, as practices of nation and state building, however problematic, continue to homogenize the communities. Furthermore, market mechanisms and globalization –again, however problematic– contribute to the same process while changing variables of individual and group identity. Sources and nature of social capital is also transforming, making ethnic, clan or regional affiliation less influential in determining political or economic behavior. Apparently, all these processes represent new avenues for social research. While clan politics remains resilient and is still an important feature of political realm in Azerbaijan, students of the country need to be aware of its transformation. The “Old Guard,” the Nakhchevani and Yeraz networks might still be powerful, but its individual members are gradually

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<sup>66</sup> Interviewer requested anonymity for this comment.

changing with the natural ageing and passing away of old members. Consequently, a new generation of political elite with a significantly different experience of political socialization will take over.

With the gradual decline of the nationalist-democratic opposition parties inheriting the APF's legacy, clan politics has become the major dynamic that determine the country's political sphere. In other words, the government-opposition dichotomy that defined the first decade of Azerbaijani politics is replaced by inter-clan competition for more political and economic power. During his presidency, Heydar Aliyev successfully balanced the clans, especially the two most influential ones, i.e. the Nakhchevani and Yerazi clans, by a mechanism of punishment and reward based on controlling information flows. As a result, no group was able to acquire political and economic power enough to marginalize the others completely. In addition, unlike, for example in Kyrgyzstan, the presidential power did not become subject to clans' sustained threat of instability. On rare occasions where clans were suspected of acting against the presidential power, they were relatively easily taken under control, as happened in 2005-2006 and later in 2010.

Some of my interviewees contended that, regional affiliations as well as family and kin relations are important for elite recruitment, although the former is not as strong as a factor as some would assume. Although regionalism has a long history in the Azerbaijani context, its meaning as we know today was believed to have emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, when Azerbaijanis became the majority ethnic group in the country's representative bodies. This period also corresponds to a new era in which the relationship between the center and the periphery republics in the USSR was redefined. According to this redefinition, the leaders of the national republics were relatively free in their handling of the internal affairs as long as political and economic demands of the center are met. The creation, or the gaining prominence of regional networks, is believed to be based on two motives: first, to create a safer environment which is politically insecure for Party and state officials and second, to make the political and economic apparatus work smoother so that these organs function better. The adverse effects of regionalism and paternalism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere are extensively studied, and therefore will not be discussed here. Although regional affiliations are still partly helpful in elite and public interpretations of politics,

regionalism in Azerbaijan is strongly weakened as a political dynamic. Instead, the ruling elite in post-independence Azerbaijan are believed to be united by joint political and economic interests.

According to Emir Pehlivan, the sense of belongingness among the population to their respective regions of origin is weaker than assumed. He contends that although in certain periods of time individuals from specific regions might be recruited to the political elite more than others, this does not mean that those regions are allocated more resources. In other words, the relative concentration of individuals originating from the same region within the political elite does not necessarily bring that region, or other people living or originating from that region for that matter, an advantage in distribution of power and wealth. For the average Azerbaijani citizen, who lives in poverty in every region, contends Pehlivan, “the issue is to make a living, not regions.” Thus, ordinary people as well as people in positions of power value loyalty over common geographical background, in order to maximize their life-chances.

The emergence of regionalism as a framework for understanding Soviet and post-Soviet political life is often dated back to 1960s, when center-periphery relationships in the Soviet Union were modified. Under Heydar Aliyev, regionalism and anti-corruption campaigns were used in combination to transform the composition of the political elite. Under the leadership of the new First Secretary, Nakhchevanis started to gain influence, although the Bakintsi retained much of their power and were able to continue recruiting from their own ranks.<sup>67</sup> For much of the last two decades of the Soviet Union, the Bakintsi and Nakhchevanis were the two most influential groups in Azerbaijani politics. The dismissal of Heydar Aliyev from Politburo membership did not lead to a decreased role of Nakhchevanis. This was an important factor in Heydar Aliyev’s return as President of Azerbaijan. A second moment, on the other hand, was “20 January,” immediately after which majority of the elite members of Azerbaijani society have fled abroad, as Rasim Aghayev contends. He further argues that with the escape of them, the concept “regionalism” gained a new meaning, in which networks affiliated with other regions started to gain power in political sphere.

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Rasim Aghayev.

Regional affiliation, not as a primordial type of group identity but as a marker of cultural orientation also plays a role in Azerbaijani politics. According to one interviewee<sup>68</sup> Russian speaking population predominantly supported the presidency of Ilham Aliyev as a reaction against the increasing domination of people affiliated with Nakhchevani and Yeraz. However, as Anar Valiev suggests, the influence of people associated with rural cultural traits have increased at the expense of the Yeraz during Ilham Aliyev's presidency. Aliaga Memmedli also confirmed that the influence of the Yeraz elite has been steadily declining while Baku-based Pashayev family's political and economic power increased.<sup>69</sup>

#### **6.4 Perspectives on Democratization and Its Failure**

The political elite of a society are the actors of the political development in a society, but at the same time, the perceptions of the elite take place within the broader understanding of the evolution of political system. The political elite, with their discourse, set the framework of this broader understanding. However, this framework needs to be consistent and realistic so that consent of the society is produced. To make an analogy of the stalled and then reversed process of democratization, one of my interlocutors provided me with a Soviet era anecdote:

“One day, a communist party representative visits a remote village in the mountains of Soviet Azerbaijan. The villagers gathered and they are told about the achievements of the revolution. Every then and now, the speaker says: “One of our feet is in socialism, the other in communism. Every problem will be solved soon.” One of the elderly men stands up and asks: “Well, but for how long will our legs remain split like this?”<sup>70</sup>

Similar to the failure to reach communist society, Azerbaijan failed to achieve democracy. Vast majority of my respondents from all perspectives not only admitted this failure, but attempted to provide explanations for it. In this section, I will provide

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<sup>68</sup> Name not mentioned upon request of interviewee.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Aliaga Memmedli, 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Anecdote told by Hatice Ismailova, public presentation on “PR,” AFU, Dec. 17, 2009.

such explanations with a special emphasis on political elite. Below, three recurrent issues are discussed. First, I focus on how “the legacy of the past” plays a role on current situation. To put it differently, the similarities in elite values, norms and behavior in the Soviet era and independent Azerbaijan is being explained. Second, the way in which the Karabagh conflict prevents the development of a more democratic political society is discussed. Finally, I will elaborate on how the international leverages and linkages for both democratization and authoritarianization are related on the political development in Azerbaijan.

In Azerbaijan, interpretations of current political and social life are still heavily made on the basis of past. What I refer here as the past, is not a homogenous history, i.e. consists of several periods, which are determined by a composition of certain general traits in political and social life. This cognitive tendency to compare and contrast intensifies while one moves closer to present. Pre-Islamic, Islamic, Turkic, Iranian, Russian, democratic republican, Soviet and finally Popular Front eras, each of which represent politically and socially non-homogenous periods of time, are often used as reference points in discussing and interpreting the present. In this regard, I can say that Azerbaijan is still a historically active country. The sensitivity about the relationship between the past and present is of course not shared by all members of elite and popular segments of society. However, it can be said that this sensitivity, whenever expressed, is accompanied by disillusionment with the post-Soviet social and political developments. References to the past that are seen relevant for explaining today are mentioned in other sections whenever necessary. In this part, however, I want to give a brief overview of explicit comparisons of past and present.

For some of those who were discontent with the Soviet Union “(C)ommunism was hell. We believed that once we get rid of the USSR, we will be like in heaven. We were wrong. Now we see that it is neither hell nor heaven. There were good things under communism, but they cannot be presented as arguments for a return to communism.”<sup>71</sup> The fact that the collapse of communism did not automatically amount to the elimination of problems experienced under Soviet Union also created a reexamination of major challenges of democracy: “The collapse of the communist

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<sup>71</sup> Niyazi Mehdi, public roundtable “Solidarity,” FAR Centre, Dec. 19, 2009.

project did not mean the end of the motives that cause its rise: liberty, equality, fraternity. Problems that were thought to be answered by communism still exist and we need to deal with them.”<sup>72</sup>

One of the questions I asked all of my interviewees was to name the biggest problem of Azerbaijan, and without an exception, they answered Qarabagh and the occupied regions. The questions of territorial integrity and displaced people are in themselves significant problems. However, in Azerbaijan, the importance of the Qarabagh question is magnified by its impact on political sphere. The idea that democratization in Azerbaijan is adversely influenced by the Qarabagh problem is expressed by many of my interviewees during research. As Rasim Aghayev puts it, “Democratization is closely related to the solution of the question of territorial integrity.”<sup>73</sup> In the late 1980s, when democratic movements in other Soviet republics were focusing on political change, political agenda in Azerbaijan was almost exclusively fixed on Karabagh. According to Arif Yunusov, “In ’88, there were illusions about democratic reforms in Azerbaijan. With the outbreak of the Qarabagh problem, all of these expectations are forgotten... Political actors preparing for a democratic struggle were stuck with the Qarabagh problem instead.”<sup>74</sup> The escalation of violent conflict and migration of vast number of ethnic Azerbaijanis from invaded territories have changed the political landscape. On the one hand, the political struggle in late Soviet years in Azerbaijan became a question of nation building. Political movements with a nationalist agenda gained legitimacy. On the other hand, the conflict became the major source of resentment against the Soviet power among the migrating masses of people as well as residents of big cities. In other words, Qarabagh problem, despite hindering democratic reforms, have legitimized and popularized nationalist political movements.

According to some interviewees, Qarabagh still continues to prevent democratization. Heydar Aliyev’s ascension to power in 1993 was on the basis of instability caused by the Qarabagh conflict, and in the following years both Aliyevs

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<sup>72</sup> Rasim Musabekov, film screening and public roundtable “Good bye Lenin,” FAR Centre.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Rasim Aghayev, 2008.

<sup>74</sup> Arif Yunusov, public presentation “Armenian National Mentality and Politics,” FAR Centre, 2009.

associated instability with the Popular Front policies and practices. As the limitation of democratic political and civic rights in Azerbaijan were intensified throughout their rule, the rhetoric that the requirements of democratization are secondary to the question of territorial integrity was continuously emphasized. In other words, state building was prioritized over nation and democracy building. The phrase “whereas we have a problem at the size of Qarabagh” has become a standard line in rejection of various political and civic rights for the proponents of the Azerbaijani political leadership.

Thinking about democratization in Azerbaijan, as elsewhere, is impossible without thinking about the international dimension of democratization. As a successor republic of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan is still believed to be highly influenced by the trajectory of politics in Russia. As Adnan Hajizade puts it: “Democratization in Azerbaijan is very difficult unless Russia democratizes. However, starting from today is not futile. Georgia, for example, has demonstrated that Russia is not that powerful in preserving antidemocratic rule in its vicinity. Some progress in this regard can be made despite Russia’s pressures, although Georgia had to sacrifice. Saakashvili, I believe, has become a historical figure already.”<sup>75</sup> During my fieldwork, I observed that examples of sensitivity towards the political developments in the former Soviet territories and especially in Southern Caucasus are abundant. Additionally, political systems in neighboring Iran and Turkey are also closely observed by the politically active segments of Azerbaijan

In 2008, resentment against the West’s disinterest in supporting a democratic opposition, and support for the existing ruling elite was long apparent. Support for Aliyev rule is criticized. In a 2008 public roundtable, Nasib Nasibli criticized what was perceived as the Western support for the government: “They say that the laws are good but the will to implement them does not exist. In fact, the government has enough political will to destroy the opposition altogether, but this will in fact would not benefit the government. ... Representatives of international organizations struggle hard to find positive signs in the government and the political realm.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Adnan Hajizade, 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Nasib Nasibli, public roundtable “Upcoming elections, media and the West,” Hotel Europe, June 27, 2008.

The apparent expectation of Western support for a regime change among some younger supporters of opposition movements is also interpreted differently by other members of the society. The anticipation of such foreign support was received with antipathy among some people who contend that such interference is not acceptable.<sup>77</sup>

A recurrent theme expressed in the interviews was whether state building should democratization or vice versa. The former approach corresponds to what is described as the “prerequisites” school in studies of democratization whereas the latter is more compatible with the “transition” school. In Eldar Aslanov’s view, “Establishing a democracy first and the state institutions afterwards is not the correct path, but the reverse. In Azerbaijan, nation building is also still problematic... I believe it should be said openly: ‘We are building a state. Now is not the time for a liberal democracy.’ Democracy can flourish only when there is an infrastructure for it.”<sup>78</sup> While all interviewees agreed that Azerbaijani statehood is problematic due to several reasons, those assigning democratization a more important role stress the difficulty of establishing reliable and accountable state institutions. Under authoritarian rule, they contend, state and bureaucracy becomes dependent on individuals rather than impersonal offices. In clear opposition to proponents of “prerequisites” approach in Azerbaijan, they insist that democratization requires democrats. More recent studies of democratization, on the other hand, emphasize that democratization occurs neither with prerequisites nor with democrats, but only when democracy becomes the only feasible game for all political elites. For this to happen there needs to be multiple groups of elite with comparable electoral, economic and political power.

## **6.5 National Identity and Perceptions of “National” Politics**

An important dimension of discussions of political elite in Azerbaijan relates to the construction of a national identity. In Azerbaijan, however, the problems of national identity building are coupled with the lack of a policy of national identity

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with I.M., PhD student.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Eldar Aslanov, Dec. 23, 2009.



building. As Eldar Aslanov puts it “The state is borne out of economic unity shaped within a cultural system. The difficult part for us in this definition is the cultural system. It is still in a process of formation, and there are various obstacles to this process. Russian elements still outweigh Azerbaijani ones in culture. The process of cultural identity formation is left on its own. National values are ridiculed.”<sup>79</sup> National identity, as in other identities, is subject to a process of constant re-negotiation and reconstruction. This process is a reflection of contesting views of the nation and transformation or preservation of these views for the political ends. In other words, national identity is inextricably linked to relations of power. In addition, national identity represents a crucial link between the political leadership and the population, by providing a basis for –or lack of– legitimacy of the rulers and their policies. As is well known, national identity in post-Soviet republics has complexities that differentiate them from the processes of national-identity building processes in other nation-states. These difficulties are related with the pre-Soviet and Soviet-era policies of national identity, which, sometimes, are exacerbated by ambiguities in post-independence policies. These policies, I argue, influence not the public and elite perceptions of identity itself, but economic, cultural and political life. In other words, the post-independence constellations of social class, social status and political views (or political affiliations) have created certain areas of contestation regarding state-society relations. Ascertaining these contestations, in my opinion, can shed light to questions of social cohesion and democratization in Azerbaijan.

During my fieldwork, my ideas about the interplay of national identity with perceptions of social class, social status and political affiliation were first formed during an intellectual debate in a Baku coffee house. Main points of discussion throughout the debate consisted of the post-colonial status of Azerbaijani society and language. These topics reflected problems of post-Soviet nation-building process, demographic transformations, democratization and modernization. The elevated status of Russian language vis-à-vis Azerbaijani language as a result of economic and cultural modernization during the course of the Soviet Union still remains problematic in the independent Azerbaijan. Russian language, in other words, is still associated

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Eldar Aslanov, Dec. 23, 2009.

with high culture, professional jobs, cosmopolitan views and importantly, a highly reserved view of post-Soviet political and cultural transformation. The cognitive division of society in educated, cultured, Russian speaking population, who predominantly lived in Baku during the Soviet era, was exacerbated with the massive influx of migrants from invaded territories and rural areas....

