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ISSUES OF NATIONAL

STRUGGLE IN AZERBAIJAN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN AZERBAIJANI HISTORIOGRAPHY

LAS CUESTIONES DE LA LUCHA NACIONAL EN AZERBAIYÁN A PRINCIPIOS DEL SIGLO XX EN LA HISTORIOGRAFÍA AZERBAIYANA

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ABSTRACT

Azerbaijan's independence in 1991 marked a crucial milestone in the country's modern history, providing opportunity to define its own political, economic, and cultural path. This historic decision meant a step toward affirming its national identity and placing the country in the international community. Since then, Azerbaijan has worked to strengthen its democratic institutions, diversify its economy, and promote its rich cultural heritage. Moreover, sovereignty has been fundamental in facing internal and external challenges, seeking diplomatic solutions, and defending its national interests. From the historical academic field, the political, socioeconomic, and cultural processes related to life in Azerbaijan at the turn of the 20th century have drawn the attention of researchers, both during the Soviet period and the era of independence. However, it is indisputable that since the regaining of independence there has been an increasing interest in this topic. Among the most relevant topics examined, we can highlight the division of Azerbaijan, the history of our statehood, public uprisings, the national bourgeoisie, and the national liberation struggle. Historians' attitudes toward these subjects varied, influenced by their ethnic or national origins, political affiliations, and many other factors. Therefore, considering the above, the present article investigates the issues surrounding the national struggle in Azerbaijan in the early 20th century, highlighting the most important research conducted by historians during the independence period.

Keywords: Historiography, National struggle, Enlightenment, National movement.

RESUMEN

La independencia de Azerbaiyán en 1991 marcó un hito crucial en la historia moderna del país, brindando la oportunidad de definir su propio camino político, económico y cultural. Esta decisión histórica significó un paso hacia la afirmación de su identidad nacional y la colocación del país en la comunidad internacional. Desde entonces, Azerbaiyán ha trabajado para fortalecer sus instituciones democráticas, diversificar su economía y promover su rico patrimonio cultural. Además, la soberanía ha sido fundamental para enfrentar desafíos internos y externos, buscando soluciones diplomáticas y defendiendo sus intereses nacionales. Desde el campo académico histórico, los procesos políticos, socioeconómicos y culturales relacionados con la vida en Azerbaiyán a finales del siglo XX han atraído la atención de los investigadores, tanto durante el período soviético como en la era de la independencia. Sin embargo, es indiscutible que desde la recuperación de la independencia ha habido un creciente interés en este tema. Entre los temas más relevantes examinados, se puede destacar la división de Azerbaiyán, la historia de la estatalidad, los levantamientos públicos, la burguesía nacional y la lucha de liberación nacional. Las actitudes de los historiadores hacia estos temas variaron, influenciadas por sus orígenes étnicos o nacionales, afiliaciones políticas y muchos otros factores. Por lo tanto, considerando lo anterior, el presente artículo investiga los problemas que rodean la lucha nacional en Azerbaiyán a principios del siglo XX, destacando las investigaciones más importantes realizadas por los historiadores durante el período de independencia.

Palabras clave: historiografía, lucha nacional, ilustración, movimiento nacional.

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 20th century in Azerbaijan was a time of significant cultural and political change. The influence of liberalism, socialism, and nationalism, as well as the defeat of Russia in 1904 and the revolution of 1905, accelerated the process of Muslim reformism and the formation of political parties (Çağla, 2002). This period also saw the emergence of a new type of literary prose in Azerbaijani literature, with similarities to British literature (Eugster & Hasanov, 2016). The expansion of enlightenment, education, press, and art in Azerbaijan during this time laid the foundation for the formation of national thought and statehood (Suleymanli, 2021). These cultural and political developments set the stage for the eventual establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918.