Relation of the Russian speaking segments of society to politics and social movements is also seen problematic. It can be said that the politically active Azerbaijanis are unable to comprehend the refrain of Russian speaking people, who are seen as educated, cultured members of the society who embrace universalistic values. Their unwillingness to participate in opposition parties and movements, or lack of discontent with the undemocratic government is often criticized. It should be noted that this segment is insignificant in terms of numbers, but politically, their weight is perceived rather high in Azerbaijani society. Also, a criticism towards Russian-speaking population's refrain on political activism does not necessarily correspond to a perception of them as a kind of "fifth column" in society. As one participant noted: "Does 'Russian-speaking' mean Russian-oriented, Russian-minded? Our problem is not the language we are speaking. The important thing is what we are talking about." The role of Russia in the formation of a distinct Azerbaijani identity is not ignored. Several of my interviewees, notwithstanding their criticisms, stated that Russian and Soviet domination has contributed positively to Azerbaijan in specific respects. While these contributions were mostly defined within the framework of modernization, the source of this modernization is sometimes contested. Again, some of my interviewees echoed similar views when they argued that Azerbaijan is more closely related to what they defined as the "Russian civilization" rather than the "European civilization." In my opinion, this line of thinking both admits the role of Russia in Azerbaijani modernization while retaining a certain criticism towards the content of that modernization.

To summarize, policy decisions as well as rhetoric of political elite of the country regarding national identity have created a kind of post-colonial situation in Azerbaijan. Whereas similar processes were also observed in some of the other post-Soviet countries, there are also peculiarities of the Azerbaijani context. Sometimes contrasting and ambiguous policies of late Soviet, early independence and late-

independence political elites were interpreted differently by different members of society on the basis of cultural and political codes. The meaning of being an Azerbaijani citizen is still a contested topic that spans between perceptions of social class, cultural status and political behavior.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE NEW GENERATION: AGENCIES OF CHANGE OR SUPPORTERS OF THE STATUS-QUO?

As the post-Soviet transformations stalled and reversed, the return or resilience of former political elite was implicitly or explicitly assumed to be the major cause of this process. This assumption was based on the idea that the members of the political elite of the former regime possessed certain cognitive and behavioral characteristics, which were incompatible with the operating mechanisms of a democratic system. The political socialization under Soviet rule is believed to create persistent networks highly capable of reproducing itself and comprised of individuals whose understanding of politics and state-society relations radically different from those in democratic countries. From this assumption, two opposing expectations were derived. First, the persistence of former Soviet political elite is expected to decrease over time, as the cohort of these individuals passed or became old enough to retire from service. The circulation of political elite due to natural process is therefore expected to facilitate members of newer and younger members into the ranks of political elite. The younger cohort, in turn, is assumed to experience political socialization significantly different from their predecessors. Depending on the level of modernization and integration into the global system, especially the technocratic and bureaucratic cadres would be filled with individuals educated not in Moscow and socialized not in the Komsomol. Finally, the younger cohorts representing a different perception of the world and different expectations for the future were expected to initiate from within the political system. Second, and more pessimist expectation on the other hand emphasizes the monopoly of a small minority over the political system, and exclude generational change as the facilitator of political transformation. It follows that by keeping actual positions of power under strict control, the actual exercisers of power are free to recruit as many

professional cadres as they want. Ascending in the political system continues to be the prerogative of this small minority, and complete conformity to the norms and values of the existing political elite is a must. Therefore, this second perspective represents a more political and sociological approach and excludes the possibility of a “natural” transformation.

It should be noted that the unfulfilled expectations and aspirations of a generation might have played a role in the dissolution of the USSR. Accordingly, as I have outlined in the section on Soviet political elite, the stagnation of the mechanism of turnover in the political and economic elite during the Brezhnev era has resulted in disillusionment and anger among the younger members of the *nomenklatura*. Perceiving their chances of ascendance in the system to be low, younger and would-be members of the Soviet elite might have considered glasnost and perestroika in the beginning, and the dissolution of the USSR later as the creation of new opportunity structures for moving forward. I contend that this was possible partly because the USSR had a highly formal mechanism for elite recruitment and circulation, despite the fact that the inner workings of elite structures relied on highly informal relations. Thus, it can be inferred that the repudiation of the practice of elite circulation for the sake of stability created a contrasted perception of expectations and reality in terms of the prospects for career advancement in politics and economy. The non-existence of such formal practice for elite recruitment and advancement in independent Azerbaijan therefore does not create a similar tension, as those with educational and professional qualifications always have the chance to advance their career abroad.

In this chapter, first I am going to make an overview of generations and political change in the Soviet Union with a focus on political elites. Major characteristics of the generations will be outlined together with the dynamics of the regime that help explain the behavior of the elite. Secondly, I will discuss the relevance of generational change in political transformations in Azerbaijan. Starting with a historical overview, I am going to focus on post-Soviet characteristics of generations and social, political and economic dynamics that shape the future elites in Azerbaijan. The chapter will be concluded with a summary and discussion of the topic. Throughout the chapter, I will attempt to present and compare secondary sources on the issue with

the information I obtained throughout my fieldwork, i.e. data collected from the interviewees and participant observations.

Until 1960s, approaches towards analysis of political elite in the USSR were limited in their perspectives as objective information about the subject were insufficient. Theories of totalitarianism (Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965; Arendt 1972) and “new class” (Djilas 1957) were regarded as insufficient as they lacked an insight for agency and change. Furthermore, the Soviet economy and society thrived in the post-War decades, thereby making discussions of “convergence” possible (Sorokin 1960; Goldthorpe 1964; Inkeles 1966; Galbraith 1967). Accordingly, communist societies were expected to demonstrate parallels with other developing and developed societies, and therefore, studies of these societies required the employment of perspectives used for understanding other industrial societies. One assumption of the new approaches was that social transformation, with its cultural and economic dimensions, as well as changes in policy-making and ideology, that the differences between generations could be used as a useful measure to understand Soviet society. In this regard, analysis and comparison of generations has an implicit relation to theories of modernization, which mainly suggests that political change is the outcome of economic changes. An understanding of generations was also seen crucial because American Sovietologists were highly interested in the process of succession. Especially after the post-Stalin “thaw” introduced by Khrushchev demonstrated that the process of succession of political elite was closely related to policy changes in the Soviet Union. An understanding of changes in political leadership and elites in terms of generational variables was thus developed.

The generational variable among the Soviet political elite was studied primarily from a number of factors. In addition to career patterns, work experience, education and year of membership to the Party, degree of consensus (or lack thereof) among the elite are studied by some authors (Nagle 1977; Stewart 1977).

Several authors commenting on generations in Soviet society and politics, with their ramifications in political elites and political leadership, define and describe roughly similar generations. For example, Mawdsley and White define four generations of political elite in the Soviet Union (2000: xi-xii, 275-76). Their classification corresponds to age cohorts that are born roughly within twenty years’

periods, but their definition as generations is in fact based on “particular set of life experiences.” (p. xi). Accordingly, the first two generations are the generation of Old Bolsheviks (born roughly between 1880 and 1900) and the Brezhnev Generation (born between 1900 and 1920, also known as the “Class of 38”). A third generation, born between 1920 and 1940, represents a group of political elites who were significantly influenced by the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Members of this generation, including Mikhail Gorbachev himself, managed to advance in their careers in 1970s, but could not enter the top stratum of the Soviet political elite due to Brezhnev’s policy of “stability of cadres.” The final generation, born after 1940, had very limited impact on Soviet politics per-se, but was the group of political elite who carried out the transition into post-communism. It is beyond the purpose of this chapter to the formation and characteristics of each generation here. However, a brief discussion of generations’ role in subverting and then ending communism in the Soviet Union can be made.

Stalin’s death and the following years of thaw have helped the emergence of a new group of people with a different relationship to authority and power in the Soviet Union. Known as the *Shestdesyatniki*<sup>80</sup>, i.e. people of the 60’s, are generally considered as a liberal segment of the Soviet intelligentsia. As a generation, their values and behavior were influenced by their lack of experience of the Stalin era purges and repressions as well as post-Stalin promises of relaxation and welfare. The *Shestdesyatniki*’s importance in terms of Soviet society’s transformation cannot be underestimated:

“Much vilified in later years for their apparently misplaced belief in the reformability of the Soviet system and the redemptive power of the arts, they nevertheless represented the first serious challenge to the post-Stalinist regime’s claims to a monopoly on the truth. Their ideas laid a long fuse that exploded into the activism of glasnost under Gorbachev.” (Sakwa 1999: 329)

In a similar way, Derluguian contends that the people taking to the streets in the late 1980’s with slogans of change were in fact the same people who demanded change in the 1960’s but failed to achieve it back then (Derluguian 2005). This group of people graduated from universities in the 1950s, and in the 1960s, they were on the

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<sup>80</sup> It is unclear when and by whom this term was first employed to connote the people in question.

verge of joining the *nomenklatura*, with hopes to reform the system. Contrary to their expectations, a new type of elite replaced the positions of former Stalinist cadres, and by late 1960's, the new elite already established "closed networks of bureaucratic patronage and privilege that would hold their grip on power for years to come" (Derluguian 2005: 2-3). Furthermore, the CPSU was becoming less representative of the Soviet society in terms of age groups (Harasymiw 1984: 125). A second opportunity for the *Shestdesyatniki* came when Gorbachev's reform programs started to threaten the foundations of the Soviet regime. However, their second period of activism was different from that of the 1960's. Disillusioned by their failure to bring about change in the communist system in the past, their level of criticism was higher in the late 1980's. The collapse of the Soviet Union and communist governments, however, created a political atmosphere in which the members of the former *nomenklatura*, and not the liberal intelligentsia, were in a favorable position to seize state power. 1960s are also referred to as the years for the emergence of the "dual life," meaning a disparity between people's apparent beliefs and behavior vis-à-vis regime on the one hand and actual beliefs and behavior on the other. The term "dissident" entered the vocabularies of Soviet citizens. It can be argued that the emergence of the second economy and informal patronage networks appeared simultaneously.

The course of events during the Soviet experience were important in creating "markedly divergent conditions in which succeeding generations have come of age," (Bahry, 1987: 61) resulting in a complex constellation of values and expectations in all segments of society. The past three decades of Azerbaijani history is in no way of lesser importance in this regard. Ethnic violent conflict, disintegration of the USSR, gaining independence, and unprecedented economic growth, might therefore justify a closer look at the changes in different generations' relation to politics and society in Azerbaijan.

A brief overview of Azerbaijan's history reveals that the country has undergone significant changes, initiated by external and internal dynamics. What we refer to as "historical periods," e.g. the Russian Imperial Rule, First Oil Boom, Azerbaijani Enlightenment, Sovietization, industrialization, collapse of Soviet rule and early independence, restoration of stability and consequently the Second Oil Boom in 2000s all signify large-scale changes in the life-experiences of Azerbaijani



citizens. Of course, this list can be further detailed and expanded, while we attempt to define and describe the major events influencing generations' experiences. It should be also noted that some of these events or periods are imposed disproportionately by external dynamics to society, whereas some others are carried out by a strong agency of the Azerbaijanis that can be defined as "generations": Azerbaijani enlightenment in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century is unmistakably represented by a generation of businesspeople, politicians, and intellectuals, whose conscious efforts made transition into modern statehood in 1918 possible. Similarly, the collapse of communism in Azerbaijan was the success of another generation, characterized by different degrees of nationalist, democratic and liberal values. The series of events that led to independence in 1991 were initiated by a group of individuals, the political motivations of whom were shaped mainly in the cultural and political atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s. Not only successes, but also failures can also be attributed to generations: when changes were imposed externally, when the elite are divided, or when they simply fail to respond to challenges from outside, generations can be taken as a useful explanatory category in the sense Mannheim suggested. As I will elaborate below, with reference to Soviet society, generations can be a subtle force in social transformation with their peculiar experiences, expectations and agency.

As Azerbaijan is being distinguished by an increasing level of political closure under Ilham Aliyev, formal politics is becoming less relevant in understanding the current and future political change. To put it more clearly, not only the power of formal opposition parties and civil society organizations have diminished to a marginal level, but also the process of subverting the institutions of state (which are ideally supposed to check and counter-balance presidential power) through constitutional amendments is almost complete. Against the decreasing sphere of politics, it is also true that Azerbaijan and its society have undergone significant transformations since 1991. It is in this context where I consider generations as an important potential source of future social and political transformation. The focus on the generations, and especially on what I will refer to as the "new generations" I should say, is not simply motivated by the diminishing role and relevance of formal political actors and civil society. In Azerbaijan, the generation of older politicians, administrators and bureaucrats are getting increasingly older whereas younger individuals are rapidly replacing them. As

it can be inferred, this process of circulation does not refer to a mere change of age cohorts in positions of power and status. Cultural processes and political socialization characteristic of the new generation are significantly different from their predecessors, and circulation of elites as well as individuals in administrative and managerial positions may also correspond to a qualitative change. Approximately for a decade now, Azerbaijani citizens born after the collapse of the Soviet Union have become adult individuals whose secondary and political socialization has occurred under radically different circumstances than their predecessors. An understanding of the ways in which they relate to politics, state, society and nation can help us understand the current and future changes in Azerbaijan in a more complex way.

With this purpose, I am going to try to describe and discuss the relevance of generations to political and social change in Azerbaijan. After a historical overview of major dynamics of different era that correspond to the rise of a new generation, I will elaborate on the generations of post-Soviet Azerbaijan. In terms of the purpose of this study, the focus of the chapter will be on the relationship between the new generation and elite formation.

An important warning with regard to studies of generation requires an understanding of the fictive character of the term. As early as 1964, with reference to Soviet youth, Fainsod warns that “Within any generation one encounters wide varieties of life experience, and the attitudes which they generate may seem to have little in common.” (p. 430). A generation, even a category or stratum of the generation such as university students or professionals should not be taken as a homogenous, undifferentiated group. However, this warning does not contradict with acknowledging that a certain group of individuals as members of the same generation have the potential to become future political elite or act as agencies of social and political change. What Lepisto describes as the “aspiring youth” (2010) in Azerbaijan corresponds to this very understanding of generations. According to Lepisto “Aspiring youth in contemporary Azerbaijan tend to follow professional paths, a preference they share with their Soviet counterparts.” (2010: 447). It is worth noting, however, that much fewer students are trying to obtain a degree in engineering and natural sciences, compared to law, humanities, business and public administration.

The debate about generations and political change in independent Azerbaijan can be dated back to the passing away of Heydar Aliyev in 2003. Way back in 2000 parliamentary elections, the ruling Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası (YAP) nominated and got elected a cohort of younger deputies at the expense of older members of the parliament. The motive behind this move could be two-fold. First, to prevent the parliament contribute to any opposition to İlham Aliyev's succession to presidency, younger deputies might be regarded as a more loyal and controllable group in comparison to older politicians. Secondly, the promotion of younger candidates could increase the electorates' support of İlham Aliyev's presidency. As I have heard many times from my local interviewees, wider segments of the public saw İlham Aliyev's candidacy as an opportunity for democratic reforms, because he was not a member of the former Soviet *nomenklatura*. Being different from the "Old Guard" and backed by a younger parliament İlham Aliyev, was able to appeal to a larger constituency. In other words, his presidency was seen as an opportunity to democratize while maintaining stability because of his perception as a member of a different generation in comparison to his father and the old guard.

Integration with the global economy is a priority of Azerbaijan. According to one interviewee, "Those who control the state and economy in Azerbaijan are in dire need for well-trained cadres to run the government and businesses."<sup>81</sup> Despite the fact that Azerbaijani economy is highly dependent on hydrocarbon resources, various areas of economy are also developing in the country. Developing an economy capable of fulfilling domestic demand and answering the requirements for integration with the world economy depends on a workforce that possesses the necessary expertise. Since 2007, Azerbaijan implements the program to support abroad education. The program is funded by the State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan, and every year since 2007, students are financially supported to obtain higher education abroad. The project and its criteria for selecting students are defined by the Law No 128.<sup>82</sup> According to Article 1.2 of the Law, the program aims to support students for graduate and post-graduate degrees in order to "form and sustain a competitive economic system"

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Ruslan Asad, Dec. 2009, Baku.

<sup>82</sup> URL: [http://www.oilfund.az/uploads/AR\\_NAZ\\_KABiNETi1.doc](http://www.oilfund.az/uploads/AR_NAZ_KABiNETi1.doc), accessed 25.6.2009.

In addition to the state sponsored program, foreign companies and consortiums fund abroad education, too. Among them, IREX predominantly supports students in social sciences whereas BP funds engineering students. According to Niqar Mammadova, engineers are in demand anywhere in the world, and because of the conditions in Azerbaijan, many of them do not want to work in their home country. She suggests that majority of international organizations support social sciences education for Azerbaijani students. Among these organizations she notes that IREX has an approximately 98% of return rate.<sup>83</sup> State sponsored or not, the number of Azerbaijanis with foreign higher-education is increasing. The ways in which exposure to a different political and cultural environment might influence the relationship between those young individuals and their society is still an under-researched issue except for few studies (FAR Center 2007; Ismayilov & Tkacik 200; Hunner-Kreisel 2015)

Regarding the possible role of the abroad education on democratization of Azerbaijan, views are generally negative. Alizade, for example, thinks that higher education abroad cannot simply provide the younger people with values and norms that would bring about a generational change in Azerbaijani society and politics:

“Thousands of young Saudi Arabian people go abroad for education, too, and then return. But their presence has no meaningful impact on the political system. They adopt the values and behavior of their patrons. Furthermore, in Azerbaijan, it is the children of the wealthy families who go abroad for higher education.”<sup>84</sup>

According to Zerdusht Alizade, the youth is concerned only about financial gain and career, but he also adds that one cannot simply object that. The real problem, he thinks, is the lack of solidarity among the few young people who feel some sort of responsibility for their society.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Niqar Mammadova, Dec. 2010, Baku.

<sup>84</sup> He implies that the people going abroad for higher education are members of a social stratum with minimum interest in changing the *status quo*.

<sup>85</sup> Roundtable on “Solidarity” (*Hemreylik*) organized at FAR Center, December 19, 2009, Saturday.

As young individuals socializing in different social and political environments, they are expected to be influenced by the values and norms they have encountered abroad. Thus, one might expect that they can potentially have an impact on the outlook of the country's managerial and bureaucratic elite. Adnan Hacizade admits that there may be young people working in state institutions. However, they cannot be expected to have a positive impact upon the existing order: "If you mix one-kilogram jam with one-kilogram dirt, you have two kilograms of dirt. There is no way to change the system from inside as some people suggest."<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, he also believes that "Even if you are simply doing your job [in a government institution] you still have a responsibility in what the state does." For this reason, he contends that he does not want to work for the state:

"I am not saying that one must be corrupt if s/he works for the state. You can never take bribes and still be working at the state. But you will be partly responsible for the crimes of the state."

In Azerbaijan, the need for qualified cadres is increasing. In turn, Azerbaijani society is aware that education is a crucial asset for social mobility. For families with least social capital, providing a good education for their children was the only option. Families with ties or networks, on the other hand, were in an advantaged position as long as loyalty was preferred over merit. With the consolidation of regime and increasing revenues, the Azerbaijani state and economy needed larger numbers of professionals with language skills and educational credentials required by global economy. In other words, loyalty together with qualification became the new necessary combination for a career. According to one interviewee, Aybeniz Memmedova,

"Until about five years ago, students abroad were the children of the poor or mid-level families. They were, however, unable to find a decent employment in state institutions, because they lacked the necessary network. Now the middle and upper class families started to realize that they should send their children to the West for higher education. They have the networks and they know that if their children return, they are likely to find higher-level jobs in state."

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Adnan Hacizade, December 2010.

However, those students are also unwilling to go back to Azerbaijan.”<sup>87</sup>

According to Eldar Aslanov, living abroad for education has a positive impact on nation-building: “Abroad, it makes no sense saying ‘I am from Sheki’ or ‘I am from Lenkoran. Instead, they are supposed to say ‘I am from Azerbaijan.’”<sup>88</sup> In other words, being outside of their society, they can understand that they are part of a nation.

Increasingly more members of the new generation, and especially those with good educational credentials, are getting employed in state institutions, private corporations and media. State employment in the so-called “showcase” ministries and institutions provides a career opportunity to those who have degrees from foreign universities. According to the former spokesperson of Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Elkhan Polukhov, in comparison to other state institutions, there is a high level of interest to the Ministry by young people with a high quality education:

“The new generation is eager to work in our institution. Ten years ago, maybe one out of ten students would say that they want to work in our ministry. Now, maybe eight or nine want. This demonstrates the growing awareness of Azerbaijani statism and an apprehension of what it means to represent the state. In other words, they have a great desire to represent the country abroad.”<sup>89</sup>

According to the interviews conducted, another crucial aspect of the new generation of professionals working in state and bureaucracy is that they are not in positions of authority or policy making. Even if they have the required knowledge and expertise to “get things done,” they are not entrusted with independent decision making. According to Hacizade, majority of the young people with a high-quality university education preferring to work for government do this because they want to contact families closer to the power circles. Some pro-government youth associations, he adds, are quite functional in this regard.<sup>90</sup> In addition, he suggests that young

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Aybeniz Mammadova, Dec.2010, Baku.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Eldar Aslanov, Dec. 2009, Baku.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Elkhan Polukhov, former spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Nov. 2010, Baku.

<sup>90</sup> Adnan Hacizade mentions FASEE, Ireli and FACE. The last organization, he contends, was born out of FASEE following a presidential decree allocating 200,000 AZN to the latter.

individuals with a good education and highly-demanded skills working for the state do not possess any significant authority regarding their job. In other words, they are not in a position to influence policy and decision making. Adnan Hacizade defines them as “technicians implementing the orders given to them.” Still, quality-higher education in Azerbaijan is rather crucial for social mobility and students try to receive best education possible. Positions with high salaries and prestige are open for such professionals, but the question is that quality education, especially abroad, is getting increasingly a luxury only for the already affluent. Thus, meritocracy in this case serves widening the gap between social classes. Even though many young Azerbaijanis are still able to obtain quality education abroad thanks to their personal capacities, the trend is more towards in-breeding of the elite and affluent.

One typical example of a young professional with higher education abroad and working for a state institution can be found in Ismayilov’s article (2008). Having himself a quality degree of higher education abroad, Ismayilov believes that education abroad hinders democratization in Azerbaijan. Suspicion and conservative reaction against “foreign influences” is a widespread approach among older members of society. As an opponent of “foreign influences” his reasoning and logic, as well as the terminology and ideas he refers to, are significantly different from that of a “Soviet bureaucrat.” Accordingly, education opportunities abroad provide young Azerbaijanis with different ideological perspectives, which create a fragmentation between alumni of different countries (i.e. Europe, Turkey and the U.S.) and also between the foreign and local higher-educated (p. 91-92). Alumni and networking activities of these graduates are seen as dangerous to the creation of a “coherent national identity” and “strong civil society.” Also, presence of different world-views and understanding of Azerbaijan’s problems and their solutions among the foreign-educated are seen as a potential source of “serious political conflict.” (p. 93).

The cultural difference between the new generation of professionals and average person in Azerbaijan is also seen as a lamentation by some Azerbaijanis. According to this perspective, those especially with a higher education in the US or UK have a world-view, and life-style, radically different from the rest of the society. One interpretation from within the Western-educated people is that the problem of

cultural difference is not a one-sided problem. Accordingly, one of my interviewees stated that those with Western education and world-view cannot integrate to the Azerbaijani politics and society, because “Azerbaijanis have a negative attitude towards these ‘different’ people.”<sup>91</sup> Also, this difference itself may not be problematic, unless there are mechanisms of communication between the foreign-educated and the rest of the society. After all, Azerbaijani Enlightenment itself was carried out by individuals with Western-style education. The difference, however, was unimportant because the educated people related to the rest of society through political parties, civic associations, publications, and art, hence became the national intelligentsia. The situation in present-day Azerbaijan is not supportive of a similar process.

Several of my interviewees contended that the levels of job satisfaction and adaptation vary among professionals with higher education, based on their place of employment in state or private companies. Nazim Imanov, for example, states that more people with foreign education are interested in coming back to Azerbaijan than in the past, due to increasing employment opportunities and increased salaries. However, he adds that many of these individuals are also unhappy because of the difference between the “atmosphere” they have experienced abroad and in Azerbaijan.<sup>92</sup> Elshad Abdullayev explains that old cadres in Azerbaijani institutions are characterized by “dependence” (*mutilik*) or inability to take initiative in any sense. But he also points out to the negative traits of the new generation who receive higher education abroad. Accordingly,

“Those who study social sciences abroad lack discipline and direction. They neither have the discipline of the Komsomol nor Ocak. They can be good commentators [–shinas]. They are good in theory but do not have practical experience. Thus they are not good for state service. They can become academics, authors or journalists. State administration, however, can only be learned by practicing it, not through education alone.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with Aybeniz Mammadova, Dec. 2010, Baku.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Nazim Imanov, Dec. 2008, Baku.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Elshad Abdullayev, Dec. 2010, Baku.



Since their life-chances in a market economy are high, their disillusionment does not lead to frustration, but instead they switch to privately owned companies or search for job opportunities outside Azerbaijan. In addition, their disappointment does not lead to any form of politicization.

The problem of loyalty vs. merit is an ongoing issue for Azerbaijan. Entrance to state service in Azerbaijan is coordinated by the Commission on State Service.<sup>94</sup> Ideally, the presence of such a coordination center has a positive impact on neutrality in acceptance to state service. Elshad Abdullayev complains that the autonomy of the Commission was compromised when ministries created enough pressure to be allowed to prepare and conduct their own exams in recruitment. By receiving the questions being asked in the exams beforehand, there is a high risk that the process will get compromised by patrimonial practices. On many occasions, if a ministry does not have someone “proper” to recruit, they simply eliminate the other candidates by the help of the exam they have prepared. Still, Abdullayev points out that loyalty and qualification is the most valued combination for a career in state in Azerbaijan.<sup>95</sup> While a career in state institutions require having the necessary network for entry, state service can also play as a platform whereby individuals can form new networks and expand their social capital.<sup>96</sup>

“Brain drain” in Azerbaijan is one of the major social problems in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. This process is observed in spheres where educated, skilled, professional individuals are most needed. Ilham Shaban notes, “The human potential of Azerbaijan is weakening. The number of professional journalists leaving Azerbaijan in the last 7-8 years is vast.”<sup>97</sup> According to Erkin Qadirli, many young Azerbaijanis with good educational and professional credentials are leaving the country. The reason of this trend, he argues, can be explained by what is known as Gresham’s Law in economics: just like “bad money drives out good,” presence of “bad people” pose a source of demotivation for the young educated people. However, he also admits that there are also

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<sup>94</sup> *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Prezidenti yanında Dövlət Qulluğu Məsələləri üzrə Komissiya*

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Elshad Abdullayev, Dec. 2010, Baku.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Niqar Mammadova, Dec. 2010, Baku.

<sup>97</sup> Ilham Shaban, “Neft Gelirleri ve Azerbaycan’in Gelecegi,” public presentation, AFU, Dec. 9, Thu.

too many intelligent, skilled, “good” people in official institutions, who, for the time being, choose to keep a low profile.

In Azerbaijan, vast majority of young people choose staying away from formal politics, due to several reasons. Instead of politics, it is argued, young people choose to increase their life chances and opportunities for material gain: “The strategy of the members of the younger generation is to get closer to families who are known to be in touch with people close to those in power. Some youth organizations, like Ireli etc, are also instrumental in this strategy.”<sup>98</sup> He adds that “I would never work in state. I am not saying that everyone working in state is corrupt. You can never take a single bribe and continue working in state offices. But even if you are just doing your job, you have a responsibility in what the state does... This is another way of serving the purposes of those in power.” Furthermore, the sheer presence of young people with good educational and professional credentials, degrees from Western universities is not sufficient for change: However, the problematic relation between youth and politics is more complex. As Zerdusht Alizade argues, “The youth is concerned only about money and career. In fact, one cannot object to this either. But there is no solidarity among the few young people who feel some sort of responsibility for their society.”<sup>99</sup>

In Azerbaijan, increasingly more young people are choosing to get their higher education abroad. Thus, one of the questions I asked my respondents was the possibility of change in politics as a new cohort of young professionals with an education meeting the standards of a global world. I hypothesized that their experiences of other countries could be a basis upon which the youth could build their demands for a more democratic society. Alizade objected this line of thinking: “Thousands of young Saudi Arabians go abroad for education and then return their country, but their presence has no meaningful impact on the political system. They adopt the values and behavior of their bosses.”<sup>100</sup> Similarly, Adnan Hajizade does not believe that such a change is possible as more abroad-educated individuals are

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with Adnan Hajizade, 2010

<sup>99</sup> Zerdusht Alizade, roundtable on “Solidarity,” FAR Centre, Dec. 19, 2009.

<sup>100</sup> Zerdusht Alizade, roundtable on “Solidarity,” FAR Centre, Dec. 19, 2009.

employed in state and bureaucracy: “There may be good people working in government posts, but if you mix one jar of dirt with one jar of jam, you obtain two jars of dirt, not jam. There is no possibility of changing the system from inside as some people suggest.”<sup>101</sup> Resonating with Zerdusht Alizade, he argues that being employed as a professional in state and bureaucracy does not empower young people: “It is true that many young people are employed in government jobs. However, they are not in positions of authority, they are not allowed into positions of policy making. They are simply technicians implementing the orders given to them and they cannot take initiative.” Furthermore, older people are more skeptical about the idea of importing change through education. As Adnan Hajizade recalls: “My first trip abroad was to Seattle, United States, in 1999-2000. Upon return, I shared my impressions with my uncle. I told him that I wanted to see similar things in Azerbaijan. My uncle got very angry and told me to shut up and sit. This was rather unexpected from me because I respected him so much and thought he would agree with me.” During the years that I conducted my fieldwork, state policy of sending students abroad for higher education was at its height, and I also asked whether this process can have an impact. He explained that “This was actually Emin Milli’s idea. He shared this idea with some friends working in state. Afterwards, the state initiated a program but in the beginning few students than planned were sent. Then Ilham Aliyev stated that students are free to stay where they study. He suggested that they can contribute to the formation of Azerbaijani diaspora abroad.”

Regarding the issue of education abroad, some of my respondents claimed that education in foreign, often high quality institutions of higher education is serving the preservation of the status-quo. As Zerdusht Alizade argues, “In Azerbaijan, it is the children of affluent families who go abroad for higher education and they do not have a stake in changing the system.”<sup>102</sup> Rasim Aghayev further contends that the relation between higher education in foreign countries and ruling elite’s recruitment practices is not new: “When Heydar Aliyev first took power, he created a team of loyal supporters. He motivated them to send their children abroad, especially to Moscow,

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Adnan Hajizade, 2010.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Zerdusht Alizade, 2008.

for higher education. In his second term as president, he started making use of this generation and this process is still in practice.”<sup>103</sup>

During my field work, I also interviewed a number of young professionals working in state institutions with university and higher degrees from foreign universities. I believe that their understanding of Azerbaijani political life as well as their motivations as individuals representing a highly different profile in terms of political socialization in comparison to their predecessors is valuable. Their view of state-society relations within the context of Azerbaijani political transformation might shed light on current and future trends in the formation of state elites. Also, their interpretation of their role in their respective institutions can help us infer some results about the Azerbaijani state building. An overall examination of their responses to my questions reveals that they have a considerably different view of political change in comparison to those with a critical approach to state.