Since 1991, Azerbaijan has gone through a period of significant political, economic, and social transformations. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the country embarked on the task of building and consolidating its state institutions. Economically, the country has sought to diversify its sources of income, since the main activity has been the exploitation of its vast energy resources, such as oil and gas (Babayev, 2019; Shakaraliyeva, 2023; Tugrul & Karimli, 2020). This approach has led to the modernization of its infrastructure and the development of key sectors such as tourism, the manufacturing sector but also education (Mammadova & Valiyev, 2020; Nizami et al., 2023; Tahir & Rafiq, 2021). Overall, Azerbaijan has sought to assert itself as a key player in the Caucasus region, both politically and economically, as it navigates the complexities of its history and the demands of an ever-changing world (Cornell, 2015).

But one of the biggest changes compared to the years before independence is the freedom that intellectuals have been given to study national history. Therefore, the study of national struggle issues in Azerbaijani historiography is one of the new important directions of our historiography. During the Soviet period, a strict censorship ban was imposed on the study of the Azerbaijani national movement. This topic was treated superficially; the studies carried out were not scientific but led to an indictment against the leading organizations and political leaders of the national movement and a court verdict. This problem in the history of Azerbaijan, like other problems, was falsified by the Communist Party. However, the positive political atmosphere created by independence in the early 1990s of the 20th century made it possible to thoroughly study the national liberation struggle.

From this point of view, the study of the socio-political and economic roots and the activities of the leaders of the

National Liberation Movement, which began in our country to achieve the modern independence of Azerbaijan, is of particular relevance. Of course, this was not possible until Azerbaijan gained its independence and sovereignty. Only our political figures in emigration were able to cover this issue at a certain level. This problem is one of the “white spots” of Azerbaijani historiography. Taking the above into consideration, the goal of this article is to analyze the issues surrounding the national struggle in Azerbaijan in the early 20th century, highlighting the most relevant research conducted by historians during the period of independence. The study of this problem is of particular scientific-theoretical and political importance in light of the increasing strengthening of the modern Azerbaijani state and the expansion of creative work in the liberated territories.

DEVELOPMENT

In the first half of the 19th century, the occupation of Northern Azerbaijan by Russia the transfer of Armenians to these regions and the use of Armenians against the Azerbaijani people as part of the colonial policy have written bloody pages in our national history in the 20th century. The study of these bloody pages is one of the most urgent problems facing national historiography. Although much has been done in this field thanks to the hard work of our scholars, there are still many issues to be resolved. However, steps were made such as the works by Mammadov, where the topics of the national struggle were addressed. Examples are “Azerbaijani National Movement (1875–1918),” the struggle of the Azerbaijani people for national independence, “Enlightenment and national movement in Azerbaijan (late 19th–early 20th centuries),” co-authored with Mammadov (Mammadov, 1996, 1998, 2005; Mammadov & Mammadov, 2006). The Patriotic Movement that started in the First World War, and the strengthening of Turkish solidarity in Azerbaijan, especially in 1916, were shown in these works; the role of charitable societies in the patriotism education of the people; the provision of assistance to Muslims who were refugees from Kars, Ardahan, and Erzurum as a result of the Russian occupation (Mammadov & Mammadov, 2008).

On the eve of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Topchubashov, one of the most important figures of Azerbaijan, the book “History of a Historical Figure: Alimardan Bey Topchubashov,” written by J. Hasanli, examines the meaningful life of the great personality and 50 years of his rich social and political activity (Hasanli, 2013). The book, written based on archive documents, highlights the Azerbaijani national movement, the evolution of Russian Muslims from ummah to nation, the establishment

of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the tireless activity of Topchubashov in entering international relations. The first 5 chapters of the 12-chapter book talk about the life and struggle of Alimardan Bey Topchubashov in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The author notes that Alimardan Bey led the expanding national movement at the beginning of the last century (20th century CE) and played an invaluable role in the awakening of the Muslims of the Caucasus and Russia, their emergence on the stage of history, and their union with national ideals. While sending Alimardan Bey Topchubashov to the 1st State Duma, Nariman Narimanov told him:

You have a big task ahead of you; this is a very difficult task. However, it is not heavier than the cross that the Prophet Jesus carried to save his people from darkness. That's why, like him, you should protect the rights of everyone, regardless of their nationality. Alimardan Bey Topchubashov fulfilled these hopes with his activity. (Hasanli, 2013, p. 4).