One of my interviewees working in a high profile state institution argued that “We have three categories of people with foreign higher education: The first group totally ignores the problems of the country and work in state organs submissively. The second group prefers staying abroad until conditions are better. A third group chooses to return and assume responsibility in the face of the country’s problems.”<sup>104</sup> He further emphasized that “Those educated abroad are highly demanded in Azerbaijan. Education abroad also helps us to look at Azerbaijan from outside. Why do I work in Azerbaijan? Look at the universities: they are just reproducing the old mentality. Therefore, education in foreign countries is a great opportunity.” In his view, entering politics to address the problems of the country is not a viable option as “Dealing with politics limits a person, molds into a specific shape.” Furthermore, “Becoming a deputy does not solve the problems automatically. Problems need to be addressed in the field. By transferring your knowledge to others and increase the number of people who think the way you do, you can be more productive and useful.” Change, as he contends, should be gradual and evolutionary, rather than quick and revolutionary.

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Rasim Aghayev, 2008.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Eldar Aslanov, Dec. 3, 2009.

It should be kept in mind that by the time this dissertation was written, numerous young professionals are already working in state institutions and bureaucracy, despite an acceptance of the proposition that political regime in Azerbaijan has serious shortcomings in terms of democracy. Understanding their thoughts about themselves was crucial for me: what do they think about working in state or bureaucracy and how do they justify their position? What is the nature and level of professional satisfaction? What is their relationship with colleagues and superiors in office? How are the discrepancies between the values and norms they have acquired through a high-quality, global-standard higher education and the so-called realities of the Azerbaijani society and politics? A general observation on the young professionals I have interviewed is that working in such positions provides them with some sort of satisfaction. Equally important was to hear how they justified being a state employee. In addition to decent salaries, their justification was grounded on a combination of self-respect, perception of social status of their position and belief in the importance of their work. This complex strategy of justification is by no means an abstract one, but on the contrary, placed in the context of Azerbaijan's past and present political experiences. In addition, these people can make use of the skills and expertise they have acquired through education. As long as their employment offers opportunities to use their knowledge, they seem to have higher levels of work satisfaction and do not accept the view that they are mere technical cadres of the government. In line with this view, they also believe in gradual and substantiated change rather than sudden but also radical and fragile political change.

In Azerbaijan, a generation who has no direct experience of the Soviet era is coming of age. Similarly, the process of political closure in the past two decades means that increasingly less number of young Azerbaijanis have an unfiltered knowledge and experience of a period when politics and society was more open. For young Azerbaijanis, years of Meydan, Black January, Qarabagh war, Popular Front of Azerbaijan are not experiences but subjects of learning, in the family or institutions of secondary socialization. For many young Azerbaijanis, figures of opposition are largely unknown, because exposure to their views and actions are significantly limited. Many Azerbaijanis I have interviewed and talked to lamented the fact that the collective memory on independent statehood is weak in Azerbaijan. Between 1918

and 1920 Azerbaijan was a modern, democratic, sovereign state, and only after 70 years could independence be restored. The failure to transfer the memory and knowledge of the past to later generations is therefore seen as a major disadvantage for Azerbaijani nation building:

“When we became independent in 1991, we took 1918 as the reference point. When communism ended in Poland, they took 1945 as their reference point. Their prime minister in 1945 was still alive in 1991. Here, everyone who lived during the ADR era was dead already in 1991.”<sup>105</sup>

In Azerbaijan, the generation which made possible the overthrow of communism, independence and a national government was forged throughout the turmoil of the final years of Soviet rule. The counter-elite that emerged during this era also embarked upon a radical campaign to transform the country. Despite their failures and eventual fall from power, leaders of the Popular Front were articulate individuals with a vision, will and determination.

Finally, I should mention that in the absence of democratic, manageable and predictable institutional infrastructure for the new generation to interact with each other and the society at large, discontent can be channeled into un-democratic dynamics. As we have seen in the Middle East and North Africa in the past few years, a disillusioned youth can see anti-democratic armed groups as an opportunity to change another anti-democratic regime. Azerbaijan is of course significantly different from the societies in question, primarily because the current government is not based on coercion.

Establishing a relationship between generational change and political transformation might require a deeper understanding of the historical processes rather than focusing on contemporary ideological formations. The literature on classes and economic interest groups in the USSR and their role in the collapse of communism points to a different, subtler way of looking at the problem of generations in present-day post-Soviet societies. A post-World War 2 generation which benefited from the changes in the sphere of ideology and rising opportunities in social mobility through

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with Eldar Aslanov, Dec. 2009, Baku.

education was a facilitating factor in the collapse of the USSR. According to one explanation, also verified by some of my interviewees, the discrepancy between the economic and political powers of the managerial and bureaucratic elites has led this group of elite search for large-scale political change where they could exchange their posts into positions of political and financial control. The transformation of the former members of *nomenklatura* into the new bourgeoisie, in other words, can be understood as the response of a generation to the changing political and economic environment. Whether expecting a parallel process in Azerbaijan is justified or not is open to discussion.

As the country's economy and culture is integrated with the world economy, a new generation of young professionals is highly demanded in the job market. The young professionals possess the necessary knowledge and expertise in a developed economy, together with language skills required in the global economy. In this sense, they are indispensable for the country. However, there are important differences between this new generation of professionals and the bureaucratic-managerial elite of the Soviet system. First of all, the economy in independent Azerbaijan is basically capitalist, where the means of production are privately owned. In contrast to the state ownership, material wealth and other privileges can be inherited. Managers and bureaucrats, like owners of factories and companies, can also transfer the wealth they have accumulated to their off-springs. Therefore, no demand for change concerning the political-economic system seems plausible. On the other hand, it is also possible that a new rising middle class, the top stratum of which is made of new generation professionals. However, this scenario does not look realistic, either. In a political system where patronalism is the crucial mechanism whereby individuals put forwards their demands and pursue interests, any demand for more recognition in the formal system of political representation is simply obsolete. If the political parties do not overlap with the social stratification in the country, and political institutions are dysfunctional as organs fulfilling social and political demands, including justice, distribution of wealth and favors, then it would be naïve to expect the creation of a socio-political pressure aiming to transform these institutions. Economically modern but authoritarian and even repressive regimes in the past and present prove that economic progress, rising overall economic standards or an educated stratum alone do

not lead to political change. Instead, events big enough to disturb the status quo, a deep crisis in economy or legitimacy of the regime, or violent conflict is more likely to facilitate such transformation. Outcomes of the political transformations widely known as the “Arab Spring,” on the other hand, demonstrated that authoritarian regimes relying on strong patronalism and weak institutions do not democratize after the autocrats are toppled.

Finally, I should add that when talking about “generations” one should take into consideration that not all members of an age group belong to the same “generation.” Deep differences continue to exist, and in some cases grow, between members of the same cohort. These differences are the result of differences in gender, status, welfare, access to resources, social capital and education. In other words, existing and emerging patterns of stratification continue drawing divisions between members of a generation. However, this does not render the relevance of generations’ role in social change. “Uneven development” also applies to societies and for social and political change to occur, the agency of a critical segment or stratum of society might be sufficient. Concerning the youth, the generation gap is also considered as an important problem. Furthermore, differences of political and cultural socialization between older and younger generations, it is argued, can be highly problematic in terms of changing patterns of value expression and behavior: “The gap between the older and younger generations is very big and it is increasing. New subcultures are being created among the youth, but there is no social research on these processes.”<sup>106</sup> Also, the generation gap that corresponds to changing values and norms between age cohorts is related to the migration processes in Azerbaijan. Rasim Aghayev, for example, argues that “The majority of those who left Azerbaijan are members of my generation, which is, the post-war generation, including the Shestdesiatniki.”<sup>107</sup>

Is it plausible to expect a change in Azerbaijan’s political regime as a generational change occurs? The answer, in my opinion is both yes and no. Looking at the ways in which generational change –occurring in terms of the transformation of the social, political, economic and cultural environment in which political socialization– took place in the past the answer is yes. These transformations and

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Aliaga Memmedli, 2010.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Rasim Aghayev, 2008.



experiences in question should have had a definite impact upon individuals' relationship with the regime and state, resulting in various forms and degrees of conformity or dissent. What we refer to as a "generation," like many other terms deployed in social science, is a construct and does not have a concrete existence (Mannheim 1972). In other words, we define generations retrospectively by looking at various forms of relationship to other macro-social phenomena. If we can relate the values and norms, as well as actual behavior of individuals within an age-range, living in a specific location (a village or the entire planet earth) to the social and political environment they live, then we are talking about a generation. In a society, the political socialization of new individuals takes place always under new conditions. However, an important aspect of political socialization takes place in the form of transmission of the accumulated knowledge and experience by the older generations. As long as the external changes are not extreme, members of the younger generations can respond to them using the knowledge they have learned from older generations.

A war, economic crisis, policy changes in the sphere of state-society relations, the invention of new technologies and many other factors combine to influence individuals' political values and behavior. It can be said that expectations about the results of compliance with the rules, written or not, as well as possible sanctions on non-compliance is a universal factor in explaining human political behavior. On the other hand, the answer to the above question, is no at the same time. In my view, the answer to why generational change would not necessarily lead to large-scale social and political change has a two-fold answer. First, human behavior is not a mechanical response to external stimuli. Instead, individuals need to decide and find out how to respond to the changing circumstances. One group of individual may prefer inventing or re-inventing one set of resources available for a new behavior while some other may choose a different set of resources. For example, in the face of economic or political decline, individuals might choose utilizing informal networks to increase chances of survival, prefer joining political struggle or escape. Even when people predominantly prefer methods to adapt the new conditions, it is the duty of social sciences to understand how this adaptation occurs. A second explanation stems from the fact that "members of any one generation can participate only in a temporally

limited section of the historical process, and (...) it is therefore necessary continually to transmit the accumulated cultural heritage.” (Mannheim 1972: 292).

In a study conducted as part of the famous Soviet Interview Project Bahry finds that “[T]he generation gap is far more complex than a simple split between young and old. There is no smooth pattern, no simple progression from one generation to the next.” (1985: 94). Therefore, generations should always be understood in relation to other variables, such as gender, ethnicity, power, political view and status. The new generation of Azerbaijan is also split alongside many lines that divide the society. However, future political elite and leaders of the country will inevitably rise from among the members of the new generation. Thus, what matters is to understand how the new generation of elite can and will perform their agency to this end.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have attempted to make a political-sociological analysis of the transformation of political elite in Azerbaijan. Political transformation of societies is a complex topic, and it has been studied by a broad range of paradigms and perspectives. By the year this dissertation was completed, the transitions from communism in the end of twentieth century can still be seen as the most important one among other previous “waves.” It is also possible to argue that following the collapse of communism, the liberal-democratic system has remained with no feasible alternatives. The overall tendency is to evaluate the two of the recent region-scale regime changes, namely the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring as government changes. I contend that the ongoing turmoil observed in these cases correspond to the limits of establishing a new social and political order once the old regimes, once believed to control all aspects of social and political life, collapse. Contrary to the expectations of three decades ago, very little is achieved in the new states of Eurasia in terms of establishing a political system which observed the universally accepted norms of democratic governance, yet a significant number of countries in the region continue persist becoming fully authoritarian (Way & Levitsky 2020). Azerbaijan is no exception, and my primary curiosity shaping this thesis was to understand the political transformation on a broader basis.

For the intended perspective of this thesis, I have analyzed the elite in a political-sociological framework. Ascribing the political elite central importance this way in studying political transformation has enabled me to include the various dimensions of the process. On the one hand, there is a plethora of studies focusing exclusively on one of the aspects of political change and of course, continuity. The modernization paradigm and historical sociology approach political change as a

historical process. Some scholars prefer to focus on institutional design as a determining feature. For some others, large-scale political change in countries is the result of the international environment or actors. Finally, some may prefer to place agency, as political actors and even individuals, at the center of analysis. For such analyses which are exclusively political in their perspective focus on shorter periods that are known as “transition” characterized by uncertainty. I acknowledge the value of each paradigm and perspective, and admit that I have made use of all these approaches. In other words, I have made an effort to put the political elite at the intersection of the four interrelated areas of political-sociological analysis, namely the history, institutional framework, individuals, and the international dimension. By the word “interrelated” I refer to the formal and informal ways in which all these spheres influence each other. Throughout the thesis, I have frequently tried to demonstrate these mutual influences. However, I attribute a special importance to the political elite, who I assume to be located at the intersection of this complex web of interactions. In other words, history, institutions, individuals, and the international dimension shape each other via the agency of the political elite. While the political elite is limited in different ways by these variables and political struggles are carried out under circumstances not determined by the leaders, their activities represent a crucial agency which reproduce, transform, or subvert these dimensions. In other words, history, institutions, actors, or international factors are not objective and solid sets of reference but instead the very spheres of political construction. By referring to this mutual interaction between spheres, I was also able to approach to the still contested issues of nation, state, regime and economy building, where political elite stand as negotiators of history, institutions, and international factors.

To begin with, the relationship between the Azerbaijani political elite and the national history is still characterized by the coexistence of contradictory interpretations. Whether the national history should be read within the framework and parameters of nation building or state building is an ongoing conflict. These contradictory views are not represented by different and opposing groups political elite, but by the same individuals who possess power. My view is that for all nation-states past is the subject is a continuous process of reinterpretation and negotiation. The building of national identity, perceptions of relations with other nations play a

central role in constructing the national and international policies. The final years of the Soviet Azerbaijan and first years of independence witnessed an assertive attempt to reshape the perceptions of identity. The elite leading this process has risen over the large-scale mass movements expressing their discontent with the policies of Soviet regime in the areas related to identity. The leaders of the AXC were united in their criticisms, but divided over the preferred course of action. The inexperience of the AXC cadres in government and bureaucracy coincided with the challenge of the Karabagh conflict, and the failure to establish monopoly over political and military authority resulted in the fall of the government together with the reversal of the radical approach in identity issues. In the following years, the Azerbaijani government extensively used a discourse against this assertive ideology. This retrospective approach was combined with the rhetoric on the lack of inexperience in state affairs. Finally, the AXC government was unable to using the hydro-carbon reserves of the country as a leverage in international relations to enhance international recognition and therefore stability. The contract signed by the national-democratic government was renewed and put into practice by Heydar Aliyev. Contrary to the AXC government, the leadership of Heydar Aliyev was able to establish political authority over state institutions. Furthermore, potential and actual rivals for political power were dealt with different methods like liquidation or cooptation. Aliyev's relations and experience in Azerbaijani state structures were the most crucial aspects of this endeavor. By the de facto, if not de jure, removal of formal political opposition from national politics, the ruling elite became also the political elite of the country. The political elite embraces a set of discourse exhibiting important contradictions, or vagueness in terms of state and nation building due to two dynamics. On the one hand, these discourses are set in motion by the efforts to condemn or limit the relatively radical ideals of the independence movement in terms of national identity and stateness. On the other hand, these discourses are necessitated by the need to establish a delicate balance in foreign policy, as the kind and degree of nationalism put forward by the Popular Front are argued to be destabilizing factors Here I am not making a normative interpretation on the Azerbaijani political elite's flexibility in national and international politics, but rather point to the potentials of the uncertainty or vagueness attached to the two sides of politics which are in fact two sides of one coin. Azerbaijani

politics is characterized by dilemmas. These dilemmas can be observed by an evaluating policies related to national identity and foreign affairs. Uncertainty or vagueness is therefore observed. These uncertainties, non-fixedness gives a broad area of negotiation and subversion of ideas and behavior, thereby helping to deal with the risks and dangers while postponing to engage these dilemmas.

The course of political transformation in independent Azerbaijan can be summarized as a process of gradual consolidation of authoritarian rule. At the outset of Soviet disintegration, some authors anticipated a higher degree of similarity between the trajectories of political transformation in the successor states because of the similar political experiences and institutional structure by the time of independence. Contrary to the expectations of similar trajectories of political change because of similar institutional structures and similar levels of socio-economic development at the time of independence, the political regimes of the former Soviet states of Eurasia demonstrate a high level of variance. In other words, the various types of authoritarian regimes in these states possess different elite structures, regime characteristics, civil society development, relations between state and society. In order to comprehend the relationship between the institutional structure and the political elite, I suggest that a superficial analysis of formal structures is insufficient. Officially, Azerbaijan adheres to democracy. However, in line with the propositions of the hybrid regime theory, institutions are subverted to serve the purpose of maintaining the monopoly of the few over political and economic power. In democratic political systems, state institutions and organizations enjoy an autonomy as described and guaranteed by the laws. In authoritarian regimes such as Azerbaijan, the autonomy of such bodies is not defined by law, but by the opaque relations among the ruling elite. In other words, the rules of the game are not defined –at least to a minimum degree– by the laws and institutions but rather laws and institutions, which are not necessarily undemocratic, are subject to groups and individuals whose actions primarily focus on the continued and increased possession of political and economic power. The unwritten codes and rules for remaining in the ruling coalition are strictly practiced.

The role of political institutions in shaping the political regimes is widely accepted in political science. The design of institutions provides a structural framework for the operation of a political system. The relationship between political

institutions not only shapes the balance of power in a society, but also the relationship between state and society because political power is created and exercised through institutions. The degree of each institution's autonomy within rule of law is as important as the extent to which their conduct is impersonal. In societies where official posts are associated with certain individuals, institutions lack transparency and accountability. In Azerbaijan, the ruling coalition primarily consists of a president with extensive powers and ministers, who are directly controlled by heads of politically and economically influential groups. Sustaining political stability relies on maintaining a balance between these groups while preventing these groups from developing into potential contenders for power. The continuous but declining need to maintain the balance between the groups also provide a pretext for occasional purges, often in cases where political elite attempt to establish an independent power basis and conduct independent negotiations with other political elite for more political or economic power. Here, the importance of the kompromat mechanism is often mentioned as a crucial tool by students of the region inside and outside the country.

The concentration of political and economic power together with the closure of the political sphere has influenced the political elite in certain ways. The understanding of politics as the process of accumulating and directing power is reduced to the sphere of intra-elite struggles. Again, intra-elite relations correspond to an important component of the political process in democratic regimes, too. In Azerbaijani politics, however, political leaders and the political elite do not appeal to the electorate, but try to increase their status and material gain by reducing the sphere of political competition to intra-elite relations. In the case of Azerbaijan, the political elite have experienced both quantitative and qualitative transformation since independence. As I mentioned before, the final years of the USSR witnessed an explosion of mass movements which enabled the formation of a counter elite. After the fall of the AXC government and the removal of their leaders from office, the consolidation of political power continued up until 1998. Since 1998, developments in the sphere of political elite were mostly about ensuring the balance of power among groups within ruling elite, as well as preventing these groups establish cooperation to contest the government. The critical turn in 2002 presidential succession represent the transfer of this ability to Ilham Aliyev. The limited capacity of the opposition parties

to make small electoral successes and mobilize segments of society was ended at the end of the attempts of electoral mobilization.

In terms of international dynamics, there seems to be no incentive move towards democracy. The linkages and leverages that facilitated democratization in the 1990s especially in the Central and Eastern Europe are weakened, as the US and EU interest in promoting democracy in Eurasia. In the global context, Azerbaijan is just one of the several countries in which authoritarianism is rising.

The relevance of political elite in political systems is first and foremost associated with the question of who actually holds political power. In Azerbaijan, the political system which is designed to exercise power exists, but the actual relations of power are in fact difficult to determine. Therefore, limiting the analysis of political elite to the individuals in formal positions of authority might be misleading. To begin with, few members of the top elite in Azerbaijan is argued to possess the power to endorse candidates for the parliamentary elections. Not all persons occupying high-level governmental posts are autonomous from unofficial networks of patronage. The candidates for top-positions in state structures are endorsed on the basis of a series of variables. First of all, such changes in cadres observe the preservation of the balance between groups within the ruling coalition. Also, such changes are instrumentally functional in punishing those who are believed to conspire intra-elite agreements or coalitions without the knowledge or consent of the leadership of the elite. Secondly, the political economy of the regime in Azerbaijan is highly reminiscent of political systems where an oligarchy monopolizes political and economic power at the same time. The correlation between the division of institutions, official posts and spheres of economic activity is observed to be high. For members of the political elite, support for the government is not unconditional but depends on guaranteeing economic gains. The ruling elite, including the presidential family, are at the same time the economic elite of the country. The overlapping of economic and political power, as well as economic gains as a precondition for political support is of course not unique to authoritarian countries. However, these practices are defined as oligarchic due to the lack of free and fair political competition. Political leaders with considerable financial resources are ousted, arrested or sent to exile in order to prevented when they are believed to attempt at defecting from the ruling coalition.



From the earliest years of elite theory, a certain degree of elite circulation based on merit is seen as a crucial prerequisite of the sustainability of political systems. In terms of building and consolidating a democratic policy, gradual elite circulation via electoral practices is indispensable. Although not all formal posts in democracies are filled through elections, legal and institutional basis needs to be provided for the accountability of the appointed individuals. Furthermore, elite circulation requires a certain degree of recruitment from younger generations to ensure the transfer of knowledge and experience of the older members of the elite. This type of circulation is also important for younger individuals to learn the unwritten norms and rules. This way, organizations and institutions can increase stability and continuity while making use of younger and talented members of the society. Recruitment of younger members into the ruling elite take place as cases of in-breeding, whereas the increased recruitment of a new cohort of highly educated and well trained young professionals competent in the skills required for the operation of institutions and organizations often do not correspond to the formation of strategic elites. In comparison to the older individuals, the way few such young professionals related themselves to the government I have interviewed to the government was different than members of older generations. The thriving economy and increased global integration opens increased demand for these educated and skilled individuals, who have the potential to become strategic elites in the future. Their education and experiences vary from their predecessors to a large extent, and their understanding of their own place and future in an authoritarian system is rather optimistic.

In the case of Azerbaijan, the mean age and years of service of the highest segment of the political elite is rather high, hence a very low degree of circulation. From 1995 to 2008, occasional purges at the top-levels took place in the face of real or fictive threats to power. In recent years, purges became rarer, targeting fewer individuals usually at the lower levels of hierarchy. The occasional ousting of officials like heads of local executive office is also instrumental in supporting the pro-government argument that corruption occasionally takes place without the knowledge of the center.

The potential for political change has been gradually decreasing. The formal political opposition lost its limited capacity of mobilization and electoral success in

the period between 2003 and 2005. From his succession to presidency in 2003 to 2008, Ilham Aliyev also consolidated the ruling elite. However, the relative stability achieved in the last decade should not be evaluated as the elimination of different interest groups within the ruling elite. Still, it should be kept in mind that the political elite in Azerbaijan do not correspond to the definition of political elite in the West.

The political elite in Azerbaijan is a small group whose cooperation is based on sharing the political and economic power. This group is politically conservative, and the sphere of civic and political rights has been diminishing since the country's independence. Life-chances are determined on a very political basis, or in other words, a person's views of the political regime. In a contradictory, or maybe complementary way, channels for political activity and competition is almost nonexistent. Political institutions and bureaucracy is far from being impersonal. There is little circulation of elites, and power has been concentrating in the hands of fewer families. Younger members of the ruling elite represent only a generational change and no political transformation. The level of patronage networks and nepotism is frequently used in justifying the description of the political regime as "sultanistic." Therefore, I argue that the generalizations mad after the global phenomenon of increased authoritarianism and the failure of sudden political changes in democratization, as it happened in the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring, can be applied to Azerbaijan. On the one hand, the observed political stability might be very fragile and the political system is inherently unstable. The unresolved issues of nation-state building coupled with the trials of establishing a coherent foreign policy sustain this instability. On the other hand, the potential of any political turmoil in the near future should be expected very low in terms of moving towards democracy. In other words, maintaining an authoritarian political system will have more appeal both for domestic and international actors. If we are to accept the proposition that democratization occurs not when some preconditions are met but when democracy becomes the only viable choice for the political elite, the prospects for Azerbaijani politics are not promising. This is because for such a process opposing elite groups capable of challenging each other is a precondition. Azerbaijani political elite is a unitary structure united by common interests and neither new strategic elites nor a counter-elite is in formation.

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## APPENDICES

### A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı siyasi otoriterleşmenin nasıl inşa edildiğini Sovyet sonrası Azerbaycan örneğinde siyasal seçkinlerin dönüşümü üzerinden anlamaktır. Pek çok Sovyet sonrası ülkede olduğu gibi, bağımsızlık sonrası Azerbaycan'da da demokratik bir sistem kurma beklentileri ilk on yıl içerisinde karşılıksız kalmıştır. Benzer şekilde, kurulan otoriter rejimin ise uzun ömürlü olamayacağı yönündeki varsayımlar da rejimin daha da pekiştirilerek varlığını sürdürmesi ile yanlışlanmıştır. Azerbaycan'da otoriter sistemin inşasını ele alırken bazı temel saptamalar yapmak gerekmektedir. Birincisi, Azerbaycan'da otoriter sistem bir süreklilik ve kopuş içerisinde inşa edilmiştir. Bir diğer deyişle otoriter sistemin inşası, Sovyet döneminin kimi değer ve normlarının bağımsızlık sonrası siyasal atmosferinde yeniden harekete geçirilmesi ile gerçekleşmiştir. Bu bakımdan Azerbaycan'ın klasik anlamda otoriter bir ülke olmadığını da göz önünde bulundurmak gerekir. Rejimin otoriter veya Sultanlık benzeri özellikler sumasının yanında, Azerbaycan iktidar seçkinlerini anlamının yolu, iktidarın dayandığı rejimin “hibrit” rejim özellikleri göstermesidir. Bu anlama çabasının temel varsayımı siyasi dönüşümlerin, yani bir rejim tipinden diğerine geçişin, doğal veya önceden verili koşulların belirleniminde değil, siyasi aktörlerin bu verili koşulları kullanarak veya bu koşullara karşı mücadelesinin ürünü olarak gerçekleştiğidir. Başka bir deyişle siyasi dönüşüm, otoriter veya demokratik yönde de olsa, siyasal seçkinler aracılığı ile gerçekleşir, ancak bu değişim geçmiş siyasal ve toplumsal deneyimler bağlamında hayata geçirilir. Bu bağlamlar hem otoriter yönetimin gücü oluşturma ve kullanma, hem de her siyasal iktidarın ihtiyaç duyduğu meşruiyet kaynaklarını inşa etmede önemlidir. Dolayısı ile siyasal seçkinlerin dönüşümü ile kastedilen süreç hem seçkinler kuramının temel varsayımları, hem de özgün tarihsel ve siyasal bağlam temelinde ele alınmalıdır.

Bu çalışmada siyasal seçkinlerin dönüşümü ile atıfta bulunulan süreç ise, farklı siyasal rejimler kapsamında seçkinlerin mevcut iktidar konumlarına gelişleri, muhalefet ve toplum ile bağ kurma şekilleri ile seçkinlerin kendi aralarındaki ilişkilerin düzenlenişindeki değişiklikleri ifade etmektedir. Hegemonik parti iktidarının kurulması, seçkin konumuna gelme ve çıkarılma şartları, iktidar seçkinlerinin bir arada tutulmasında etkili faktörlerin iktidar ve meşruiyet bakımından ele alınması, siyasal seçkinlerin dönüşümünü anlamada araçsaldır. Klasik otoriter rejimlerden ayrılan ve bir yirmi birinci yüzyıl olgusu olarak anlaşılması gereken, Azerbaycan'ın da dâhil edilebileceği hibrit rejim kavramsallaştırması bu anlama girişiminin önemli bir bileşenidir. Muhalefet partilerinin yasal olarak var olabildiği, kitle iletişim araçları üzerinde mutlak bir denetimin olmadığı, daha da önemlisi demokratik ilke ve pratiklerin açıkça ve toptan eleştirisine veya inkârına dayanmayan söylemler, iktidar seçkinlerinin de ele alınmasında önemli çıkış noktalarıdır.

Özetle belirtmek gerekirse, bu tezde siyasal seçkinler üzerinden bazı sorulara cevap aranmıştır. Azerbaycan'da iktidar nasıl bu kadar uzun bir süre bir baba ve oğlu tarafından sürdürülebilmştir? İki lider arasında, iktidar seçkinlerinin idaresi bakımından nasıl farklar vardır? Bu iktidar yapısı neden bu kadar istikrarlıdır? İktidar seçkinlerinin yapısı ve işleyişi ne şekilde sağlanmaktadır? İktidar bloğunun bir arada kalması, bu bloğun içinden gelebilecek rekabet nasıl engellenmektedir? Demokratikleşme neden başarısız olmuştur? Seçkinler ve halk arasındaki ilişki ile devlet ve toplum arasındaki ilişki nasıl bağlantılıdır? Bölgesel ağlar siyasette nasıl yer almaktadır? Son olarak, eski kuşağa mensup seçkinlerin yerini daha genç kadroların alması siyasi dönüşüm açısından nasıl yorumlanmalıdır. Bu sorulara cevap ararken, ülkenin mevcut siyasi süreçleri ile tarihsel deneyim ve mirası bir arada ele alınmaya çalışılmıştır.

### **Teorik ve Kavramsal Çerçeve**

Bu çalışma otoriterleşmenin inşası ve güçlendirilmesinin hem seçkinler arası, hem de seçkinler ve seçkin olmayanlar, yani toplumun büyük çoğunluğunu oluşturan ancak siyasi karar verme yetkisine sahip olmayanlar arasındaki ilişkinin düzenlenmesinin bir sonucu olarak gerçekleştiğini var saymaktadır. İnsan

toplumlarının siyasi formasyonlarının, farklı rejim tiplerinin ve bunların türevlerinden bağımsız olarak, seçkinler ve seçkin olmayanlar şeklinde anlaşılabilen fikri toplum bilimciler tarafından on dokuzuncu yüzyıl sonlarından itibaren ileri sürülmeye başlanmıştır. Erken dönem siyasi seçkinler kuramcılarının göre, yukarıda bahsedilen ayrım bir siyasi sistem ve bu sistem içerisinde iktidarı uygulayan siyasi seçkinler grubunun varlığına işaret etmektedir. Bu kuramcılar açısından özellikle modern siyasi sistemlerin ortaya çıkışı ve halk iradesine dayanan demokratik bir sistemin nasıl inşa edileceği sorusunda dikkat edilmesi gereken en önemli nokta, her durumda bir siyasi seçkinler grubunun oluşacağı, yani toplumun seçkinler ve seçkin olmayanlar şeklinde bir tabakalaşmayı içereceğidir. Bu çalışmanın amacı açısından ise erken dönem siyasi seçkinler kuramcılarının yönelik iki temel eleştiri önemlidir. İlk olarak, kuramın normatif bir bakış açısı ile yorumlanarak, seçkinler ve seçkin olmayanlar arasındaki ayrımın ikinci grubun siyasi haklarını kullanması bakımından dezavantajlı bir hale gelmesini sağlayacak şekilde otoriter siyasi sistemlere meşruiyet kazandırabileceği olmuştur. Siyasi seçkinler grubuna dâhil olmanın sadece bir takım kişisel, sosyal ve psikolojik özelliklere sahip olmaktan geçtiği varsayımı, modern toplumlarda seçkinler grubunun meşruiyetini seçmenlerden veya halktan aldığı düşüncesi ile tam olarak örtüşmemektedir. İkinci olarak da, bu kuramcılar bahsedilen seçkinler grubunun ne şekilde ortaya çıktığı ve nasıl değiştiği sorularına tatmin edici bir bilimsel yanıt üretmemişlerdir. Bu oluşumun basitçe insanların sahip olduğu farklı kişisel yeteneklerin sonucu, grup ölçeğinde değişimin ise adeta doğal bir süreç şeklinde işlediği anlayışı erken dönem kuramları karakterize eder.