In Mammadov's work "The National Liberation Movement in Azerbaijan," special attention is paid to the awakening of the national liberation movement in our country and its role in the development of national self-consciousness in the people (Mammadov, 2009). In the work, the awakening of the national liberation movement in Azerbaijan in the 19th century, intellectuals as the predecessors of national democrats, the revolutionary struggle on the eve and years of the First Russian Revolution, the national movement, the activities of Azerbaijani deputies in the State Duma, the struggle of national political parties for independence, South Azerbaijan during the 1905–1911 Iranian revolution, and other issues were analyzed. In the work, the activities of national intellectuals in the Enlightenment and national movements were reviewed.

Huseynova's work "Azerbaijani Intellectuals at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries" also occupies an important place in historiography (Guseynova, 1993). Seyidzade's work "On the history of the Azerbaijani bourgeoisie at the beginning of the 20th century" investigated for the first time such issues as the Baku massacres of 1905–1906 and the organization and activities of the peace-making committee (Seidzade, 1978). It is true that, although this committee is wrongly presented as a committee created against the unity of the proletariat, the facts about its role in achieving peace between hostile nations are also presented. In the work, the events of August 1905 were evaluated as an inter-ethnic conflict. At that time, the inter-ethnic conflict in Baku spread to the oil districts of the city and brought disastrous results for the oil industry. Seyidzade, in his work about the activities of

Azerbaijani deputies in the State Dumas of Russia, mentioned for the first time in the historiography of the homeland the Armenian-Azerbaijani conciliatory congress held in Tbilisi in February–March 1906 to find a way out of the inter-ethnic conflict (Seidzade, 1991). The main propositions extracted from both monographs were completed in Seyidzade's new research and expressed in the book published during the period of independence (Seyidzade, 1998). Seyidzade's recent research proves that the representatives of the Azerbaijani bourgeoisie, for example, put forward quite radical demands in the State Duma. This proves that the idea that the national bourgeoisie of Azerbaijan was fearful and cowardly is not true.

Bagirova's work "Political parties and organizations in Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 20th century (1900–1917 years)", and Gurbanov's study "Freedom movement in Azerbaijan in the first half of the 19th century" (Bagirova, 2000), have explored the topic. On the other hand, R. Gurbanov examined the socio-economic and political causes of the people's liberation movement, providing objective analyses and generalizations about the leaders and driving forces of the uprisings, as well as the reasons for their defeat (Gurbanov, 2003).

The freedom movement in the earlier 20th century

In the joint work of Gasimova and H. Hasanov entitled "The National Liberation Movement in Azerbaijan in the 20th Century," enlightenment in Azerbaijan, its role in the national movement, the ideological foundations of the national liberation movement, political conditions in our country at the beginning of the 20th century, the liberal directions of the national liberation movement, the emergence of political parties and organizations, and other issues were analyzed based on historical literature (Gasymova & Gasanov, 2018).

Peasants' speeches were one of the constituent parts of the national liberation movement. The study of the colonial policy of tsarism in Azerbaijan and the liberation movement of Azerbaijani peasants against it is one of the important problems of our historiography. During the Russian Empire, this topic was not a special research object for a long time. Until the October coup, bourgeois-noble historians and tsarist officials who worked in high positions in the Caucasus dealt with separate issues on the subject. Although there were initiatives for the objective study of the problem in the Soviet era, the study of the agrarian issue and administrative changes was put in the foreground, and the problems of the russification of the population, demographic changes, and the influx of the Muslim population to Turkey remained in the background. Historians

looked for the reasons for the protests of Azerbaijani peasants only in the agrarian policy of tsarism.