Modern toplumların büyük ve karmaşık idare sistemleri gerektirdikleri olgusu, yeni sanayi toplumlarını inceleyen ilk sosyologların ve siyaset bilimcilerinin dikkat çektiği bir noktadır. Tarihte eşi görülmemiş bir üretim gücünün ortaya çıkması, modern iş bölümü aracılığı ile gerçekleşmiştir. İş bölümünün önemi doğrultusundaki temel varsayım, toplumların yönetimi konusunda da uygulanarak gelişmiş, modern siyasi sistemler ve bürokratik yapılar ortaya çıkmıştır. Devlet iktidarının ve bürokratik yapının nasıl oluşturulacağı, bu iktidarın nasıl uygulanacağı ve bu yapıları oluşturan kişilerin ne şekilde değiştirileceği, modern siyasi sistemlerde yasa ve kanunlarla belirlenmiştir. Bir diğer deyişle, siyasi gücü uygulayacak bir grubun oluşmasının kaçınılmazlığı, siyasi rejimin ne şekilde kurulduğu sorusu ile birlikte

düşünülmelidir. Siyasal rejim bir diğer ifade ile kişilerin ne şekilde seçkin konumuna gelebileceği, devlet otoritesini kullanabileceği ve konumunun ne şekilde sona ereceği meselesini de içerir. İşte bu nedenle, yukarıdaki paragrafta bahsedilen iki eleştiri, demokratik seçkin kuramcılarının çıkış noktasını oluşturuyor denilebilir. Yani seçkinlerin nasıl oluştuğu, siyasal iktidarı uyguladıkları ve resmi statülerinin nasıl sona ereceğine bağlı olarak, seçkinlerin kaçınılmazlığı demokratik bir siyasi sistem ile çelişmeyebilir.

Bahsedilen yaklaşıma göre en temel varsayım, modern toplumlarda siyasal gücün tek bir toplumsal grup tarafından şekillendirilmediğidir. İş bölümüne dayalı, karmaşık ve örgütlü çıkar gruplarının karakterize ettiği modern toplumlarda, siyasal güç ve etki için mücadele eden farklı gruplar vardır. Bu gruplar siyasal gücün demokratik ilkeler temelinde nasıl uygulanacağı veya siyasal kararların toplum hakkındaki hangi varsayımlara dayanacağı konusunda farklılaşan siyasal partiler olabileceği gibi, baskı ve çıkar gruplarını da içerir. Modern iş bölümüne dayalı örgütlenme, hak ve özgürlükleri genişletme olanakları, siyasi gücün tek bir grup tarafından ve tek bir toplumsal grubun lehine olacak şekilde işletilmesinin önündeki en büyük engeldir. Demokratik çoğulculuk anlayışına dayalı bu yorum demokratik seçkinlik olarak tanımlanır ve siyasal gücün bir tür seçkinler grubu tarafından kullanılmasının demokrasi ile çelişmeyeceğini vurgular. Buna rağmen, seçkinlerin oluşumu ve dolaşımı konularına odaklanan kimi kuramcılar, bu süreçlerin toplumsal tabakalaşma süreçlerinden bağımsız ele alınamayacağını öne sürmüştür. Buna bağlı olarak toplumda ekonomik ve siyasi açıdan avantajlı gruplar, siyasal seçkinlerin oluşumunda daha ağırlıklı ve istikrarlı olarak yer alabilmektedir.

İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki siyasal seçkinlere odaklanan C. Wright Mills, demokratik sistemlerde de iktidar yapılarının belirli toplumsal grupların hegemonyasına girebileceğini göstermiştir. Savaştan önce Almanya gibi yüksek sosyo-ekonomik gelişkinlik seviyesine ve demokratik sisteme sahip bir ülkede otoriter bir yönetimin iktidarı ele geçirebilmiş olması, diğer demokratik ülkelerde de aynı riskin mevcut olabileceğine işaret eder. Mills'in çalışmasına göre ABD'de siyasetçiler, askeri teknolojilere dayalı büyük sermayedarlar ve ordunun üst düzey yönetimi, toplumsal bir sınıfı andıracak şekilde iç içe geçmiş durumdadır ve önemli siyasi kararlar bu görece kapalı grubun inisiyatifindedir. Bu

ayrıcalık, bahsedilen grubun gücünü ve sürekliliğini koruma doğrultusunda kullanılmaktadır. Özetle, demokratik çoğulculuk yaklaşımına dayanan demokratik seçkinlik, gelişmiş ve demokratik sistemlere sahip toplumlarda da şüphe ile yaklaşılması gereken bir varsayımdır. Ekonomik güç, kimlik, statü ve siyasi görüş temelinde şekillenen tabakalaşma, siyasi seçkinlerin de oluşumunu ve istikrarını belirleyebilmektedir.

Buraya kadar ele alınan şekliyle siyasi seçkinler kuramının üç önermesine odaklanılmıştır. Birincisi, siyasi seçkinlerin kaçınılmazlığıdır. İkincisi, demokratik sistemlerde siyasi iktidarın toplumdaki farklı görüş ve çıkar grupları nedeniyle çoğulcu bir anlayış çerçevesinde gelişeceği ve Üçüncüsü ise, mevcut toplumsal tabakalaşma özelliklerinin siyasi seçkinlerin oluşumuna etki edebileceğidir. Bu üç görüşün son ikisi, hâlihazırda demokratik olarak tanımlanan ve sosyo-ekonomik gelişmişlik seviyesi yüksek toplumları temel alan görüşleri yansıtmaktadır. Ancak demokratik olmayan ve düşük gelişmişlik seviyesindeki toplumlar için siyasi seçkinler daha az çoğulcu ve dolaşıma daha kapalı bir yapıdadır. Asıl olarak, bu durum farklı siyasi rejimler arasındaki ayrıma karşılık gelmektedir. Bir başka ifade ile siyasi seçkinler grubuna girmenin, burada kalmanın ve ayrılmanın koşulları demokratik olan ve olmayan toplumlar arasındaki farkın temelini oluşturur. Siyasi seçkinlerin en üst tabakasının yüksek seviyede süreklilik gösterdiği ve toplumsal grupların siyasi karar verme pratiğine demokratik kanunlar çerçevesinde etki edebilmesinin imkânlarının son derece kısıtlı olduğu ülkeler, otoriter olarak tanımlanabilir.

### **Araştırmanın Metodolojisi**

Bu çalışma kapsamında kullanılan temel araştırma yöntemi derinlemesine mülakatları içeren etnografik yöntemdir. Bu amaçla, Azerbaycan siyasetinin orantısız şekilde merkezi sayılan başkent Bakü’de beş ayrı saha çalışması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Saha çalışmaları 2007 yılından 2010 yılına kadarki süreçte yapılmıştır ve her bir çalışma üç ila beş hafta arasında sürmüştür. Toplam yetmiş dört derinlemesine mülakat için, sahada öncelikle az sayıdaki bağlantı şahsına ulaşılmıştır. Azerbaycan siyasetinin içinde bulunan ve siyasi alana vakıf bu şahıslar aracılığı ile siyasi görüş,

yaş ve cinsiyet farklılıklarını yansıtacak bir çeşitliliği içerecek şekilde öncelikle siyasetçilere, ardından siyasi analistlere, akademisyenlere, sivil toplum örgütü yöneticilerine ve gazetecilere ulaşılmıştır. Kartopu yöntemiyle ve yukarıda belirttiğim farklılığı gözeterek şekilde oluşturulan bu örnekleme Azerbaycan tarihi, yakın geçmişi ve güncel siyasi meseleler konusunda siyasal seçkinleri tartışmanın odağı olarak tanımlayan yarı-yapılandırılmış mülakat soruları sorulmuştur. Görüşmeler bir buçuk saat ile dört buçuk saat civarında sürmüştür. Sorulan soruların odak noktası, Azerbaycan’da seçkinler arası ve seçkinler ile seçkin olmayanlar arasındaki ilişki oluşturmuştur. Seçkinler arası ilişkiler ile siyasal seçkinlerin nasıl ortaya çıktığı, siyasal iktidarı ne şekilde ellerinde tuttıkları, olası rakiplerle nasıl mücadele edildiğidir. Seçkin olmayanlar ile ilişki ise ülkede tarihsel bakış açısı çerçevesinde siyasal seçkinler grubunun oluşumunda ve söylemlerinin şekillenmesinde öne çıkan olay ve dönemler olarak düşünülmüştür. Örneğin Azerbaycan’da ulus ve devlet inşası süreçleri açısından önemli dönemleştirmeler ve olaylar (örneğin bağımsızlık mücadelesi, Sovyet iktidarı dönemi vb.) seçkinler arası ilişkilerin tarihsel ve toplumsal bir bağlama oturtulması açısından kullanılmıştır. İzin alınabildiği ölçüde görüşmelerin ses kaydı alınmış, aksi durumlarda ise mülakat sırasında tutulan notlar kullanılarak görüşmeler yeniden oluşturulmuştur. Mülakat dökümleri, aynı sorulara ve konulara verilen benzer ve farklı cevapların gruplandırılması yoluyla analiz edilmiştir. Bu yolla Azerbaycan’da siyasal seçkinlerin oluşumu ve dönüşümü sorusuna yönelik farklı görüş ve düşüncelerin temsil edilmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Saha çalışmaları bilindiği üzere araştırma pratiğinin önemli bir parçasıdır ve elde edilen veriler kadar varılan çıkarımların da şekillenmesinde birincil bir rol oynar. “Yerliler” ile kurulan ilişki, araştırılan konunun ne ölçüde ve nasıl anlaşılacağına önemli bir göstergesidir. Bu bakımdan araştırmacının sunulan kimliğinin hem kendisi, hem de görüşmeciler tarafından nasıl algılandığı önemlidir. Türkiye’de bir üniversitede araştırma görevlisi olarak çalışan, otuzlu yaşlarının başında bir erkek bir doktora adayı olmak bu kimliğin en görünür kısmıyken, hem araştırmacının hem de görüşülen kişilerin siyasi varsayımları, eğilimleri, cinsiyeti, ekonomik ve kültürel statüleri de bu karşılıklı etkileşimin parçası olmuştur. Bu etkileşimin aradaki farklılıklar ve benzerliklerden bağımsız şekilde en sağlıklı biçimde kurulabilmesi için araştırmacı olarak amacımı, ülkedeki siyasi süreçlerle ilgili tutumumu ve benzeri

konulardaki görüşlerimi olabildiğince şeffaf şekilde fakat aradaki ilişkiyi en az etkileyecek şekilde ortaya koymaya özen gösterdim.

### **Azerbaycan'da Siyasal Seçkinler: Tarihsel Arka Plan**

Azerbaycan'da otoriter yönetimin pekiştirilmesi her ne kadar aktörlerin eylemleri sonucu olarak gerçekleşmişse de, bu eylemlerin anlamlandırılabilmesi ülkenin tarihsel bağlamından ayrı düşünülemez. Bu açıdan Azerbaycan'da ulus ve devlet oluşumu sürecinde düşünce ve davranış kalıpları ile siyasetin kurumsal yapılarını şekillendirmede bazı dönem ve olaylar öne çıkmaktadır. Araştırma süresince siyasi iktidar, devlet, siyaset ve toplum hakkında seçkinler ve seçkin olmayanların düşünce kalıpları ile bu kalıpların kurumsal yapılarla ilişkisi tekrarlayan bir tema olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu kalıplar ülkenin Rus egemenliğine girmesinden önceki döneme kadar uzanmaktadır. Siyasi davranışlarda bölgesel aidiyetlere dayalı ağların, kayırmacılığın ve patronalizmin önemi devlet kurumlarının kişilerden bağımsız bir nitelik kazanamaması, siyaset alanının toplumsal katılımdan uzak olması, devlet ve toplum arasında bir iletişim ve uzlaşma aracı olarak tanımlanabilecek sivil toplumun zayıflığı yine bu ve sonraki dönemlerde oluşan koşulların birer sonucu olarak görülmektedir.

Rus İmparatorluğu egemenliğine girmeden önce günümüz Azerbaycan'ı sınırları içerisinde siyasi bir birlik bulunmamaktaydı. Birbirleri ile sert bir rekabet içerisindeki hanlıkların birbirleri ve yabancı ülkeler ile olan işbirlikleri değişken ve istikrarsız bir temele dayanmaktaydı. Kültürel ortaklığa rağmen ekonomik ve idari sistemler siyasi bir birlik kurulabilmesini sağlayacak düzeye ulaşmamıştı. “Hanlıklar dönemi” olarak adlandırılan bu dönem, Rus egemenliği sırasında da yeniden üretilmişti. Bölgede hâkimiyetini sağlamlaştırma çabasının bir parçası olarak Rus yöneticiler hanlıklara karşılık gelen farklı bölgelerdeki güç ve statü sahiplerini kullanmış, bu politika da mevcut bölünmüşlüğü pekiştirmiştir. Azerbaycan'ın Rus egemenliğinde ekonomik ve kültürel modernleşmesi ile ülkedeki Azeri Türkü Müslümanların ülke içerisindeki dezavantajlı durumu Azerbaycan aydınlanmasının çıkış noktasını oluşturmuştur. 1918'e kadarki süreçte “Azerbaycan Aydınlanması” ulus inşası yolunda önemli başarılar elde etmişti. Uluslararası koşulların da uygun bir hale gelmesi ile Azerbaycan 1918-1920 yılları arasında ilk Müslüman demokratik



cumhuriyeti hayata geçirmişti. Evrensel demokratik ilkelere bağlı, aydınlanma ve modernleşme hedeflerini devam ettiren bu yönetim ise koşulların değişmesi ile birlikte 1920’de bu defa Sovyet egemenliğine girmiştir. Sovyet iktidarının kurulması ve pekiştirilmesi sürecinde ulus inşasında elde edilen kazanımların büyük kısmı kaybedilmiştir. En önemlisi, ülkenin eğitilmiş, siyasi ve kültürel önderliğini yürütebilecek kadrolar tasfiye edilmiştir. Azerbaycan yönetimi tamamen Moskova’nın güdümünde belirlenmeye başlamış, devlet kurumları Sovyet sosyalist ilkeleri doğrultusunda şekillenmiştir. Rusya’dan bağımsız herhangi bir siyasi pratiğin imkânsızlaşması ile Azerbaycan kendi dinamikleri ve kadroları ile ulus-devlet inşasına devam edememiştir. Ancak vurgulamak gerekir ki Sovyet yönetimi, “uluslar politikası” aracılığı ile ulus-devlet inşasını farklı bir çerçevede de olsa yeniden üreten bir rol oynamıştır. Çoğunluğu oluşturan ulusların ismiyle adlandırılan on beş cumhuriyet şeklindeki idari yapılanması, Birliğin dağılıp sürecinde bu politikanın ne kadar etkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca Azerbaycan’ın idari bölgeleri olan *rayonlar* da hanlıklar dönemindeki sınırlara karşılık gelmekteydi ve bu durum bölgesel aidiyetlerin güçlü kalmasına yardımcı oldu. Bu idari ve kurumsal yapı temelinde birlik ve cumhuriyet düzeyinde siyaset, merkezin ekonomik ve siyasi hedeflerini gerçekleştirirken idari-kurumsal birimler arasında da bir denge oluşturma ihtiyacını doğurmuştur. “Şekil olarak ulusal, içerik olarak sosyalist” şeklinde özetlenebilecek Sovyet uluslar politikası, ideolojik alandaki ilerlemelerine rağmen, bu şekilde ulus-devlet dinamiklerini teşvik etmişti. Stalin’in ölümünün ardından Azerbaycan iktidar seçkinleri ulusal bilinç ve haklar konusunda kimi girişimlerde bulunmuş olsa da, kalıcı başarılar elde edemedi.

*Nomenklatura* sistemi ile belirlenene SSCB siyasi seçkinlerinin 1960’lara kadar en önemli özelliklerinden bir tanesi yüksek bir dolaşım oranına sahip olmasıydı. Yöneticiler merkezden gelen emirlerle sıklıkla değiştirilmekteydi. Brejnev, bu uygulamayı değiştirerek merkezi komuta ekonomisinin hedeflerine ulaşma karşılığında üye cumhuriyetlerin birinci sekreterlerine kendi kadrolarını kurma ve istikrarı sağlama konusunda göreceli bir serbestlik tanıdı. Onun Azerbaycan’ın yönetimine getirdiği Haydar Aliyev, öncelikle Nahçıvanlılardan oluşan kadroları devlet yönetimine alırken bağımsızlıktan sonra geri dönüşünü sağlayacak siyasi-bürokratik ağlar ile çıkar ilişkilerini tesis etti. Bu dönemde Aliyev karizmatik ulusal

lider imajını da inşa etmekteydi. Yolsuzluk ve rüşvetle mücadele, önemli ekonomik yatırımları ülkeye kazandırma, yeni yükseköğrenim kurumları kurma, ulusal tarihsel isimlerin rehabilitasyonu, teknokrat kadroların Rusya'daki prestijli eğitim kurumlarında yetiştirilmesi gibi başarılarını kitle iletişim araçlarının başarılı şekilde kullanılması ile birleştirerek liderlik özelliklerinin toplumun geneline benimsenmesini sağladı. Kısaca Azerbaycan sadece dış işlerinde ve ideolojik konularda merkeze bağımlı, modern bir ulus devletim tüm kurum ve yapılarına sahip bir ülke haline geldi. Bu kurum ve yapıların içi ise Aliyev'e hem çıkar, hem de sadakat bağları ile bağlı kadroların oluşturduğu ağlar tarafından doldurulmuştu. Bu ağların içerisinde güç ve çıkar paylaşımlarının dengelenip sürdürülmesindeki başarısı, Haydar Aliyev'in 1993'te iktidara dönmesinde en önemli etkenlerden birisiydi. 1982'de Politbüro üyeliğine kadar yükselen Aliyev, 1987'de Gorbaçov politikalarına muhalefeti nedeniyle görevden alındı.

1980'lerde yeni politikaların sağladığı ortamda pek çok Birlik ülkesinde olduğu gibi Azerbaycan'da da ulusal uyanışın önu açılmıştı. Ulusal mücadele, Dağlık Karabağ sorunu ekseninde büyümekte, göreceli özgürlük ortamında yeni örgütlenmeler kurulmaktaydı. 1988'de ulusal-demokratik örgütlerin bir araya gelmesi ile kurulan Azerbaycan Halk Cephesi (AHC) toplumsal hareketler üzerinde güçlü bir şekilde yükselen yeni bir seçkinler grubunu temsil etmekteydi. 1991'de bağımsızlık kazanan Azerbaycan'da mevcut hükümetin Karabağ konusunda etkisiz kalması sonucunda AHC 1992'de Ayaz Mutalibov hükümetini devirerek iktidara geldi. Yeni iktidar seçkinleri arkalarındaki güçlü halk desteği ile ulus-devlet inşası ve bağımsızlığın pekiştirilmesi konusunda önemli adımlar atsa da, yaklaşık bir yıl sonra devrildi. AHC seçkinlerinin başarısızlığında siyaset ve devlet deneyimlerinin zayıflığı, müesses nizamı temsil eden kadroları tasfiye edememeleri, parlamento seçimlerini yenileyememeleri, anayasa değişikliğini yapamamaları, ekonomik krize çözüm bulamamaları gibi nedenler etkili olmuştu. Ayrıca ülkede güç kullanma tekeli ortadan kalkmış, farklı çıkar grupları ve siyasi oluşumlar ülkenin siyasi istikrarını belirsiz hale getirmişti. Bu ortamda AHC hükümeti lideri Ebulfez Elçibey Haydar Aliyev'i Meclis Başkanlığı'na getirdi. Böylece cumhurbaşkanlığına vekâlet eden Aliyev 1993'de başkanlık seçimlerinin düzenlenmesi ile ülkenin yeni lideri oldu.

1998'e kadar geçen süreçte geçmiş deneyim ve ilişkileri aracılığı ile ülkede siyasi istikrarı sağlayan Aliyev, darbe girişim ve planlarını bastırarak ülkedeki siyasi otorite boşluğuna son verdi. 1994'te Karabağ'da ateşkesin sağlanması ve 1995'te yeni anayasanın kabul edilmesi ile istikrar ortamı sağlandı. Bu süreçte Azerbaycan'da temel insan hakları ve siyasi hakların daha özgürce kullanıldığı, muhalefet partilerinin kısmi de olsa örgütlenme, mobilizasyon ve seçim başarıları elde ettiği görülmektedir. İlerleyen yıllarda sağlığının bozulması ile başlayan başkanlık devri tartışmaları, oğlu İlham Aliyev'in adaylığı ve seçimleri kazanması ile son buldu. Aliyev, kimi kesimlerin beklentilerinin aksine liberalleşme adımları atmak yerine babasının oluşturduğu iktidar ağını başarılı bir şekilde devralmıştır. İlham Aliyev, mevcut iktidar seçkinleri ağını devraldıktan sonra muhalefetin 2003 ve 2005'teki seçim sonrası protestolarını şiddet kullanarak bastırdı. Olası bir "Renkli Devrim"i engelleyen İlham Aliyev, 2005 ve 2006'da hükümeti devirme planları olduğunu iddia ettiği bazı bakan ve üst düzey yöneticileri görevden aldı. 2009'da başkanlık görev süresini iki dönem ile kısıtlayan maddeyi de kapsayan anayasa referandumundan başarıyla çıkan Aliyev, bu tezin basıldığı 2020 yılında iktidardaki on yedinci yılını doldurmaktaydı. Elbette görünürde son derece istikrarlı otoriter yönetimlerin çok kısa sürede sarsılabileceği, Renkli Devrimler ve Arap Baharı örnekleri ile anlaşılmıştır. Bu dalgalar tarafından etkilenmeyen eski Sovyet ülkelerinde otoriter yönetimler adeta bağımsızlık kazanmış ve daha da pekişmiştir. Azerbaycan'da da iktidarı elinde bulunduran seçkinler, özellikle bu iki süreçten önemli dersler çıkarmış, olası iktidar değişimleri karşısında daha donanımlı hale gelmiştir. Ülkede bazı dönemlerde ortaya çıkıp kaybolan toplumsal protestolar ise siyasal liderlikten yoksundur ve sistemsel bir değişimi zorunlu kılmamaktadır. Özellikle yerel mülki amirlere yönelen tasfiyelerle bu protestolar engellenebilmektedir. Uluslararası koşullar da bölgede siyasi istikrarsızlığı ortaya çıkarabilecek dinamiklerin oluşması için uygun değildir. Böyle bir ortamda iktidar içerisinden veya dışından hükumete karşı etkili bir hareketin çıkması olası görünmemektedir.

## **Bulgular**

Bu tezin önemli bir boyutunu, saha çalışmasında elde edilen veriler oluşturmaktadır. Bu veriler temel olarak Azerbaycan'da siyasal seçkin tanımının özellikleri, toplumun siyasetleştirilmesi bakımından halk/seçkinler bağlantısının kopukluğu, bölgesel aidiyetler temelinde şekillenen grupların siyasetteki yeri, demokratikleşmenin başarısız olmasına dair açıklamalar ve son olarak da ulusal siyaset ve seçkinler alanının ulusal kimlik tartışmaları açısından ele alınmıştır. Azerbaycan'da siyasal seçkin teriminin popüler tanımları, yüksek kültürel sermaye ile ilişkilendirilirken, seçkinlere yönelik eleştirilerin önemli bir boyutunu bu ölçüt bağlamında değerlendirilen eksiklikler oluşturmaktadır. Benzer şekilde bir diğer kıstas, güce dayalı olarak da yapılmaktadır. 2003 ve 2005 süreçlerinden sonra örgütlenme ve toplumu harekete geçirme kapasiteleri ciddi ölçüde düşen, sembolik de olsa seçim başarıları elde edemeyen, dolayısı ile resmi mevkilerde bulunmayan muhalefet seçkinleri, seçkin olarak tanımlanmayabilmektedir.

Tezin ele aldığı temel konulardan birisi olan otoriter rejimin dayanaklılığı sorusu bir açıdan tersten de sorulmayı gerektirmektedir. Başka bir ifade ile Azerbaycan'da geç Sovyet ve erken Sovyet sonrası dönemde ortaya çıkan demokratikleşme çabalarının neden başarısız olduğunu anlamak, otoriter yönetimin neden ve nasıl bu kadar uzun süre ayakta kalabildiğini anlamaya yardımcı olacaktır. 1980'lerin sonunda Dağlık Karabağ sorunu temelinde yükselen Azerbaycan Halk Cephesi hareketi, 1992'de son AzKP birinci sekreteri ve bağımsız Azerbaycan'ın ilk devlet başkanı Ayaz Mutalibov'u devirerek iktidara gelmiştir. Büyük çoğunluğunun siyasi deneyimi bulunmayan AHC kadroları, ulus-devlet inşası alanında önemli adımlara imza atmış olsa da, siyasi alanda gereken reformları gerçekleştirememiştir. En önemlisi, Sovyetler dağılmadan önce seçilmiş olan ve bağımsızlıkla birlikte Milli Meclis adını taşıyan parlamento için yeni seçimlerin yapılamaması, devlet ve bürokrasinin çeşitli kademelerine Haydar Aliyev tarafından getirilmiş ve ona sadık kadroların yerlerinde kalması, gerekli siyasi reformları engellemiş, AHC hükümetinin halk kitleleri dışında çok fazla destek bulmasını engellemiştir. Tüm bu dışsal etkenlere ek olarak, belirtmek gerekir ki, AHC'nin kendisi de demokratikleşmeyi sekteye uğratan bazı sorunlarla maluldür. Cepheyi oluşturan fraksiyonların kişisel liderlik yapıları, bölgesel ayrımlara dayanan destekçi profilleri, Sovyet döneminde oluşmuş,

kozmpolit kimlik dinamiklerine zıt bir siyasi program izlemeleri toplumsal desteği sınırlayan bir etki yaratmıştır.

Demokratikleşmenin başarısızlığı veya otoriter yönetimin toplumsal alanda destek bulması da yine saha arařtırmalarında ele alınan sorulardan birisi olmuřtur. Bu bağlamda, siyasi angajmanlardan büyük ölçüde bağımsız olarak vurgulanan bir faktör toplumun son iki yüz yılda edindiđi siyasi reflekslerdir. Siyasi alanda tezahür eden sorunların bir “zihniyet” sorunu olarak tanımlanması, popüler ve seçkin kesimlerde benzer şekillerde gözlemlenmiştir. Etnik ve dinsel olarak farklı bir ulusun hegemonyasında geçen iki yüz yılın, bağımsız bir siyasi alan kurma konusundaki dezavantajları sürekli vurgulanmıştır. Bu hegemonya, önce Rus İmparatorluğu ardından Sovyet Rusya tarafından sürdürölmüş, merkeze tabi bir çevre ülkesi olma hali siyasete dair algıları güçlü şekilde etkilemiştir. Azerbaycan’da bir tür dekolonizasyon olarak adlandırılabilir bir süreç sadece AHC iktidarı döneminde etkili bir şekilde yürütölmüşse de, sonrasında özellikle siyasi faaliyet alanının değer ve normlarının deđiřtirilememesi ile problematik bir biçimde devam etmiştir. Bu açıdan benim görüřüme göre Azerbaycan’da dekolonizasyon halen derinlemesine arařtırılması gereken konulardan birisidir.

Bu tezin seçkinler kuramına katkısı iki başlıkta özetlenebilir. Birincisi, siyasal sistemdeki deđişimlerin büyük tarihsel aşamalar ve sosyo-ekonomik gelişmişlik seviyesi ile deđil, bu deđiřimi gerçekleřtiren aktörler olan seçkinlere bađlı olduđudur. Seçkinler sistem deđiřimine tüm kořullar hazır olduđunda deđil, bu deđiřim onların genel çıkarları açısından en uygun seçenek olduđunda gerçekleşir. Eđer seçkinler için mevcut sistemi devam ettirmenin maliyeti karşılanabilir düzeyde ise, sistem devam edecektir. Azerbaycan’da da, pek çok eski Sovyet ülkesindeki gibi demokratikleşmenin maliyeti iktidardaki seçkinler açısından oldukça maliyetliken, otoriter rejimi sürdürmenin maliyeti karşılanabilir düzeydedir. Bu maliyetin düşük olması iktidar seçkinlerinin görece yüksek bir bütünleşme düzeyine sahip olması, muhalefetin sistem karşıtı bir deđiřimi zorlayacak kapasiteden çok uzak olması, mevcut iktidar ağlarının dođal kaynak gelirlerinin paylaşımı ile kolay sürdürülebilir olmasıdır. Ek olarak bu maliyetin düşüklüğü, uluslararası düzlemde demokratikleşme yönünde baskıların çok düşük olması ile açıklanabilir. İktidar seçkinlerinin dolařımının çok düşük düzeyde olması, iktidar seçkinlerinin tekil ve düzensiz

değişiminin bir sistem değişimini ifade etmekten çok mevcut sistemi onarmaya ve güçlendirmeye yaradığı Azerbaycan'da otoriter yönetim de kalıcılışmaktadır. İkinci olarak, Azerbaycan özelinde yapılan bu çalışma göstermektedir ki iktidar seçkinlerinin yapısını ve işleyiş kurallarını meydana getiren faktörler ülkelerin tarihsel deneyimlerinden ve geçmişin mirasından ayrı anlaşılabilir. Görünürdeki kurumsal yapıların ve resmi kuralların arkasındaki bölgecilik ve patronaj ilişkileri son iki yüz yıllık süreçte, özellikle de Sovyet dönemindeki politikalarla güçlenmiştir. Normalde siyasetin ayrılmaz ancak biçimsel alanla sıkı ilişki içerisindeki biçimsel olmayan kısmı, biçimsel alanı siyasetin bir parodisi haline getirmiştir. Seçkin kuramcıları, siyasetin ve siyasetçilerin toplumdan görece bağımsızlığını siyasetin sağlıklı işlemesi için elzem bir özellik olarak tanımlamıştır. Ancak Azerbaycan'da iktidar bölgeciliğe ve patronaja dayanan dar ve kapalı bir seçkinler grubunun tekelinde kalmış, bir diğer deyişle aslında Sovyet döneminde oluşan siyasetsiz toplum sürdürülmüştür. Bahsedilen bu iki katkıyı tek cümle ile özetlemek gerekirse, seçkinlerin siyasi sistemin devamı veya değişimi konusundaki rolleri onaylanmış, ancak bu rolün ne şekilde gerçekleştirileceği tarihsel deneyim ve mirasın belirleyiciliğinde kalmıştır.