The freedom movement of the Azerbaijani peasants in the second half of the 19th century and the reasons that gave rise to this movement, the forms and characteristics of the struggle of the peasant movement, and the results of the movement were the subject of Niftaliyev's dissertation entitled "The freedom movement of the Azerbaijani peasants in the second half of the 19th century" (Niftaliyev, 2008). The researcher shows that in the mentioned period, peasant uprisings occurred separately and were brutally suppressed. Russian military historians considered the freedom struggle of the peasants a "crime." The author researched a large number of archival materials and unpublished documents related to the main issues of the research and benefited from historical literature. Materials collected by Ismayilov, Sumbatzade, and Tuzenkevich in the Scientific Archive of the History Institute of ANAS regarding the research work were also used.

The author studied the peasant speeches that took place both in Tsarist Russia and in the Soviet period in Azerbaijan and commented on the works of other researchers (Frenkel, Kuchayev, S. Megrelidze, and Muhammad Tahir). In addition to well-known fugitives, little-known fugitives and the leaders of the rebellion in the Nukha district were also mentioned in the research work. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, it was mentioned that the rebellion against tsarism that started in Chechnya also covered the Guba, Gusar, and Khachmaz regions (Bayramova, 2020).

Studying the history of Azerbaijani peasants at the beginning of the 20th century has great scientific and political significance. This problem always stands before the science of history as an actual issue. It should not be forgotten that Azerbaijan was a country of peasants during the mentioned period. The history of the peasants is an important part of the history of the Azerbaijani people. The study of the history of the peasants allows us to deeply reveal the agrarian and financial colonial policies of Tsarist Russia, which slowed down national development in remote areas. This was expressed in the freedom struggle of the peasants against tsarism and feudalism.

The first Russian revolution was a peasant revolution in the true sense of the word. One of the main central issues of this revolution was the agrarian issue. The solution to the agrarian-peasant problem was related to the solution to the people's direct social and national freedom struggle. As colonial oppression intensified and capitalist exploitation increased, the struggle for national liberation expanded. Huseynov initiated a study to reveal the role

and characteristics of Azerbaijani peasants in the struggle for national liberation at the beginning of the 20th century in his dissertation entitled "Peasant movement in Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 20th century (1900–1907)" (Huseynov, 2008). Using the experience gathered in various historical literature, the author has studied the speeches of scattered peasants and conducted extensive analyses on the topic. The results of the analysis are reflected in the tables compiled by the author. According to these tables, the dynamics of the peasant movement, its economic and political forms, its character, and the struggle of the peasant class in different periods in the conditions of the development of capitalist relations found their expression (Huseynov, 2008, p. 11).

In the study, special attention was paid to the struggle of the peasants during the First Russian Revolution. The author's scientific conclusions, judgments put forward, and attitude toward the works written about the problem are scientific in nature. For example, Ismayilzade's work entitled "Russian Peasants in Transcaucasia" mentions the settlement of Russian peasants in pastures belonging to the nomadic population of Azerbaijan (Huseynov, 2008). However, the researcher disagrees with this opinion and proves with facts that the land fund created for the Russian peasants included a lot of land purchased from the sedentary part of the local population—farmers. The author writes that the crops and gardens irrigated by Kahriz do not belong to others; how can these residents with houses and mills be considered nomads (Ismailzade, 1982, p. 12)?

At the beginning of the 20th century, Azerbaijani women were particularly active in the social-political and national-liberation movements that were reviving in Azerbaijan. The socio-political activity of Azerbaijani women was also investigated in the research works of the mentioned period. In this sense, Suleymanova's monograph entitled "Social and Political Movement in Azerbaijan (end of the 19th century–beginning of the 20th century)" has a special section on the participation of Muslim women's societies in the social movement in the period before the October revolution of 1917 (Süleymanova, 2022). In our opinion, the researcher rightly points out that in the West, they mistakenly believe that Muslim women are lawless, uneducated, and helpless beings. They saw this backwardness in Islam and the Holy Quran. To refute this idea, the researcher refers to the opinions and information of progressive Muslim and Azerbaijani figures. In her monograph and doctoral dissertation, Suleymanova tried to investigate the philanthropic activities of the Azerbaijani bourgeoisie in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including the activities of women's charitable societies in the social movement. However, little

attention has been paid to the political activity of women (Süleymanova, 2022, pp. 173–176).