Azerbaycan özelinde otoriter rejimin korunması ve güçlenmesinin sorgulanması, otoriterlik çalışmaları açısından önemli bir yeniliği onaylamaktadır. Sovyetler Birliği'nin ve komünizmin çöküşünün üzerinden yaklaşık on yıl geçtiğinde demokratikleşme beklentileri büyük oranda boşa çıkmıştı. Yaklaşık yirmi yıl önce ifade edilen otoriter yönetimlerin geri dönüşü ve pekiştirilmesi olarak özetlenen mevcut durumun incelenmesi ise klasik otoriterlik anlayışından farklı bir perspektifi gerektirmekteydi. Siyasal sistemi tarif etmekte kullanılan “gri alan,” “sahte demokrasi,” “seçim otoriterliği” gibi farklı sıfatları içeren bu yeni tanımlamaların ortak özelliği, sistemin “hibrit,” yani hem demokratik sistemlerin, hem de otoriter sistemlerin özelliklerini içeren melez bir yapıya işaret etmesidir. Demokratik özellikler genellikle yazılı kanunlar, kurumlar, seçimler ve söylem düzeyinde kalırken otoriter boyut daha çok iktidar seçkinlerinin yapısı ve iç işleyişine dair anlaşılması gereken özelliklerdir. İktidar seçkinleri ellerindeki orantısız maddi ve örgütsel gücü, biçimsel demokratik kurum ve pratiklerin kendi konumlarını tehdit edebilecek pratiklere alan açmaması için kullanılmaktadırlar. Başka bir ifade ile kanunlarla belirlenmiş siyasi haklar ve insan hakları, basın özgürlüğü, düzenli seçimler gibi

demokratik ilkeler melez rejimler altında son derece seçici, kontrollü ve adil olmayan şekillerde uygulanarak herhangi tedrici bir demokratikleşmeye izin vermemektedir. Klasik otoriter rejimlerden farklı olan hibrit rejimlerdeki seçkinler de bu bakımdan hibrit seçkinler olarak adlandırılabilir. Demokrasiyi açık ve bütünlüklü bir şekilde reddetmeyen, demokratik kurum ve pratikleri göstermelik de olsa sürdüren, hatta kişisel görüş bakımından demokrasinin gerekliliğine inanan seçkinler demokratikleşme ihtiyacını açıkça ifade etmekten ya da bu yönde politikalar izlemekten kaçınmaktadır. Demokratik muhalefet seçkinlerinin ise siyasi ve toplumsal gücü son derece kısıtlanmış, ülke siyasetine ve gündemine etkisi neredeyse yok edilmiştir ve mevcut görünümü itibariyle demokratikleşme yönünde inisiyatif almaktan uzaktırlar.

Merkezinde çok küçük bir grubun bulunduğu siyasi ve ekonomik iktidar yapısının varlığını 1993'ten bu yana korumayı başarması bu çalışmada odaklanılan sorulardan birisidir. Modern bir devlet yapısının tüm kurumları mevcut olmasına rağmen kurumlar belirli şahıs ve gruplarla çok yakın bir şekilde ilişkili haldedir. Zaman zaman iktidar bloğu içerisinde çıkan bazı anlaşmazlıklara rağmen, siyasi ve ekonomik güç iktidar sahipleri arasında son derece istikrarlı bir biçimde paylaşılmaya devam etmiştir. Haydar Aliyev döneminde hükumete karşı daha ciddi ve ülke dışından da destek bulan müdahale girişimleri, iktidar bloğunun dağılmadan kalabilmesi sayesinde bertaraf edilmiş, 2003 sonrası dönemde ise daha çok iktidar bloğu içinden yükselen rekabet yine aynı şekilde önlenmiştir. 2005-2006 yıllarında konsolidasyonunu tamamlayan İlham Aliyev yönetimi, 2009'da yapılan referandumla başkanlık dönemi sayısını iki ile kısıtlayan anayasa hükmünü değiştirmiştir. Bu dönemden sonra ise iktidar bloğu içerisinde herhangi bir muhalif hareket çıkmamıştır. Yine belirtmek gerekir ki, Azerbaycan'da iktidar seçkinlerini sıkı bir şekilde bir arada tutan şey "kompromat" mekanizması ile ülkenin gaz ve petrol gelirlerinin iktidar bloğu üyeleri arasında kurum ve ihalelerin paylaşımıdır. Siyasi ve ekonomik gücün dar bir grup içerisinde paylaşımı, iktidar yapısına karşı grup içerisinde gelebilecek rekabet tehlikesini oluşturmaktadır. Ancak bu tehlike, iktidar seçkinleri hakkında bilgi akışının kontrol edilmesi sayesinde sürekli olarak bertaraf edilebilmektedir. Siyasi ve ekonomik güç sahiplerinin mevcut hiyerarşiyi bozmaya yönelik, uluslararası düzeyde veya ülke içerisindeki diğer güç sahipleri ile yatay

ilişkiler kurma girişimleri dikey ve kontrollü bir bilgi akışı ile engellenebilmektedir. Siyasi iktidar merkezinin öngördüğü sınırların dışına çıkma, hızlı ve etkili bir şekilde cezalandırılmaktadır. Bilgi akışına hâkimiyet, istenilen iktidar ortağının ve destekçilerinin gerektiğinde kolayca itham edilerek kamuoyu nezdinde gözden düşürülmelerine yardımcı olmuştur. Bu sayede olası hükümet karşıtı veya bağımsız ilişki ağları kurma niyetleri karşısında caydırıcılık da sağlanmıştır.

Azerbaycan'da siyasal seçkinlerin bölgesel aidiyet temelinde örgütlenmeleri de bağımsızlık sonrasında önemli değişiklikler geçirmiştir. İlk olarak vurgulanması gereken, bu aidiyetlerin siyasi tercih veya destek davranışlarını mutlak şekilde belirlemediğidir. Siyasi ve ekonomik güç halen bölgelerle anılan gruplar arasında paylaşılarak denge ve istikrar sağlanmaktadır, ancak “ele geçirilmiş” bir devlette bu paylaşım çok küçük bir grubun avantajına olmaktadır. Ayrıca özellikle İlham Aliyev döneminde daha da küçülen iktidar seçkinleri grubuna dâhil olmanın temel aracı, siyasi ve ekonomik gücü elinde bulunduran ailelerin şirketleri arasında kurulan ilişkiler ve çocukları arasında düzenlenen evlilikler haline gelmiştir. Böylece, Sovyetler zamanında mevcut olmayan, ayrıcalıkların sonraki kuşaklara aktarılabilmesi daha da kolaylaşmıştır.

## **Sonuç**

Bu tezin amacı Azerbaycan'da siyasal seçkinlerin dönüşümünü Sovyet sonrası dönemde otoriter konsolidasyon bağlamında incelenmiştir. Sovyet mirasçısı devletlerin çoğu, bağımsızlığın başlangıcındaki görece çoğulcu siyasal alan ve demokratikleşme beklentilerinin aksine otoriter yönetimlerin yeniden tesis edilmesine sahne olmuştur. Sovyetler Birliği ve komünizmin çöküşü sürecinde siyasi ve ekonomik gücü elinde bulunduran gruplar otoriter bir yönetimi yeniden inşa ederek yönetimlerine istikrarlı hale getirmişlerdir. Otoriter inşanın da demokrasi inşası gibi seçkinler tarafından seçkinlerin yapısı ile işleyişine dair düzenlemelerle tanımlanabileceği, bu çalışmanın temel önermeleri arasındadır. Bir diğer önerme ise Birincil kaynak olarak Çalışma temel olarak saha çalışması ve yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakatlar aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Saha verileri, kuramsal çerçeve ve tarihsel arka plan kapsamında değerlendirilmiştir. Sovyetler Birliği'nin



dağılmasının ardından pek çok Sovyet mirasçısı cumhuriyette farklı şekillerde işleyen otoriter yönetimler ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu yönetimlerin ortak özelliği hibrit rejimlere dayanması, yani klasik otoriter yönetimlerden farklı olarak kimi demokratik söylem ve pratikleri tamamen reddetmemeleridir.

Bağımsızlık sonrası Azerbaycan'da ne tür bir rejim kurulduğu konusunda yapılacak tanımlamalar rejimin birbiri ile çelişir görünen ancak birbirini tamamlayan özellikleri bir arada ele alınmadığı ölçüde eksik kalacaktır. Öncelikle Azerbaycan'da rejimi belirleyen temel özellikler otoriter bir yönetimin olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca bu otoriter yönetim "Sultanvari" karakteristikler taşımaktadır. Devlet yönetiminin, sadece kâğıt üzerinde değil ama aynı zamanda siyasi ve ekonomik gücün kontrol edilmesi anlamında aile temelinde devam ettirilmesi bu duruma işaret eder. Siyasal seçkinlerin formasyonu ve temel işleyiş kuralları otoriter sultanvari bir çerçevede içerisinde ele alınabilir. Ancak nihayetinde Azerbaycan'da "hibrit" bir rejim bulunmakta, bu tanım ise diğer daha kesin ve genel tanımlamaların daha açıklayıcı bir şekilde ele alınmasını gerektirmektedir. Hibrit rejim, iktidar seçkinlerine iki avantaj sunmaktadır. Bir yirmi birinci yüzyıl olgusu olarak hibrit rejimler açıkça otoriter bir rejim ilan etmenin harici ve dâhili maliyeti karşısında otoriter yönetimlere daha esnek ve sürdürülebilir bir seçenek sunmaktadır. Hibrit bir rejim aynı zamanda İktidar seçkinlerinin en üst tabakasında değişimin son derece yavaş olmasına karşın daha alt düzeylerde bu değişimin daha hızlı olması karşısında bir esneklik sunmaktadır. Bağımsızlık sonrası Azerbaycan'da muhalefet partileri aracılığı ile siyasi değişim umutlarının azalmasına paralel olarak ülke içinde ve dışında, siyasi değişimin ülkenin sosyo-ekonomik gelişimi ve daha da önemlisi siyasi ve kültürel toplumsallaşmalarını bağımsızlık sonrası dönemde tamamlayan figürlerin siyasi otorite konumlarına gelmesi ile gerçekleşeceği umudu dile getirilmiştir. Buna göre, eğitimi Rusya yerine Batı ülkeleri ve Türkiye'de tamamlamış, İngilizce bilen, liyakatli profesyonellerin devlet ve bürokrasi içerisinde daha fazla yer etmesi ile demokratikleşme yönünde bir dinamik ortaya çıkacağı ihtimali tartışılmıştır. İlham Aliyev'in 2003'teki başkanlık seçimini kazanması dahi, o dönemde genç bir siyasetçinin Azerbaycan demokrasisi için olumlu bir seçenek olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Ancak 2008-2009 civarında tamamlanan otoriter konsolidasyon, siyasi değişimin doğal denebilecek sosyo-ekonomik gelişim ve kuşak değişimi ile gerçekleşebileceği iddiasını çürütmüştür. Bu

bağlamda siyasi dönüşümün, dolayısı ile de demokratikleşmenin bazı sosyo-ekonomik gelişimlerle paralel gerçekleşeceği önermesi Azerbaycan örneğinde de karşılık bulmamıştır. Batılı ülkelerde eğitim almış, siyaset, demokrasi ve insan hakları konularında evrensel değerlere aşina, yaşam standardı gürece yüksek genç kuşaklar, siyasete mesafeli durmaktadır. Kalifiye profesyoneller büyüyen ülke ekonomisi ve dünya ile daha gelişkin bağların kurulması sonucu sayıca artmış, ancak siyasi karar verme konumlarından büyük oranda dışlanmış. Saha araştırmasına göre, karar verme konumlarına gelen eğitilmiş ve genç siyasetçilerin ise yeni bir dinamik temsil etmekten çok var olan güç yapılarına uyumlu hareket ettikleri ifade edilmektedir. Sovyet döneminin Rusya'da eğitim görmüş, Komünist Parti organlarında toplumsallaşmış kadroları yerlerini Batı ülkelerinde eğitim almış, piyasa ekonomisi ve demokrasi jargonuna yabancı olmayan, kalifiye, ancak mevcut patronaj sistemi ile uyumlu çalışan daha genç üyelere bırakmıştır. Eğer mevcut iktidar seçkinleri ağına dâhil olma şansları yoksa orta veya uzun vadede genç kuşakların devlet ve bürokraside en üst mevkilere gelme ihtimali, bulunmamaktadır. Kariyerlerinde yükselme şansı olmayan yeni kuşakların ise Sovyetler Birliği'nin son yirmi yılında gözlenen sürece benzer şekilde tepki biriktirmeleri mümkün değildir. SSCB'de Brejnev döneminde kadro istikrarının genç bürokrat ve teknokratlarda oluşturduğu hoşnutsuzluk, günümüz koşullarında bu kesimlerin özel sektör veya yurt dışı çalışma imkânlarına yönelmesi ile sönümlenmektedir.

Azerbaycan örneğinde otoriter yönetim, siyasal seçkinlerin bölgesel ağlar, bilgi akışının sıkı kontrolü ve patronaj ağları aracılığı ile birlikte anılmaktadır. Ayrıca babadan oğula iktidar transferinin başarılı şekilde gerçekleştiği ülkede otoriter sistemin kurucusu Haydar Aliyev ile onu devam ettiren oğlu Haydar Aliyev'in iktidarlara arasında iktidar seçkinlerinin yapısı ve işleyişi bakımından süreklilik ve kopuşlar da bulgular arasındadır. Baba Aliyev döneminde devlet iktidarının güvenceye alınması öncelikliken, demokrasi bir amaç olarak ifade edilmemesine rağmen fiiliyatta demokratik hak ve özgürlükler kısıtlı da olsa kullanılabilmiştir. İlham Aliyev döneminde ise iktidar tekeli tamamen kurulmuş, demokratik söylemin daha çok kullanılmasına rağmen uygulamada hak ve özgürlüklerin büyük ölçüde engellenmiştir. Ayrıca iktidar seçkinlerinde ve daha alt düzeyde gerçekleşen kadro değişikliklerinin demokratikleşme yönünde bir dinamik ortaya çıkarmaktan çok

otoriter ynetime hizmet ettiđi vurgulanmalıdır. Sonu olarak hibrit rejimin inřası grnrde demokratik syleme daha yakın, ancak uygulamada otoriter bir hibrit sekin grubu ortaya ıkarmıřtır. Siyasal sekinler kuramının ngrdđ zere sekinlerin siyasal sistemi tanımlamada birincil konum sahip olduđu, yani demokratikleřme veya otoriterleřmenin inřasındaki aktrler olduđu varsayımına dayanan tez, bu inřa srecinin tarihsel gemiř ve deneyimler temelinde gerekleřtiđini de yadsımamaktadır.

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