In Aliyeva's monograph "Women in the Social and Political Life of Azerbaijan (1900–1920s)," the situation of women at the beginning of the 20th century and their place and role in the social and political life of Azerbaijan were the subject of research (Süleymanova, 2022). The impact of socio-cultural life and political events on different areas of women's lives in Azerbaijan has been investigated. In the research, the actualization of the issue of women in Azerbaijani society at the beginning of the 20th century, the creation and activity of non-governmental women's organizations, the charitable activities of Azerbaijani women, the role of the women's newspaper "Işıq" in the social life of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani women during the Armenian-Muslim conflict of 1905–1906, and issues of women's role in the political life of the country were investigated (Aliyeva, 2013).

Gasimova paid attention to women's education, family marriage, social issues, hijab (head covering), and other problems in the mentioned period in her monograph "Women's Problems in the Press of North Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 20th century (1901–1917)" (Gasimova, 2010). The researcher concluded that "Light" was not a collection or a magazine, but a newspaper. This women's press agency covered women's legal issues, medicine, homemaking, and children's education. The author tried to determine the place and direction of the newspaper in the Azerbaijani press. She also developed a bibliography of women's topics for the Azerbaijani press in 1901–1917.

Especially in the works written during the Soviet period, Tsarist Russia was considered the main culprit in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict of 1905–1906. In modern times, the provocative actions of Armenian political circles in the bloody events of 1905–1906 are given by irrefutable facts. However, in these works, the idea that Russia played the main role in the massacres has not changed. Baghirova's monograph entitled "Political Parties and Organizations of Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 20th Century (1900–1917)" stands out from the mentioned studies (Bagirova, 2000). The research used a wide source base, especially documents stored in the funds of the State Historical Archive of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Archive of Political Documents of the Presidential Affairs Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan, census materials conducted at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, and the publications "Caucasian Calendar" and "Memory Book of Iravan Governorate."

The chronological framework of A.K. Eyyubov's dissertation entitled "Interethnic Relations as a Factor Influencing

the level of National Self-awareness of the Peoples of the South Caucasus (at the beginning of the 20th century)" covers the second half of the 19th century, the beginning of the 20th century, the period of direct conflict, and the first decade of the 20th century in general (Eyyubov, 2011). Adhering to the principle of objectivity in research, in addition to local documents and historical literature, ample space has been devoted to the works of Armenian authors and Armenian sources. The researcher focused his attention not only on listing the facts but also on the ethno-social and historical aspects of the conflict. The author tried to show how the ideas of nationalism and capitalism coming from Europe affect the status, lifestyle, and outlook of the autochthonous Caucasian nations and how the violent and incomplete involvement of local peoples in the processes of capitalization and nationalization of society destroys the polyethnic harmony of the Caucasus. The general picture of the emergence and aggravation of the conflict at the ideological and ethnocultural level has also been clarified (Abdullayev, 1998).

CONCLUSIONS

Since 1991, the study of national history in Azerbaijan has experienced significant advances, particularly in the exploration and reassessment of its historical past. One of the main progresses has been the promotion of the country's rich cultural, literary, and artistic heritage. Academic and cultural institutions have investigated and disseminated Azerbaijani history and culture, revaluing historical figures, events, and literary works that were previously underestimated or ignored. In-depth investigations have been conducted on key periods, with the early 20th-century independence movement being of special relevance. However, this process has faced inherent difficulties in the authentic preservation and study of Azerbaijani history and culture, as many historical documents and archives were destroyed or manipulated. This situation hindered the comprehensive and accurate research and teaching of Azerbaijan's history. Despite these difficulties, the post-independence period has witnessed a resurgence and revitalization of the study of Azerbaijani history.

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